

Chapter 2 - Story 38: Workshop

Central area of the Solbiant Plains. In a place not that far off the zoan's sacred land Rollo, a wasteland with not even grasses growing here spread. It's a place where rain rarely falls, even during the rainy season. Once could see dry red sand dance in the wind across that wilderness.

"This is the place, right?"

The one asking after surveying the location while shading his eyes is the dwarven warrior and skilled craftsman, Dvalin.

The one he asked is a young dwarf. Although he's young, this face is still covered by a black beard as it's custom among dwarves. For humans it's difficult to guess a dwarf's age by their appearance.

"Yes. According to my old man and his folks, it should be around here."

Dvalin contently nodded in response.

"Alright. —Everybody, split up in groups and start searching!"

Following that order, the dwarves scattered in all directions and started to turn over the rocks and stones laying around the vicinity. And, after a while, one of them rises his voice.

"Hey! It's here!"

A big stone, which lay turned over at the dwarf's feet, exposed its underside. Once Dvalin ran over and wiped the dirt on the stone's surface with his bare hands, a chiseled figure became visible.

"No doubt. It's a cipher used by dwarven artisans."

Dvalin ordered the other dwarves to dig up the area around the stone. As they continued to skillfully dig a hole, it very quickly reached the depth of a dwarf's height. And at just that depth the dwarves felt a weird feedback as they swung their spades. Once they carefully removed the dirt with their hands after shoveling the bigger part out of the hole with their spades, a face on a wooden board peeked out from beneath the soil. While holding their breaths, the dwarves removed that board. What showed up below was a gaping wide hole.

"Ooh! There it is! The remains of the mine."

One of the dwarves entered the hole with a burning torch in his hands. After a while he came back while covered in dirt. The dwarf held up his tightly grasped right hand towards Dvalin who had waited for him.

"Sir Dvalin, please have a look at this."

What he grasped in his hand was a faintly yellowish-white stone covered with dirt. After staring closely at it, Dvalin suddenly tosses the stone into his mouth, wondering what it might be. For a while he moved it around inside his mouth as if tasting it, and then he spat it out.

"It's a safe bet. Moreover, the quality is quite good."

The surrounding dwarves all cheered in delight after hearing Dvalin's analysis.

"Okay, we're going to start digging it out right away! Heat the retrieved stones for a moment after breaking them down properly, before boiling them in a pot!"

Following Dvalin's instruction the dwarves began to busily move about with spades and pickaxes at hand.



It was when Souma was discussing the future with Solon in the orphanage that he received the message.

Recently the orphanage's management has been going well. A big part of that is owed to Solon. The trigger was a day not long after Solon had become a teacher in the orphanage. Solon stormed angrily into the lord's residence with a bright red face (not because of alcohol) while yelling.

"Boy! Isn't what you're saying and what you're doing completely different!?"

Souma was bewildered as he didn't know what he was talking about, but after listening to Solon, he became dumbfounded.

The women working at the orphanage were selfishly putting the orphans to work without Souma's knowledge. And not only that. They filled their own pockets with the orphans' wages under the pretext of it being the prince for their care-taking.

It took such a turn because of even small children being regarded as valuable work force, and the absence of child welfare in this world.

For the city's residents orphans are nothing but parasites. They misunderstood the orphanage, where the orphans gather, as place housing those parasites. On top of that, in the eyes of the employed women, the orphans are only scribbling incomprehensible doodles called Arabic numbers while having their daily necessities being taken care of by Souma, the feudal lord.

It's a world where it's only natural to send out children below the age of 10 to work as apprentices of craftsmen or merchants. For the people of this world it was very normal to make the orphans work, even though taking away their wages still went too far.

Learning of that, Souma quickly fired all the women, and hired new ones. However, this time he made sure to strictly order the new employees to take care of the children.

But, only that much didn't soothe Solon's anger.

"Oh great Lord, it looks like you're not aware of the commoners' circumstances. It would be better for this old, senile fool to handle this whole matter."

Not only did he insult Souma, Solon went as far as telling him to hand over the authority over the orphanage.

