1595 Builders of Things

The new customer was a young woman wearing a sharp, but somewhat wrinkled formal suit. Her white blouse was buttoned up all the way despite the warm weather, and her dark hair was gathered in a bun. There were dark circles under her deeply intelligent, but tired eyes.

Unlike Teacher Julius, who visited Bastion in his sleep, she was a mundane human residing here permanently. It also seemed like she was visiting the Brilliant Emporium after burning the midnight oil and working through the night, instead of doing so first thing in the morning.

The young woman glanced at Sunny, frowned slightly, then gave him a curt nod.

"Master Sunless."

He hid behind a polite smile.

"Miss Beth."

"Ah, Chief Bethany! You've made it!"

Forgetting about Sunny's existence, Beth turned to where Julius was sitting and smiled brightly.

"Professor Julius! Of course, I have."

Sunny received her order and retreated back into the kitchen. As he started preparing a cup of hot chocolate for the tireless scientist, he sighed and shook his head.

"She doesn't change..."

Aiko, who had just finished running some calculations on a wooden abacus, gave him a curious glance:

"Oh? Do you know Chief Bethany, boss?"

He lingered for a few moments, then shrugged stiffly. "We had a few brushes in Antarctica. I doubt she remembers, though."

Then, he looked around and added:

"Can you pass me salt?"

Aiko continued to abuse the abacus, but the salt shaker floated from the shelf into Sunny's hand. That was her Dormant Ability — a weak form of telekinesis.

...Which really put her integrity in doubt, considering that she used to run a gambling den in the Bright Castle.

But who was Sunny to judge?

Shaking his head, he finished making the hot chocolate, poured it into a ceramic cup with care, and walked out of the kitchen.

As he was placing the cup on the table, he caught a part of the conversation between Teacher Julius and Beth. The old man was saying:

"So, how are you and your team doing?" Beth let out a long sigh and picked up her hot chocolate, warming her hands on the cup.

"Ah, we are drowning in work. There are rumors that our colleagues in Ravenheart had a breakthrough recently, but you know how it is... both sides are hoarding information instead of sharing it. The guys from Valor are also tightening up security, as if they are wary of spies. Madness, it's pure madness! They do understand that we could have achieved results twice as fast if there were fewer roadblocks for proper cooperation?"

She grimaced and shook her head.

"In any case, developing the infrastructure of Bastion has been a titanic undertaking. Thousands of engineers have given it their best, but with how strange the Dream Realm is, there are countless challenges. That is where we, the scientists, are supposed to step up."

A distant expression appeared on Beth's face for a moment. She took a sip of her hot chocolate and savored it for a bit.

Her gaze cleared a little.

"But even with all the data we gathered during the Chain of Nightmares, shielding technology remains simply ineffective. Actually, the entire approach is flawed, but the bigwigs are too myopic to realize that we should not be concentrating on developing better insulation, to begin with. So... that was why I went and became a bigwig myself. Now we are on the right track, at least."

A subtle smile appeared on her face.

"Actually, there is progress! We are very close to creating a working model of a power station. There is no reason for electrical power not to work in the Dream Realm, right? And yet, it doesn't... for now. But mark my words, I'll have the streets of Bastion illuminated by electric lights before the end of the year. And from there, all manner of things will become possible."

Teacher Julius raised his hands and applauded her silently.

"Electricity, huh? Wonderful, simply wonderful! What are you using to generate the current? Soul essence, I presume?"

Beth shrugged.

"I mean, it's not that complicated. Most electricity in the waking world is still produced by steam-powered turbines. It's just the method of producing heat, and therefore steam, that differs. So, we are using heat. Granted, finding a way to produce heat from soul essence is the ultimate goal. A truly sustainable source of energy... "

After that, Beth's explanation became too technical for Sunny to understand. He had long retreated to the reception desk, of course, but his hearing was greatly enhanced when compared to that of mundane humans — he was a Saint, after all. If Sunny wanted, he could eavesdrop on the conversations between the residents of the surrounding houses, let alone those of his own customers.

Not that he was in the habit of doing such things.

In any case, it seemed that what Beth was talking about was beyond Teacher Julius, as well. After a while, he coughed in embarrassment and said in a hesitant tone:

"Well... that sewage system you guys built is already remarkable enough. I mean it, truly! A thing like that can make or break a city..."

Beth rolled her eyes.

"Oh, gods. Don't remind me. The earth here is still full of the roots left behind by that titan... any kind of subterranean construction is a nightmare..."

Sunny sighed and turned away. The Shadow Chair, which stood behind the reception desk, creaked quietly as he shifted his weight.

'She... is living well, at least.'

When hundreds of millions of people entered the Dream Realm, there was an instant crisis having to do with how and where to settle them, of course. That crisis was not too terrible, though, because the Great Clans had been secretly preparing for an event like that for a long time.

As a result, many of the best specialists in all things having to do with building a robust infrastructure had been either found among the refugees or recruited from the waking world. The prospering city around Bastion had not just appeared on its own — countless engineers, architects, scientists, craftsmen, and professionals of all kinds had worked incredibly hard to make it a reality, Awakened and mundane alike.

Beth was one of these pioneers, and of a high rank at that.

Of course, being a champion of civilization on the wild and hostile magical frontier was not an easy job. Especially considering that the Dream Realm operated on a set of laws subtly different from the waking world, making most modern technology useless here. But human intelligence prevailed.

'Electricity before the end of the year?'

Sunny blinked a couple of times, trying to imagine what Bastion, and other human cities in the Dream Realm, would look like if something like that truly happened.

What would they look like in ten years? He wasn't sure he could guess. Well, if anyone could fulfill such a promise, it was Beth. Professor Obers last disciple...

Source: telegram channel )