1777 Hell on Wheels

In the morning, Rain crawled out of her tent feeling rested and refreshed. The sun had barely shown itself, rising above the distant horizon in all its pale glory - the world was still shrouded in darkness, but at least one could see where they were going.

One of the first things Rain had noticed after coming to Ravenheart was how darker the nights were in the Dream Realm, compared to NQSC. Out there in the waking world, humanity had long defeated and banished darkness from their homes, but here, it was still a tyrannical enemy.

'Ah... how cold.’

The main construction camp was already a hive of activity. The dead continued to toil silently in the distance, the sound of their tireless work reaching the small tent settlement like a persistent tide. By now, the road had extended far beyond the defensive palisade, so the whole camp would have to be moved soon - the road crews were nomadic in nature, following the roads they built.

The night shift laborers were returning to their tents, while those assigned to the day shift, like her, were waking up. The Awakened warriors guarding the camp were out on patrol, Food was being prepared, and oil lanterns were being put out.

Everyone was getting ready for a new day of work.

Rain yawned, rubbed her eyes, and walked slowly to the communal washroom.

Mercifully enough, the female laborers had a separate space to maintain hygiene, and since most of the hired laborers consisted of men, it was not too overcrowded. Still, there were whispers behind her back - Rain's body, after all, was a sight to behold... meaning that it was a bit scary to see, since she had never gotten the chance to visit a healer after slaying the Huntsman.

The bruises had mostly faded by now, but during her first few days on the road crew, her skin was as black and blue as it was fair and white. The bandages she wore to cover the cut on her side weren't bloody anymore, either. The female laborers were more relaxed around her, but still a little wary.

Rain washed her face, brushed her teeth, and shivered miserably from the cold for a while. Then, wide awake, she returned to her tent and put her jacket on.

The breakfast was just as tasteless as the supper had been, but at least it was prepared from actual ingredients, not synthpase - the volcanic soil around Ravenheart was extremely fertile, so the harvests from the fields were enough to not only feed the entire city, but also supply the other settlements of the Song Domain with food.

Rain ate in solitude, since no one was brave enough to approach her. The male laborers often threw furtive glances her way, but shyly kept their distance. She did not know what was so frightening about her, really... maybe it was the sharp and feral aura of an abomination hunter, or the dark circles that were constantly under her eyes because of the lack of sleep.

She didn't mind sitting alone in the canteen, anyway. At least it gave her the chance to converse secretly with her teacher.

"Listen, Rain... I know that killing people is generally frowned upon. But if you want to strangle the sorry excuse for a cook they have in charge of the camp kitchen, I won't judge..."

Rain raised a tin cup, hiding her lips behind it, and answered quietly:

"Is that something you should be teaching your student, teacher? How to murder people?"

Her shadow remained silent for a while, then asked in a tone of confusion:

"Yes? What's wrong with a little murder?"

Rain exhaled slowly.

"I won't be killing the camp cook, thank you..."

Finishing her meal, she walked out of the canteen and headed for the crew management wagon.

On the way, Rain passed a team of tranquil corpses who were carrying sacks of gravel, once again feeling as if she had somehow ended up in hell. Then, she crossed the finished section of the road and paused for a few moments, looking down.

A small smile found its way onto her face.

ة

Rain had enlisted as a road crew laborer out of necessity, but after spending some time at the wandering camp...

She realized that he liked it here a lot.

It was a bit magical, to see a beautiful road appear out of nowhere in the dreadful wilderness of the Dream Realm. Like watching order and the human spirit triumph over chaos.

The road itself was an engineering marvel, as well.

Rain's father worked for the government, dealing with the complicated logistics that went into making it function. He rarely brought his work home, and yet, she had a better understanding of how wondrous the infrastructure of the world was than most of her peers.

Before the Dark Times, humans often admired the so-called wonders of the world - grand structures that defied imagination. However, Rain was of the opinion that the greatest thing that humanity had built, by far, rarely received any attention.

It was the network of roads that used to connect all the cities of the waking world, enveloping it like a planet-sized spider web. The scale of it was almost unfathomable... and that was just the physical scale. The role it played for the infrastructure of the world, the amount of goods and people being transported over those roads every day, was even more unimaginable.

Of course, that era was long gone. Most of the waking world had been lost, and most of the roads that the humans had built were destroyed. These days, only a scattering of reinforced railroads and easily defendable highways remained, connecting the walled cities of humanity together.

There were fewer of them being used each year.

That was why Rain felt glad to have joined the road construction camp. The road was being built right in front of her eyes, and she found herself deeply excited by the building process. The engineering, the logistics, the problem solving... all of it was both fascinating and wonderful.

The wide cobbled road appearing as a palpable, undeniable result of it all was a joy to behold. Building things spoke to something buried deep in her heart.

It was sort of like the soul core that she was creating, one grain of sand at a time.

That was why Raun spent all of her free time which there wasn't a lot of - observing every part of the construction process, from the way laborers were managed to the way the dead lay layers of sand, gravel, and crushed rock in the dug trench before cobblers got to work.

It was to the point that she was a little reluctant to leave the main construction camp behind, even if it resembled a wandering hell.

However...

There was more to building a road than simply constructing it. The other assignments were also part of the process. So, she was curious about them, too.

Enjoying the solid feel of the paved stones under her boots, Rain crossed the pristine road and entered the northern part of the camp.

It was much different from the chaotic settlement where the laborers lived. Here, the tents were much larger and more luxurious, and there were even a few semi-permanent buildings with wooden walls. Everything seemed cleaner and more orderly.

That was where Awakened and the managers lived and worked.

The crew management office was actually a huge wagon with a two-level wooden building constructed on it. When the camp migrated, it was pulled along the newly constructed section of the road by two enormous Echoes, but now that the camp was stationary, the wagon was simply standing there.

Rain took a deep breath.

'Hopefully, I can get a new assignment today!’

She was quite hopeful.