That was by no means the complaint of a mere scholar, but Souma, who had just made such a mistake, had no other choice but to actually grant him the right of management after being pressured into it.

And yet Souma worried whether the act of leaving it to Solon would be really alright. However, to

his pleasant surprise those worried were betrayed in a good way.

In little time the orphanage's situation improved quite visibly. And not just that. The misunderstandings about the orphanage, which was at first considered as place to gather children for selling them as slave or working them to the bones as labor force, vanished in no time, and nowadays it has even reached the point that orphans come to the orphanage on their own devices. This surprised Souma. Once he asked Solon just what kind of method he had used, he readily answered without any air of superiority, as if being asked about that day's lunch,

"The children learn by watching the adults around them. Then one must first get those very adults to act as examples."

Solon thoroughly drove the adherence to the rules into the newly hired women even before the orphans. In response the orphans naturally learned the rules by watching the adults. Hearing of that, Souma admired this principle. But, Solon didn't stop at that.

"Fools that only look at the top of tall trees apparently don't realize that the weeds growing at the roots sustain the tree itself."

The wiping out of any prejudices against the other races and the spreading of new knowledge as wished by Souma had the children, whose thinking was still flexible, as target. But being preoccupied with just that meant neglecting the adults around the children, Solon insinuated. This way of speaking angered Shyemul, but Souma, who believed him to be correct, could only smile bitterly.

From that time Souma sought Solon's consultation on various matters.

Souma had realized his own knowledge's bias. After all most of it came from manga and light novels. Those kinds of works wrote about what knowledge is used and what results it brought about, but in most cases those works lacked a detailed description on the processes involved.

Also, Souma still being disconnected from this world's common sense caused problems.

However, as with the matter of the orphanage, Solon could compensate Souma's lacking common sense and his biased knowledge.

It was only understandable for Souma, who was well aware of his own weaknesses, to pin his hopes on Solon.

However, for some reason Solon stuck to discussing the orphanage, and became evasive, changed the subject, or if very heartless, bluntly refused Souma as soon as he started to discuss anything besides the orphanage.

Originally Souma wanted to also ask him about his opinion on city government matters, but in the end he's a spineless boy. In order to not hurt Solon's feelings, he limited the discussions to matters only pertaining the orphans and the orphanage.

And even now Souma was discussing with Solon that the current building of the orphanage has slowly become cramped due the rapid increase of orphans.

"As for the building, it will be extended. And as for the people taking care of the orphans, we just have to hire the city's elderly women, but the teachers are a problem..."

"Well, there are only few whimsical fellows like me who would teach orphans."

Upon Souma frowning, Solon cackled, seemingly being humored by something, and continued,

"Anyway, there are some who learn surprisingly fast among the orphans. We have no other option

but to train those fellows as teacher replacements."

"Mr. Solon, please take care of that part while I will continue to search for teachers."

Searching for teachers was completely riddled with troubles when Solon tried to do so. Finding them in a brief time is simply not possible. 'As Solon said, we probably won't have any choice but to select orphans possessing the qualities to serve as replacement teachers and educate them from now on while at the same time looking for new teachers.

Souma spoke with Solon about various other matters related to the future management of the orphanage, but at some point the elven beauty Eladia showed up.

"Lord Soma. I'm very sorry for disturbing you while you are busy."

It's rare for Eladia, who is supposed to stay at the lord's residence in case of sudden visitors, to expressly come to the orphanage. Souma asked her what happened.

"Sir Dvalin told me that he would like you to visit his workshop since he completed what you had asked of him before."

The instant he heard those words, Souma jumped up in delight.

"Really!?! It's finally done! Got it! I will go at once."

Souma's joy piqued Solon's curiosity.

"Ooh, what is it? Did something interesting happen?"

"Shut up. It's unrelated to you!"

Feeling adverse towards Solon due to the events of the other day, Shyemul curtly said over her shoulder to him who bared his curiosity. Due to Solon growing timid with the words, "You're shunning an old, senile fool" despite being cautious of her possibly opposing him tenaciously, Shyemul ends up disappointed.

