

## Apocalypse 650

### Chapter 650 Strength In Number

The Winters' men didn't hesitate to accept the help—they weren't in a position to act tough. They knew better than to put on a strong front, so with a grateful nod, they followed the older man.

As they moved away from the area, more and more people joined them. Children, elderly women, and older men all left their hiding spots and fell in step with the group. The Winters' men were baffled—why would they abandon a seemingly safe refuge?

Sensing their confusion, the older woman from earlier spoke up. "There's strength in numbers. That monster may look terrifyingly strong, but with all of us together, I don't believe we'll be wiped out. As long as we protect the children, we'll be fine."

The crowd murmured in agreement, nodding resolutely. Only the woman who had refused to share her hiding spot earlier, along with a few elderly and younger men, remained perched on the tree branches. Others tried to persuade them to come along, but they stubbornly refused, even scoffing at those who chose to leave.

"We'll stay here. If you all are so eager to risk your lives for a bunch of irrelevant people, then suit yourselves!" the woman scoffed, rolling her eyes before turning away.

The older man, who had naturally taken on the role of leader, sighed but didn't argue. "Alright. If they don't want to come, let them be. If we get the chance later, we'll circle back for them before we leave this place."

With that, the group took off in a different direction. They ran for several kilometers, but the younger children, with their short legs and limited stamina, began stumbling and falling. The adults had no choice but to scoop them up and carry them as they pressed forward.

Eventually, they reached a cluster of large trees surrounded by mud pits and wildflowers. It was an ideal hiding spot—the thick mud would help mask their scent, making it harder for the mutated tiger to track them.

Following the Winters' men's lead, the others rolled around in the mud, cutting fresh grass to further conceal themselves. Once they were sufficiently covered, they quickly climbed up the trees, finding safety among the branches.

Once they managed to climb to a high spot in the tree, the Winters' men finally let their guard down. Their shoulders slumped as the lingering disorientation drained their strength, leaving them leaning heavily against the tree trunks.

One of them mustered the energy to speak, offering a grateful nod. "Thank you so much for helping us. But... why are you all here in the forest?"

The leader of the group, an older man with a weary but determined gaze, replied, "We're from Port City. We survived the natural calamities—the tsunami, flash floods, and everything that followed—after we fled."

"The big cities aren't safe anymore, so we decided to head for my village. I figured that in a smaller community, we'd have a better chance. We could work together to clear out the zombies, build a survivor camp, and maybe... just maybe, we could survive by farming."

"But reaching my village means we have to pass through this forest and cross the mountain on the other side," the man sighed, his gaze fixed ahead. "We had no idea that, aside from people turning into zombies, even animals would mutate and become even more terrifying. We ended up trapped here, doing our best to avoid running into any of the stronger creatures."

He let out a weary breath before continuing, "Back in Port City, we were too afraid to venture out and search for food. No matter how many times we fought them, the zombies would always rise again. It felt hopeless."

"But when the natural disasters struck and we were on the verge of death, I realized something—we could give up and accept our fate, but what about the children? Did they deserve to die because we were afraid? No. So we, the adults, had to grit our teeth, swallow our fear, and push forward... for their sake."

"We've come a long way. Some of the adults sacrificed themselves to protect the children, but we have no regrets. We had already accepted death from the beginning, so what difference does it make whether we were swallowed by the tsunami or died shielding the young?"

"Thinking this way gave us a sense of peace, and so we kept moving forward. But now, stuck in this forest, I don't know how long it will take before we can finally reach the village."

The Winters' men nodded in silent understanding. They had no right to judge these people's choices—everyone had their own paths to take. But rather than seeing their resolve as foolish, they found themselves respecting this group.

They were civilians, ordinary people who had never trained to fight but had spent their lives working and surviving in simpler times. And yet, in the face of despair, they had chosen to fight for the children rather than give up and die in vain. That, in its own way, was a different kind of bravery.

The older man continued, his voice tinged with regret. "We would've had a better chance of survival if our leader, Rakan, hadn't been kicked out of the shelter and maybe he already died out there with his few people."

"Rakan?" the Winters' men echoed in unison.

"Yeah," the man nodded. "He was our leader, and a good one at that. But there was an internal power struggle over supplies, and with just a small mistake, those vying for control conspired to force him out. After they took over, it didn't even take a full day before the so-called new leader and his people abandoned us. They took whatever they could carry and vanished, leaving us—the elderly, the sick, and the young—to fend for ourselves."

He let out a weary sigh, the weight of their past mistakes and struggles pressing heavily on his shoulders.

"Oh!" The Winters' men exchanged glances before nodding. "Actually, Rakan isn't dead. He's alive and living in our base now," one of them revealed.

They knew they shouldn't be sharing this information so casually, but at the same time, it wasn't a secret that could be kept forever. Once their gates opened to other survivors, HOPE Base would inevitably become known. Telling these people about Rakan's survival wasn't a major risk—at least, not yet.

If these survivors had any ill intentions toward their base, the Winters' men knew they could handle troublemakers, just as they had with the Coltons. But for now, they chose to give them the benefit of the doubt and extend a little trust.

"He's alive?!" A wave of shock rippled through the group as almost everyone turned toward the Winters' men. But as soon as they realized they had spoken too loudly, they quickly covered their mouths, their eyes darting around in fear of attracting the mutated tiger that was still lurking nearby.

"Yeah," one of the Winters' men confirmed in a hushed tone. "When our people came to Port City for supplies, Rakan and a few of his men managed to find them. They joined our base and have been working alongside everyone to keep it safe."

"Really?!" The older man's initial excitement was evident, but it quickly faded as a sobering thought crossed his mind. Could they join this base as well?