

Chapter 91: Solution

The scenery started to distort, turning illusory and began to fade away.

After Klein left his dreamlike state, his vision adapted to the darkness in the room.

He knew that with one pound and ten soli, which was thirty soli a week, Benson didn't have an easy time supporting the family according to the standards of an average family.

He had thought that the majority of workers earned twenty soli a week.

He had once heard Melissa remark that Lower Street of Iron Cross Street had five, seven, or even ten families squeezing into the same room.

He also learned from Benson that as a result of the situation in the Southern Continent, the kingdom's economy was in a recession for the past few months.

He knew that a maid, with board and lodging provided, could earn between three soli and sixpence to six soli a week.

Klein extended his hand and pinched his glabella. He was silent for a long time, until Sir Deweyville asked, "Officer, aren't you going to say anything? The psychiatrists I went to would always speak to me and ask questions in such a situation.

“However, I must say that I feel at peace. I almost fell asleep. I haven’t heard any moans or cries yet.

“How did you do it?”

Klein leaned back in the rocking chair. Instead of providing an answer, he asked with a gentle tone, “Sir, do you know about lead poisoning? Do you know about the dangers of lead?”

Deweyville fell silent for a few seconds. “I did not know about it in the past, but I do now. Are you telling me that my psychological illness stems from my guilt—my guilt toward the female lead and porcelain factory workers?”

Without waiting for Klein to answer, he continued just like he always had—in his position of power during a negotiation.

“Yes, I did feel guilty about this in the past, but I did compensate them. At my lead and porcelain factories, the workers do not earn less than other workers in the same industry. In Backlund, lead and porcelain workers are paid no more than eight soli a week, but I pay them ten, sometimes even more.

“Heh, many people criticize me for breaking ranks since it makes it hard for them to recruit workers. If not for the repeal of the Grain Act that made many farmers bankrupt, sending them to the cities, they would have had to raise their wages just like I did.

“Furthermore, I’ve also informed the supervisor of the factories to make sure that those with repeated headaches and blurry vision are to leave the areas where they are exposed to lead. If their illness is really severe, then they can even ask for help at my charity foundation.

“I think I have done enough.”

Klein spoke without a ripple of emotion in his voice, “Sir, at times, you cannot imagine how important a salary is to a poor person. Simply losing work for a week or two can result in an irreversible loss to their family, a loss that would cause tremendous grief.”

He paused before saying, “I am curious, why wouldn’t a kind person like you install equipment that can protect against dust and lead poisoning in your factories?”

Deweyville looked at the ceiling and laughed ruefully.

“That would make my costs too high for me to bear. I would no longer be able to compete with other lead and porcelain companies. I no longer pay too much attention to my profits in these areas of my business. In fact, I am even willing to fork out some money. But what’s the point of keeping the business if I have to keep doing that? That can only help a number of workers and not become a standard in the industry or effect change on other factories.

“That would merely result in me forking out money to support the workers. I heard that some factories even secretly hire slaves to minimize costs.”

Klein crossed his hands and said after a moment of silence, “Sir, the root of your psychological illness comes from the buildup of guilt, despite you believing that the guilt has faded and disappeared over time. It wouldn’t have any visible effects under normal circumstances, but there was something that triggered you and set off all the problems at once.”

“Something that triggered me? I’m not aware of such a thing,”

Deweyville said puzzled, but with conviction.

Klein allowed the chair to rock gently as he explained with a gentle tone, "You did fall asleep for a few minutes just now, and you told me something."

"Hypnosis?" Deweyville made a guess as he usually did.

Klein did not give a direct reply and instead said, "You once saw a girl dying on her way to work while you were on your carriage. She had died because of lead poisoning. She was one of your workers who glazed porcelain while she was still alive."

Deweyville rubbed his temples, speechless before saying somewhat doubtful, "I think that happened once... but I can't remember it clearly..."

His prolonged insomnia had left him in a poor mental state. He could only faintly recall seeing such a scene.

He thought for a moment, but gave up taxing his brain. Instead, he asked, "What was that worker's name?"

"Well, what I meant was, what should I do to cure my psychological illness?"

Klein replied immediately, "Two things."

"First, the worker that died by the side of the road was called Hayley Walker. That was what you told me. She was the most direct trigger, so you have to find her parents and give them more compensation.

“Second, spread information about the dangers of lead in the newspapers and magazines. Allow your charity foundation to help more workers who suffered from the damage. If you succeed in becoming a member of parliament, push for enacting laws in this domain.”

Deweyville sat up slowly and laughed in a self-deprecating manner.

“I will do all of the rest, but to enact a law, heh— I think it’s impossible since there is still competition from nations beyond our country. Setting up such a law would just slip the entire industry in the country into a crisis. Factories would become bankrupt one by one, and many workers would lose their jobs. Organizations that help the poor cannot save that many people.”

