1776 Working Dead

'So tired…’

Rain was sprawled on her threadbare sleeping bag, staring at the slanted roof of her modest tent Outside, the noises of the construction camp were churning like a sea, Just as loud as they had been throughout the day despite the late hour.

Out here, the work did not stop when the darkness fell.

For a very particular reason.

Rain had finished her long shift as a laborer, so her muscles were sore. Later, she crawled into her tent ready to pass out from fatigue, but instead of resting, she spent several hours arduously circulating her essence in an attempt to form a soul core. That was something she did every night, and although there were no signs of Awakening yet, the number of tiny grains she had created was growing steadily.

Rain had only stopped after becoming completely exhausted.

And now, she couldn't fall asleep because of the noise outside.

'Ah, damnation... I really need to get out of this place…’

The construction of the Eastern Road was progressing at a startling pace, She had to stay hidden among the road crews for a while, but that did not mean that she had to remain in the main camp. There were other assignments available for those daring enough to take them - scouting parties, advanced camps, subjugation troops, and so on.

It was just that the number of slots for these jobs was limited, and young mundane girls were not exactly at the top of the list for tough tasks.

Still, she wanted to leave the main construction camp as soon as possible.

It was not only cramped and noisy, but also a bit creepy.

That was because mundane laborers were not the only ones building the road. In fact, most of the work was being done...

By the dead.

Rain had not heard about anything like that happening in other construction crews, but the Eastern Road was special. Clan Song wanted it built very fast, for some reason, and so, the Queen had sent her personal servants to assist the builders.

The dead were dutiful workers. They never complained, never grew tired. They didn't need water or food. They just continued to build the road silently, without sleep or rest. Their frozen faces were calm and empty... men and women, young and old. Plenty of Nightmare Creatures were among them, as well, their monstrous eyes devoid of the usual frenzy.

Every time Rain left her tent early in the morning and saw the silent corpses working diligently in the dim light of dawn, she couldn't help but feel like she was in a strange, cold hell.

It was indeed very creepy... but people were very adaptable creatures. She observed the other laborers grow accustomed to the company of the dead with great speed.

She could understand them well. After all, the Queen's servants were doing the hard work that the laborers would have had to do themselves otherwise. The dead were also quiet, solemn, and never hurt anyone. All in all, as far as colleagues went, they weren't bad at all.

The unique culture of the Song Domain played a part in the speed with which the laborers had adapted to their presence, as well. Working side by side with the dead could have been terrifying if their origin was mysterious and sinister. But they had been sent by the Queen, and the Queen was revered and beloved by the citizens of her kingdom.

So, anything that had come from the Queen was seen in a positive light.

Anyway...

"What the hell are you doing? Be quiet!"

Giving up her attempts to fall asleep, Rain turned her head and hissed at the darkness.

The darkness, which had been humming a joyful melody, grew silent.

Her teacher was in a strange mood these days. He was way too carefree and cheerful, even by his standards.

The ancient fiend must have felt at home in the company of creepy corpses. Rain couldn't explain the sudden shift in his behavior any other way.

The darkness remained silent for a while, then sighed reproachfully.

"You are such a killjoy."

Rain stared in the direction of the voice with indignation.

"Teacher... your poor student is trying to sleep here. After working a long, arduous shift in the cold. And being fed tasteless slop by the camp wardens. Can't you go hum somewhere else?"

He chuckled.

"I can. But I don't want to... that woman is there, and she might see me."

Rain frowned.

"That woman?'

Was he talking about Saint Seishan, the overseer of the camp? Teacher seemed to be wary of the Queen's daughter...

Which was a bit strange. Ki Song did not have biological children, but she had raised many orphan girls. Among them, seven were now Saints, each possessing enchanting beauty and startling powers. The Queen's daughters were venerated and loved by the people of the Sword Domain almost as much as their mother was.

Rain's teacher did not show any reaction at the mention of the more famous of them, like Beastmaster or Silent Stalker, even joking about having had questionable relationships with them... but the more obscure of the Queen's daughters, Song Selshan, caused him to behave strangely.

Rain sighed.

"Why? What did you do... no, let me guess. Did you abandon her at the altar? It was something like that, wasn't it?"

Her teacher laughed quietly.

"What? No, nothing like that... it's just that when I was a young shadow, and she was going around devouring naughty youths, we crossed paths a few times, and it seemed like she was able to see me."

Rain did not know what to say.

'Can he at least try to be consistent with his lies? He said on multiple occasions that he's thousands of years old... so how could Saint Seishan have been there when that bastard was young? And what is that about devouring youths? I can believe that he has devoured a fair share of children, but Lady Seishan? Ridiculous!'

She sighed.

"In any case, Stop humming and let me sleep. I need to get up early if I want to snatch an assignment at one of the advanced camps... I hear they'll be establishing a new one this week.”

Her teacher scoffed.

"Fine, fine. Go to sleep, then. Oh, and by the way... don't worry. I managed to get a message to your family in Ravenheart. They know that you're safe. Well... that you are alive, at least."

Rain's eyes widened in the darkness.

"Really?"

He sighed.

"Really."

A smile appeared on her lips, and a palpable sense of relief spread in her chest. A heavy burden that she had been carrying was suddenly gone.

Her poor parents must have been so worried!

"Really, really?"

Her teacher cursed quietly.

"Yes! Listen... I am a very honest person. The most honest person in two worlds, even! When have I ever lied to you?"

She laughed quietly and turned on her side, finally closing her eyes.

'Yeah, sure... that statement is full of holes, Not only are you the most brazen liar I have ever met, it's even a question if you are a person.'

Rain relaxed, feeling sleep finally starting to envelop her mind in a soft embrace.

'But it's alright... tonight, I'll forgive you... thank you, teacher!’

Relieved and warmed by the news he had shared, she peacefully fell asleep.

Tomorrow, she was going to find away to leave the main camp.