

Chapter 40: I want to be with my crackers!

The route to the Jing Mountains was difficult to travel on as it was mostly made up of dirt roads.

While sitting in the pickup truck bed, Ren Xiaosu occasionally saw some concrete surfaces on the road. But for whatever reason, those roads had crumbled a long time ago and were in a state of decay.

Ren Xiaosu had once heard from the schoolteacher, Mr. Zhang, that the concrete roads were left behind from the time before The Cataclysm. The structure of the roads had degraded after so many years, and most of them were now covered by layers of dirt.

This was the case with most of the “major” roads linking the strongholds together. However, these dirt roads had a slightly more even surface due to more vehicles traveling on them.

In reality, not many vehicles traveled between the strongholds. Back at their own town, Ren Xiaosu and the others would only see nonlocal vehicles coming to Stronghold 113 about a dozen times a year. Even that was considered quite a lot.

The wilderness was not all desolate. On the contrary, it took only dozens of kilometers after leaving town before they were greeted with lush greenery everywhere. Over the years, the vegetation got even lusher.

However, Ren Xiaosu didn't feel that this was a bad thing. Back in town, food was usually considered a scarcity. Since he could not have meat, he would eat more vegetables. He had also noticed that the cabbages planted by Zhang Jinglin were getting larger than before.

Ren Xiaosu even specifically asked Zhang Jinglin whether he had used any fertilizers to grow them, but he denied it.

This was a good thing. Perhaps one day a single potato might even be enough to feed a family of three.

When Liu Bu made Ren Xiaosu sit in the bed of the pickup, he never could have expected that Ren Xiaosu would do something.

The cargo bed was filled with food and water provisions they brought with them from the stronghold. There was no need to lock such items up, so they were simply covered with tarps.

While Ren Xiaosu sat in the cargo bed, he lifted the tarp out of curiosity. He had a look under it and immediately saw the word “cracker.” Then he lifted another tarp and saw bottled water.

Because of the bumpy road, the vehicles did not go fast. In reality, the band did not fear wild animal encounters. After all, they had 12 soldiers from the private army who were carrying loaded weapons with them. As such, they did not have to worry too much about any beasts.

Although a wolf attack had taken place earlier, the wolves were long gone and hiding in the mountains several hundred kilometers away from here. There was absolutely no need to worry that they would suddenly return.

According to past experience at the stronghold, it would take at least a year of recuperation for them to come back and be active in the area again.

So what worried the convoy the most at the moment was what would happen if the vehicles broke down.

Half of these soldiers from the private army were trained in automobile repair, but they couldn't possibly bring a full set of spare parts for the expedition with them.

While this made the journey slower, it was better than having to walk there.

In between, Ren Xiaosu insisted on getting out to relieve himself. As a result, the entire convoy had to stop and wait for him. This made them even more displeased with him, but Ren Xiaosu was not bothered by it. He faced everyone's complaints as if it were nothing.

The convoy continued moving until noon. When they came to a stop, Liu Bu jumped out of the vehicle first. He laughed happily and said, "I've stayed in the stronghold for too long. It's such a great feeling to come out here and see the sweeping vistas."

A soldier laughed and said, "Yeah, that's right. I've gotten terribly bored from staying inside the stronghold all the time."

In fact, everyone had such thoughts from the moment they set off on this expedition. They were all in the mood to enjoy the scenery, chat, and laugh. However, this would likely not be the case in a few days.

In the past, Ren Xiaosu also thought that it was rather lovely when he first came out to the wilderness to hunt.

Liu Bu beckoned for everyone to get out of their vehicles. He said, "Let's get out here and eat something. After we finish, we'll continue on our journey and try to get to the Yun Range before it gets dark. We were there the previous time, and there's a clearing that's suitable for setting up camp." [1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yun_Range]

Everyone was chatting and laughing as they got out of the off-road vehicles. Several of the soldiers gathered to smoke together. Their faces were full of happiness when they started puffing away.

Liu Bu called for the band to go over to the pickup truck. He did not have the authority to order the soldiers around. It was neither down to his nor Luo Xinyu's influence that they were able to hire 12 soldiers from the private army to come with them on this trip. In actual fact, their band was here to act as a cover for the private troops to carry out their mission!

In such circumstances, others might think that Liu Bu and Luo Xinyu were very influential. But they knew better.

As Liu Bu walked towards the pickup truck, he said to a band member next to him, "We'll distribute the cigarettes that we brought along to the soldiers in a bit."

"Alright, how many should we give out to them?" the band member asked.

"Bring out one carton first. Didn't we take ten cartons along with us? There's no need to be so anxious. We can hand them out slowly." Liu Bu smiled and said, "We have a fresh group of soldiers joining us, so everyone will start getting along once we get familiar with one another."

When Liu Bu came to the back of the pickup truck, he received a shock as he turned around and had a look inside. "Holy shit! Ren Xiaosu, what have you done?!"

Ren Xiaosu looked at Liu Bu and said, "Why do you look so shocked? I didn't do anything at all!" He burped. As he had a little too much to eat, he couldn't help burping. Ren Xiaosu stood up to stretch himself, then brushed off the cracker crumbs on his body...

Liu Bu leaned over into the cargo bed and looked around. His heart ached. "Are you a pig? How can you eat so much? You ate five packets of crackers all by yourself in one morning?!"

Quite frankly, it had been a long time since Ren Xiaosu had eaten so much. In their poorest days, he would leave his food for Yan Liuyuan to eat. They only became rich recently, so he hadn't had the chance to be extravagant yet.

Besides, the crackers they brought along were delicious. There were both sweet and salty ones.

Importantly, salt and sugar were luxury goods in town. Most of the time, they would just have plain boiled potatoes or some similar food to eat. Where would they get the chance to eat such delicious food like crackers? There was even a lot of potable water available in the vehicle.

"Look how bloated your belly is!" Liu Bu roared. "You must be four months pregnant, right? Don't you feel uncomfortable stuffing yourself with so much food?"

Ren Xiaosu snapped, "It's only because you let me sit here in the bed that this happened! But now that you mention it, it does feel a little uncomfortable." Ren Xiaosu got out of the pickup and started running into the distance. "Y'all can eat first. I need to take a dump."

While Ren Xiaosu ran far away, Liu Bu and the others felt frustrated in the wilderness.

A band member hesitated before saying, "Why don't we just let him sit inside the vehicle?"

Liu Bu stared at him. "Why should we let him sit in the vehicle? Is a refugee like him qualified to sit together with us, huh?"

The band member did not sound so confident at his suggestion anymore, but he still muttered, "If we continue to let him sit in the bed of the pickup for two more days, I'm afraid that our provisions will not last until Stronghold 112...."

At the words, Liu Bu made a rough estimation of Ren Xiaosu's appetite. Then he sighed and said, "Indeed, we won't be able to last until then."

In the end, everyone unanimously decided to let Ren Xiaosu sit in the vehicle.

When Ren Xiaosu came back, he was unhappy to find out that he had to sit in the vehicle. "I don't want to sit in the vehicle. I'm not qualified to sit together with y'all. I'm just a refugee!"

"Let me go, let me be with my crackers!"

"Are you people human!"

Eventually, things were solved after everyone worked together to cram him into the vehicle.