

Built to serve

Melina Burguera*

I stepped onto the site in the early morning, the place was dead silent and ready for today's masterpiece. The light was pale and cold, lighting up the isolated workplace with the ticking clock that echoed louder than the hum of any piece of machinery. Today's construction depended entirely on me, every measurement had to be precise, and every stage completed without delay because a single mistake could cause the entire structure to collapse. My apron was my armor, my tools were arranged in strict order, and the raw materials were ready.

The first task was to lay the foundation. I began placing two small pale tiles, fragile and porous, inside the kiln. The setting had to be exact: too much heat, and they would burn into brittle fragments; too little, and they would remain soft, and lifeless, unable to sustain the weight of what was to come. I shut the door, set the timer, and waited, attentive to any unfamiliar crackle or hiss that might foretell collapse.

In the meantime, I turned quickly to the adhesive. The jar resisted my grip, but after a stubborn twist, it yielded. Inside it, the thick, brown compound clung to the edges, reluctant to spread. I dipped my trowel and scooped out the dense mixture. Once the foundation was ready, I would have to work fast; adhesion was indispensable.

A perfect aroma emanated from the kiln, warm and golden. But before checking the tiles, I began preparing the blend that would bring balance to the whole structure - the finishing element no craftsman could overlook. It was said that no construction stood truly altogether without the right combination of density, heat, and timing.

I reached the dark substance, bitter in scent and texture, and released it into the metallic boiler. The machine awakened with a hiss, steady and rhythmic. Slowly, its tone deepened from bronze to warm amber, while I adjusted the temperature until the consistency became smooth and uniform.

I left the substance stand, while I began working on the lighter compound -dense at first, and once it heated, a soft, creamy layer was formed, capable of giving harmony to the whole piece. Only by patience and control could both materials complement one another in perfect proportion.

The rumbling of the container jolted me, signalling that the tiles were ready. I set them aside for they had already acquired a crisp, golden tone. With deliberate precision I transferred them onto the chosen pallets that would support the entire structure. The result ought to be flawless. I was battling against time, and I had to place them at perfect angles. I, then, spread the adhesive over them, covering every corner.

Once this procedure was over, I reached for the glossy reddish coating, I spread it smoothly until the surface gleamed with a uniform sheen. The structure had been completed.

The blend within the metallic boiler was again demanding my presence. I rushed back and slowly poured out the dark substance into its specially selected vessel. After this procedure, a lighter layer followed, spreading slowly across the surface sealing the mixture with precision. With a gentle motion, I traced a faint pattern upon it, a quiet signature of movement and heat.

Now came the finishing touches. The golden tiles stood firm and bound by the adhesive that held every edge in place. Beside them, the vessel containing the steaming brownish liquid, was crowned with a perfect foam. I stepped back for a last inspection: the project was finished. I sighed with relief, wiped my forehead, and allowed myself a

* Mención por Originalidad – Concurso Literario USAL en Lengua Inglesa – Categoría cuento (2025).

brief moment of pride. The construction had been executed with flawless timing. The blueprint was no longer a plan, it was real.

My heart raced as I carried it across the counter, every step echoing louder than the last. Then, at last, I placed it gently before the waiting customer.

“Latte and toast with peanut butter and jam... for Emma?” I called with a trembling voice. She smiled, reached forward and took it.

It was simply my very first order, and in that instant, I knew I had become a Barista.