Souma, who hurriedly departed after bidding Solon a brief farewell, leapt on the carriage Eladia had boarded, and quickly headed to the workshop where Dvalin was waiting for him.

That workshop is located outside the city.

Once the carriage advanced towards the north for a while after leaving through the city's gate, as if following the river flowing through the city center upstream, a forest came into sight. The huge brickwork building with white smoke rising within the forest is Dvalin's workshop.

"You finally finished it!?"

Souma jumped off the carriage that had stopped in front of the workshop and shouted at the waiting dwarves without even giving a proper greeting while having a smile plastered all over his face. Far from being offended by that, the dwarves throw out their chests in pride.

"Aye! There's no doubt that it'll be very useful to you, Sir Soma!"

An unwavering conceit could be sensed from Dvalin's voice.

"Come, Sir Soma. I will guide you, so please come inside."

Urged on by Dvalin, Souma was about to immediately head into the workshop, but Eladia, who came with him, stopped behind him.

"Lord Soma. I shall wait for you here."

Eladia smiled meaningfully at Souma who believed that she should just enter with him since she came all the way anyway.

"Beyond this point you will find the dwarves' secrets. They won't be very happy about an elf like me entering."

If one knows about the discord between the dwarves and elves of this world, they might consider this as very reasonable. However, Dvalin responded with a harsh tone,

"Hah! As if something could happen just because the likes of an elf was able to see our workshop!"

The surrounding dwarves show their disapproval to that, but Dvalin makes them shut up by saying, "Our secrets are not that simple that they could be stolen from just being seen," with a thundering voice.

Dvalin being conscious of Eladia to such an extent is not only owed to the discord between elves and dwarves. It's because the elven woman around Eladia most recently became Souma's power in the clear shape of securing Souma's vicinity, taking care of his everyday necessities, and dealing with visitors as court ladies.

Compared to that, the dwarves contributed by producing many tools so far, but almost all of them had been created based on Souma's ideas. In addition, launching this workshop has consumed a vast amount of money.

Hence the elves surely opened up a big lead in contributions towards Souma in comparison to the dwarves.

Feeling a sense of impending danger from that, Dvalin felt like wanting to show off to Eladia how the dwarves would make a huge achievement here.

Being led by Dvalin who roughly breathes through his nose, Souma's face is hit by heat as he stepped into the workshop.

Even though it's the season where the footsteps of Jack Frost started to be audible, a heat similar to that during midsummer enveloped the workshop's interior.

What drew one's attention first after entering is the big, dome-shaped furnace in the center. A burner is open at the lower part of the furnace, and flames, which changed into incandescence, peeked out from there. Dwarven artisans throw large amounts of firewood into the burner, and send air inside the furnace through stepping bellows, so big that they can't be operated by one or two people. In response, the flames, which devoured the wood and air, blaze up, gaining even more strength.

What's baking inside the furnace are many crucibles. Several windows have been built into the sides of the furnace, and dwarves deposit and withdraw redly glowing crucibles with metallic pliers. Inside the crucibles is a syrupy, molten fluid. The dwarves quickly spill that into gutters that had been carved into a sheet of metal. After leaving it alone for a while, it gradually solidified as the heat vanishes, and became cylinder-shaped. The dwarves lightly heat it up inside the furnace, and once its consistency turns into something similar to soft candy, they nimbly twine that mass around

a clump of clay which had previously been attached to the end of a metallic rod. After the mass covered the clay without any gaps remaining, it's heated inside the furnace once more.

"This is the result after letting it slowly cool down, scrape out the clay within and polishing it."

What Dvalin handed to Souma was a deep green jar with the size of a baby's head.

Souma scrutinizes the jar with his hands trembling in expectation and excitement.

A unique luster and a smooth surface obviously differing from the usual earthenware. And, above all else, light faintly shines through if you when held against the sun.

Dvalin smiled broadly upon Souma's eyes sparkling.

"That's the glass jar produced by this workshop."