

# The First Order

## Chapter 5: The school

“As pets? They’re not buying them to eat?” Ren Xiaosu was puzzled. “What a waste! All of the meat on this is great!”

“You won’t understand the world that the rich live in.” Old Wang laughed and said, “I heard that rich people used to keep eagles as pets a few hundred years ago. But haven’t the eagles gotten too big and dangerous now? So the next best thing is the sparrows. Just look at how menacing this sparrow looks. It’s exactly what the rich like.”

Ren Xiaosu thought about it for a while. So while there were still a lot of people who didn’t have enough to eat, some people had started keeping sparrows as pets.

“But I’ll have to sell it for a higher price if they want it alive.” Ren Xiaosu said, “When this bird is still alive, it can even kill people if you aren’t careful! It’s too dangerous!”

All of a sudden, Ren Xiaosu thought that if the refugees outside the stronghold were contaminated, wouldn’t the sparrows be contaminated as well? Or did the people in the stronghold only need these refugees to work for them? And the walls, did they naturally divide them into a hierarchy?

“You can only get rich by taking risks.” Old Wang smiled and said, “Since you can wait an entire night hunting, you’re no ordinary person. If you make an effort to catch a live sparrow, you can probably afford to stop working for the next six months. Besides, haven’t you thought about making some money so that you can get a wife?”

“Get a wife? My ass!” Ren Xiaosu said petulantly.

Old Wang purposely said in a mysterious tone, “Old Li, who lives next door, has a daughter who’s studying at the same school as your little brother, Liuyuan. She’s a really decent girl...”

“Based on what you said, wouldn’t it be better if I just sold this sparrow to Old Li directly? Would I still need your introduction then?” Ren Xiaosu turned his head to Yan Liuyuan and asked, “Is Old Li’s daughter your classmate?”

“Yes.” Yan Liuyuan nodded. “She’s quite big.”

“Shoo, go play over there,” Old Wang snapped. “Pretend I didn’t say anything since you’re mistaking my kindness for ill intent!”

Seeing that he almost got caught between Ren Xiaosu and Yan Liuyuan's bantering, Old Wang decisively stopped them by changing the topic. "Remember, the next time you catch a live sparrow, you must bring it to me."

"Sure." Ren Xiaosu nodded. Although catching it alive was dangerous, it was not impossible. He looked around the grocery store and asked, "How much are you selling the cotton-padded jacket for?"

"The jackets are new arrivals, and they cost 500 yuan apiece! You should know that I bought them for 490 yuan each. I'm not looking to profit from selling these cotton-padded jackets at all." Old Wang said, "One less death is one life saved, after all."

"How kind of you," praised Ren Xiaosu nonchalantly. "I'll buy one. Check and see what size Liuyuan should wear."

"Bro, buy one for yourself too," Yan Liuyuan quickly said.

"Don't interrupt when adults are talking." Ren Xiaosu frowned. "I'm not cold."

Money was a good thing. The organizations that controlled the strongholds issued money to ensure the distribution of goods and materials. Although it was convenient, without it, nothing could be done.

The winter here was freezing, but he had to put some money aside in case of emergencies. As there was still over a month left until winter, Ren Xiaosu thought that it would not be too late to buy another cotton-padded jacket by then if he could catch another sparrow.

More importantly, it was time for Yan Liuyuan to pay for his monthly tuition.

Ren Xiaosu glanced around the grocery store again, his gaze arresting at the counter behind Old Wang. "How much are you selling the antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs for?"

"You want to buy medicine?" Only then did Old Wang notice the bloodstained bandage wrapped around Ren Xiaosu's hand. "You're injured? You really must buy some medicine then. If not, you could get an infection and die!"

"I'm asking you how much it is!" Ren Xiaosu said impatiently.

"210 yuan each." Old Wang said, "Antibiotics must be taken for three days straight. I'll sell you three pills for 620 yuan and give you an application of iodopovidone 1 for free. I only have 10 pills left in stock here."

Ren Xiaosu thought for a while before saying, "How about rounding it down..."

“If by rounding down, you mean removing the zero, shut it,” Old Wang snapped.

Ren Xiaosu smacked his lips and reluctantly looked away. “Forget it, I’m not buying them. Inflammation is uncommon during winter.”

He turned around and led Yan Liuyuan to school. When they passed by the grain store, Ren Xiaosu went in and bought a long loaf of black bread. The black bread was mixed with something that would make their throats uncomfortable when swallowed.

Yan Liuyuan said as he chewed on the black bread, “Bro, why don’t you also pay for the tuition and come to school since you want to attend classes so much.”

“I still have to go out to hunt.” Ren Xiaosu said, “About what Old Wang said earlier, there are quite a few well-to-do girls in your school, right? You had better not fall in love at such an early age.”

“I heard that people in the past used to get married when they were around 13 to 14 years old,” Yan Liuyuan retorted. Although he had never given such matters any thought before, he found it fun and enjoyable to bicker with Ren Xiaosu.

Finding joy amid hardship was probably one of the greatest skills that humans had.

Ren Xiaosu feigned a slap upside Yan Liuyuan’s head. “How can we compare what people did in the past? You’re still young. The women you get into a relationship with now will end up becoming someone else’s wife in the future.” Ren Xiaosu marveled at the thought. “A relationship with someone else’s wife sounds quite exciting for some reason...”

“Bro, what are you talking about? Why can’t I understand?” said Yan Liuyuan while blinking.

“Get lost. Stop acting innocent with me,” Ren Xiaosu said peeved.

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The school was the cleanest and tidiest place in the entire town. It was also the only residence that had its own individual yard.

Walking in from the outside, properly spaced crops grown in the yard could be seen: scallions, garlic sprouts, potatoes, cabbages, and many others.

Ren Xiaosu felt that a place like a school should have bamboo trees growing around it instead. But then again, with food not easily accessible these days, it was quite fortunate to have a place to grow these vegetables. As such, Ren Xiaosu’s wish was for Yan Liuyuan to become a teacher when he grew up.

It was not because he had a lot of respect for teachers, but that he felt that being a teacher was safe. They also had the privilege of having their own yard to grow some vegetables in. Furthermore, no one would ever steal their crops.

It was such a wonderful thing.

Generally speaking, Ren Xiaosu's wishes had always been very "simple."

Yan Liuyuan took his tuition money and went to class. Ren Xiaosu squatted on top of the wall and listened to what was being taught inside the classroom. As he could not afford to pay the tuition, he had to eavesdrop like this.

The teacher would sometimes tell the students stories about how glorious human civilization was in the past. Frankly, however, the teacher had not witnessed such a time either. Whatever he was telling them now were details passed on by word of mouth, so the truth had probably been distorted already.

Although it was not very reliable, Ren Xiaosu was still fascinated by it.

At times, Ren Xiaosu would ask Yan Liuyuan questions about information he didn't understand or hear. This greatly troubled Yan Liuyuan because if he could not answer him, it would show that he did not pay attention during the lessons. Hence, whenever Ren Xiaosu was present to attend the lessons, Yan Liuyuan would be exceptionally attentive during class.

For some reason, Yan Liuyuan had to admit that his brother looked rather charming when he was seriously learning. It was no wonder Xiaoyu would throw herself at him.

The teacher was holding a book in the classroom as he stared with melancholic eyes at some of the sleeping students. Then he looked at Ren Xiaosu, who was on top of the wall outside the window. He said to Yan Liuyuan, "When you get back today, tell your brother that he can come into the yard and listen to my lessons in the future."

"Alright!" Yan Liuyuan smiled happily.