He slowly got off the bed and adjusted his collar. He then looked at Klein and said, “Hayley Walker, right? I’ll immediately get Cullen to retrieve information about her from the porcelain company and find her parents. Officer, please wait with me and continuously evaluate my mental state.”

“Alright.” Klein stood up slowly and smoothed his black-and-white checkered police uniform.

...

At eleven in the morning in the living room of Deweyville.

Klein sat on the sofa in silence as he looked at the man and woman being guided into the house by Butler Cullen.

The two guests had blemished skin, wrinkles already woven into

their faces. The man had a slight hunch while the woman had a mole under her eyelid.

They looked nearly identical to what Klein had seen through Hayley, just older and more haggard. They were so skinny that they were almost all bone. Their clothes were old and ragged. Klein even learned that they couldn't continue living on Lower Street of Iron Cross Streets any further.

Sob...

Klein sensed an icy wind start to spiral through his spiritual perception.

He pinched his glabella and shot a glance toward Sir Deweyville. It was unknown when a faint white, translucent, contorted figure had appeared behind him.

"Good-good morning, Honorable Sir." Hayley's parents were unusually polite.

Deweyville rubbed his forehead and asked, "Are the both of you Hayley Walker's parents? Doesn't she also have a brother and a two-year-old sister?"

Hayley's mother answered in fear, "Her-her brother broke his leg at the harbor sometime back. We got him to take care of his sister at home."

Deweyville remained silent for a few seconds before he sighed.

"My deepest condolences for what happened to Hayley."

Upon hearing that, the eyes of Hayley's parents immediately turned red. They opened their mouths and said over each other, "Thank-thank you for your goodwill."

"The police told us-told us, that Hayley died from lead poisoning. That's the term, right? Oh, my poor child, she was only seventeen. She was always so quiet, so determined."

"You had sent someone to visit her before and sponsored her burial. She is buried at the Raphael Cemetery."

Deweyville glanced at Klein and changed his sitting posture. He leaned forward and said with a serious tone, "That was actually an oversight of ours. I have to apologize."

"I have considered that I need to compensate you, to compensate Hayley. Her weekly salary was ten soli, was it not? One year would be five hundred and twenty soli, or twenty-six pounds. Let's assume that she could have worked for another ten years."

"Cullen, give Hayley's parents three hundred pounds."

"Three-three hundred pounds?" Hayley's parents were dumbfounded.

They never had more than one pound of savings, even at their richest!

It wasn't only them who were dazed. Even the expressions of the bodyguards and maids in the room were also all that of shock and envy. Even Sergeant Gate couldn't help but draw in a deep breath—his weekly salary was only two pounds and among his subordinates, only one chevroned constable earned one pound a

week.

Amidst the silence, Butler Cullen walked out of the study and held a bulging sack.

He opened the sack and revealed stacks of cash, some one pound, some five pounds, but mostly made up of one or five soli.

It was clear that Deweyville had made his subordinates receive “change” from the bank earlier.

“It’s an expression of Sir Deweyville’s goodwill,” Cullen handed the sack over to Hayley’s parents after receiving confirmation from his master.

Hayley’s parents took the sack and rubbed their eyes, looking at it in disbelief.

“No, this-this is too generous, we cannot accept this,” they said as they held the sack tightly.

Deweyville said in a deep voice, “This is what Hayley deserves.”

“Y-you truly are a noble, charitable knight!” Hayley’s parents bowed repeatedly in agitation.

They had smiles on their faces, smiles that they couldn’t repress.

They praised the knight repeatedly, repeating the same few adjectives they knew. They kept insisting that Hayley would be grateful towards him in heaven.

“Cullen, send them home. Oh, take them to the bank first,” Deweyville heaved a sigh of relief and instructed his butler.

Hayley’s parents hugged the sack tightly and walked toward the door quickly without stopping.

Klein saw the faint translucent figure behind Sir Deweyville attempt to extend its hands towards them, hoping to leave with them, but the parents’ smiles were abnormally radiant. They didn’t turn back.

That figure turned fainter and, soon, vanished completely.

Klein also sensed that the icy feeling in the guest hall had instantly returned to normal.

From beginning to end, all he did was sit there silently, not expressing his opinion.

“Officer, I feel much better. Now can you tell me why my butler, servants, and bodyguards could also hear the cries and moans? This shouldn’t just be solely a psychological illness of mine, right?” Deweyville looked at him curiously.

Inspector Tolle, who knew the underlying truth, instantly became nervous.

Klein replied without much expression, “In psychology, we call this phenomenon—mass hysteria.”