

Civilization 34

Chapter 34 Rescue_2

"What's the matter, Xiulote?" Totec's cold face lit up with a hint of a smile, "The sacrificial rite was well conducted today."

"Supreme Commander, today is the first divine day of the Feathered Serpent, and on this auspicious day for celebrating the New Year, we should not create so much bloodshed."

"Hmm?" Totec frowned, "Are you suggesting we leave the village till tomorrow before destroying it? But we've already started; if we delay till tomorrow, more people will escape."

"What I'm saying is that we can show mercy. Warriors and able-bodied men are potential threats, but we can spare the women and children," Xiulote said earnestly.

"The King's command is to kill all Otomi people," Totec shook his head, "Xiulote, don't be childish, you are a priest."

Then, without waiting for Xiulote to continue, Totec grabbed Xiulote by the arm, pointing towards the distant Ping Shan City, "Can your catapult take down Guamare City?"

Xiulote looked at the city and shook his head, "The current power of the catapult is not enough. Although it can reach the city, its force is limited."

Totec nodded, "We also don't have the time to lay siege. Since we can't take down the city, we must burn down the villages and farmlands!"

As he spoke, he turned his body to gaze earnestly at the youth: "Xiulote, the Otomi people do not deserve sympathy! Use the time to conduct more sacrificial activities for the warriors or study that catapult thoroughly."

After that, he waved his hand, signaling the guards to take Xiulote out of the tent.

Xiulote wandered a few steps outside the tent, then suddenly thought of someone and hurried off.

Entering a side tent, Xiulote saw Aweit sitting cross-legged in front of an earthen platform, writing something on a wooden board. Occasionally, messengers and scouts would come and go, reporting on military affairs.

Xiulote moved closer to see and was startled—the wooden board was filled with neat traditional characters: "Found 198 villages along the way, expecting to burn 21 today; the mission can be completed and return within ten days..."

Seeing Xiulote, Aweit smiled and pointed to the board, "How about that, my writing is pretty good, isn't it?"

Xiulote nodded. In just a few months, Aweit had managed to write Chinese characters without any errors, which truly was impressive.

Then, Xiulote asked anxiously, "Aweit, the Supreme Commander wants to kill all the Otomi people. Can we be merciful?"

With a smile, Aweit replied, "Xiulote, don't you know that the Otomi are our enemies? If we let the Otomi militia escape into the woods, the Mexica warriors will suffer heavy losses."

Xiulote nodded in response, "I understand. I wasn't talking about the Otomi men; I meant the women and children."

"Oh! I see." Aweit laughed heartily, his eyebrows curving in two soaring arcs. "After the New Year, you're already thirteen years old, the age when you long to become an adult."

"How about this, I will talk to Totec and have the warriors bring you a few Otomi girls to change you from a boy to a man, then you won't be so soft-hearted."

Xiulote was left feeling dry-mouthed, his face reddened by Aweit's teasing. This guy could really do it.

"Look, although priests cannot marry, as long as you take these Otomi girls as concubines, they will be saved," Aweit continued persuasively, "The great Montezuma I, he had hundreds of concubines and fathered over a hundred Divine Descendant warriors. You can also take a hundred Otomi girls as well."

Xiulote was stunned for a moment, then stood rooted to the spot, mulling over things. His intelligence had become a negative number in the day's ordeal; now he was counting on his fingers, murmuring to himself, pondering exactly how many girls he should save.

Seeing Xiulote seriously getting lost in thought, Aweit became concerned again.

He reached out and flicked Xiulote's forehead hard, saying seriously, "Xiulote, what are you thinking about! Our Mexica warriors are not like those weaker tribes; the warriors' coming-of-age rituals are after the age of fifteen, and the excellent ones even later."

"My student, too much frolicking too early will seriously harm the body's vitality, diminish the intelligence of the brain, and drain the life force given by the Heavenly Divine. Those renowned Jaguar warriors often refine their bodies and suppress the desire for revelry until the age of twenty! Xiulote, I hope you will not be drawn to the opposite sex's pleasures before the age of eighteen," Aweit said, sobering up.

"But I really want to save the innocent women and children," Xiulote insisted, holding his gaze firmly.

"There are no innocent people in this world; everyone has a reason to die. Women will weave and farm, nurturing children. Children will grow up and take up arms to kill."

"Give me a reason, but not the same old talk about the sanctity and equality of life," Aweit said seriously. "If you can convince me, I'll convince Totec."

Xiulote began to think calmly.

"We could take them captive and bring them back to the Alliance," Xiulote answered.

"We don't have enough food, and we don't have the manpower to spare watching over them."

"It would take these women and children a decade or more to pose a threat to us," Xiulote added.

"Indeed, but what about after that decade or more?"

"In a decade or more, we will be powerful enough to thoroughly conquer the Otomi, turning these commoners into citizens of the Alliance," Xiulote said with some confidence.

Aweit looked at Xiulote and gave a slight nod but then said, "Maybe that's the first reason. But for now, I can't see the benefit of letting these people go. Any other reasons?"

"We could take these people captive and then take them to the gates of Guamare City, to exchange them for food. The army is currently short of food," Xiulote said.

"What if the City-State doesn't offer food in exchange?"

"Then we let them go, and the City-State will have lost the hearts of the people."

"What do the hearts of the commoners amount to?" Aweit laughed, "But to trade for some food isn't bad. That's the second reason. But why should I help these commoners? Give me another reason."

Aweit watched Xiulote's eyes, as if waiting for something.

Xiulote pondered back and forth and after a while he said, "This is my personal belief, valuing life is not the natural order of this world, but it is my preference, and it satisfies my heart."

"Oh? But we executed their husbands and fathers, they won't be grateful to you."

"I don't need their gratitude, I just need to find peace and satisfaction in my heart," Xiulote replied softly, but it seemed to take all his strength.

"So, my student, this is just a preference of yours, right? It is not the natural order that you should follow; preferences must serve the greater cause," Aweit asked gently, as if with a hypnotic charm.

"Yes, it's just my preference, unrelated to the natural order of the world; it serves the greater cause," Xiulote repeated laboriously.

"Good, very good! Valuing life is Xiulote's preference. These thousands of commoners are mere ants; how can they compare with the growth of my student! This third reason, this is the real reason that moved me!"

Aweit finally clapped his hands and laughed, "Xiulote, remember what you said today. No matter what the memories of the past are. Life and equality are just your preferences, just as some people lust, some crave war, some love wine, it's simply a more benevolent preference."

"When conditions allow, one can act on their preferences. But preferences must submit to the greater cause; they are not the bottom line."

"The bottom line must not be breached, or it becomes a weakness, and weakness leads to death. Unlike ordinary people, a great ruler can never have weaknesses. So, Xiulote, whatever is in your memory, forget the weak part! This is the most important lesson I teach you!" Aweit insisted, pressing Xiulote's shoulders firmly, looking intently at him, his eyes full of expectation.

"And as rulers, our only cause is this nation, the future of the Mexica, the supreme power of this world!" Whispering the last sentence, Aweit finally burst into laughter, his laughter filled with hidden ambition and longing.

He gave Xiulote a firm hug, turned around, and strode away, heading for Totec's tent.

Xiulote still stood there; he was about to take the first and hardest step towards becoming a great ruler.