

Apocalypse 649

Chapter 649 A Different Group

"Shhh..."

Just as Sparrow was about to unleash an angry roar and fight back, a firm hand suddenly covered his lips, signaling him to stay silent. His head snapped to the side in reflex—so fast it nearly felt like he might dislocate his own neck.

A jolt of realization struck him when he felt a grip on his collar. This wasn't just something—someone had caught him.

His eyes widened as he met the person's gaze, his mouth parting to speak again, but the stranger swiftly gestured for silence. Then, using a series of hand signals—ones only known to the Winters' men—he gave Sparrow a silent command: Climb the tree beside us.

Sparrow hesitated for only a moment before following the man's gaze upward. That's when he saw them—several figures perched among the branches like silent sentinels, their forms blending into the shadows. They sat poised like watchful predators, waiting.

There were also some unfamiliar faces mixed in with his people. Yes, the one who had grabbed him by the collar and dragged him through the bushes was a member of his missing Group 6—they were all here, safe and sound.

'Or at least, for now, they were safe.'

Unfortunately, just like Sparrow, they were disoriented, their senses dulled, and their bodies sluggish. None of them were in any condition to fight—not when a mutated tiger was prowling nearby, its sharp gaze sweeping the area in search of its prey.

Worse still, they were all experiencing some kind of status abnormality that was messing with their mental states, making it impossible for them to engage in a direct confrontation. Their only option was to stay hidden among the trees.

But when they spotted Sparrow sprinting toward them, unaware that the mutated tiger was only a few meters behind them, they knew they had to act. If they didn't, he would run straight into the beast's waiting jaws.

As luck would have it, Sparrow tripped and fell. Before he could unleash a tirade of curses over his misfortune, someone from Group 6 had already swooped in, grabbing him by the collar and silently dragging him behind the bushes—far from the mutated tiger's line of sight and into a safe blind spot.

At that moment, the mutated insect that had just passed Sparrow caught sight of the mutated tiger instead. Unable to find Sparrow and still seething with unfulfilled rage, the insect redirected its aggression toward the beast. A furious roar echoed through the forest as the mutated tiger, now under attack, lashed out in response.

Group 6, still covered in mud, remained unrecognizable, their scent masked by the thick layer of grime. Sparrow, however, was a different story. Having spent so much time inside the cave with the mutated insect, his scent was noticeably stronger.

With the mutated tiger and insect locked in battle, the group knew they couldn't linger for long. The tiger's powerful sense of smell would eventually pick up on Sparrow's presence—if it hadn't already.

For now, it was too preoccupied with its fight to focus on him, but they all understood that their window to escape was quickly closing.

Instead of climbing up, they quickly changed their plan. Sparrow signaled for everyone to climb down and escape while he stayed at the rear to keep watch. Though still somewhat disoriented, he was in better shape than the others and could at least put up a fight if necessary.

As they moved, Sparrow took note of the unfamiliar faces among Group 6—civilians, mostly elderly, women, and children. In the distance, the mutated tiger's furious roars echoed through the forest, followed by the deafening crashes of trees being toppled in the chaos of its battle with the mutated insect.

Sensing the urgency, Sparrow urged everyone to move faster. He kept a vigilant eye on their surroundings, ensuring that neither of the raging creatures was closing in on them.

Some members of Group 6 stumbled as they ran. Though they looked intimidating, their predator-like appearance was deceiving—they were barely holding on. Weak and on the verge of collapse, they were running purely on willpower, struggling to keep up with the others.

Before encountering Sparrow just hours ago, they had been fleeing from a mutated cow. In their desperation, they had ventured too deep into the forest, only to realize too late that they had been affected by a status abnormality that weakened their bodies and clouded their minds.

Disoriented and drained, they had tried to escape the area as quickly as possible, only to cross paths with the mutated tiger. The beast, sensing their vulnerability and lack of resistance, had immediately given chase.

The mutated tiger seemed to be enjoying the chase, relishing the sight of its prey desperately trying to escape. It was clear that it wasn't hunting out of hunger—it was toying with them, confident that no matter how far they ran, it could catch them whenever it pleased.

Realizing this, the group decided to take advantage of the tiger's arrogance. They stumbled upon a pit of mud and, without hesitation, rolled in it to mask their scent. Their gamble paid off. The moment the tiger lost their trail, it let out an enraged roar, frustrated that its prey had seemingly vanished.

Despite their disorientation—the world spinning around them—they pressed on, trying to navigate their way to a safer hiding spot. They knew that running indefinitely wasn't an option; exhaustion would catch up to them sooner or later, leaving them as easy prey. Finding a place to hide was their best chance at survival.

They spotted a large tree that seemed like the perfect hiding place, but as they approached, they realized that others had already taken refuge in its branches. These people were likely hiding from the mutated tiger as well, waiting for the danger to pass before making their escape.

The Winters' men considered climbing up, but one particular woman immediately voiced her objections.

"Can't you see there are already people here? Do you want to bring that monster straight to us? Or are you planning to use us as bait so you can escape?" she accused sharply.

Her words didn't sit well with the Winters' men, but with the mutated tiger closing in, they had little choice.

"What the hell is your problem?" an older man from the group in the tree snapped back. "Can't you see they're just like us, trying to survive? Why can't you show a little compassion?"

"Compassion? Will compassion save my life or give me a better future in this godforsaken place?!" the woman retorted, her voice laced with frustration.

"If you're not afraid of attracting that monster, then keep shouting," an older woman in the group scoffed. She eyed the younger woman with disapproval, clearly irritated by her hostility toward the Winters' men.

No one knew why she was so against them—maybe she simply didn't want to share their hiding spot. It was understandable, but the Winters' men were in a tight spot too.

Without hesitation, the older man who had spoken first carefully climbed down from the tree. "Come on," he said firmly. "I'll help you and your people find a better hiding spot. I used to wander these forests when I was young—my village was nearby. If anyone can guide you through this place, it's me."