

## Civilization 41

### Chapter 41 Life\_2

Kusola looked toward the direction of his southern home, his eyes filled with an expression unlike any other. Xiulote saw in him the responsibility of a man, the pursuit of a family head, and the aspirations for the future. Enlisting in the military was the only way for a Mexica to change their social class.

"Yes," Xiulote nodded, sincerely blessing him. "Your son will become a Jaguar warrior."

Hearing Xiulote's blessing, the young Kusola smiled happily. Bertade next to him also smiled.

"Head Warrior Bertade, what about you, why did you enlist?" Kusola, still in high spirits, posed the question to the seasoned samurai beside him. Xiulote was curious as well.

"Me?" Bertade gazed leisurely at the approaching sunset, his eyes growing distant and deep, as if they had traversed time and space to see the past.

"I spent five years in a commoner's military school, then came of age and joined the capital's army, staying here for another twenty years. Initially, I followed the great Montezuma I into battle, then King Asayacatl, and now King Tizoc."

Bertade chuckled, "The army is my entire life, here I have spent my youth, my adulthood, my middle age, and it will see my old age too. Perhaps dying on the battlefield like a samurai is the best ending."

"But you are already a Fourth-Level senior samurai, owning enough land and slaves, you could retire back to the city-state, you could even become a military school teacher, living happily with your family, right?" Kusola imagined the life of a Fourth-Level samurai, looking curiously at Bertade.

Bertade just smiled, the harsh military life leaving its mark of vicissitudes on his face, even more so engraved in his heart: "My wife has already gone to the red kingdom, dying in childbirth along with my child. I never remarried."

"My only brother fell in battle last year." Bertade stared at the distant clouds, "When I return this time, his wife will probably remarry, and I will adopt his daughter to inherit everything I have."

Xiulote slightly lowered his head, his mood somewhat heavy. In those days, childbirth was a very common danger. Without contraception and with a high infant mortality rate, women were trapped in a cycle of constant pregnancy and childbirth. One misstep, and it ended in tragedy.

Therefore, in Mexica society, women who could continually give birth to healthy boys held an exceptionally high status, akin to outstanding warriors on the battlefield. And women who died in childbirth were honored just as warriors who died in battle.

When Xiulote was very young, his mother passed away from complications during the birth of her second child. He vaguely remembered her face, a very gentle woman from a civilian family of the city-state.

Later, his father married a new noblewoman and had many concubines who bore him many brothers and sisters. These new family members were not close to him, and they kept to themselves. Had he not been exceptional from a young age, earning the attention and affection of his father and ancestors, he imagined he might have found himself in many dramatic situations.

The three fell silent, watching the distant sunset together, watching the far-off afterglow, lost in deep nostalgia.

After a while, Kusola finally asked Bertade, "Head Warrior, why do you choose to follow the Priest?"

Bertade looked at the setting sun and took a long time to respond: "Perhaps, I want to change something. What about you?"

Kusola smiled sincerely, "At first, I thought, the Priest being so formidable at such a young age, I wanted to follow him, to seek a career and a future."

Xiulote also smiled, looking at the young samurai before him, "So what do you think now?"

Kusora thought seriously for a while before saying, "I think you, Priest, are different from the other nobles. You treat us peasant warriors well, teaching us to read and imparting knowledge to us. You are kind to the common people too. You are a good person."

Xiulote felt moved inside. He had heard the accolades of the nobles for his knowledge, to which he would only smile. But this was a different voice, one that recognized him for who he was, and it touched him deeply.

"You two guys, now you're making me blush. Come on, it's time for dinner." Xiulote said with a smile, getting up and pulling the two warriors with him as people started to gather around, preparing for the evening meal.

The dinner was somewhat special. Everyone first sat around the village center's bonfire, roasting corn cakes and stuffing them with chili and bean paste. After that, the village elders presented two local specialities: a type of spineless cactus and red dried cactus fruits. He also brought out a jar of tequila, an important treasure of the village, expressing his heartfelt thanks and reverence for Xiulote's spring planting sacrificial rite.

This type of cactus was the beloved "Mibonta" of the Mexican tribes, an important vegetable. Xiulote picked up a roasted piece, biting into the tip.

The Mibonta was perfectly roasted, with thin skin, likely specially cultivated. The flesh was tender, tasting like a mix of cucumber, celery, and zucchini. Towards the center, the juice was more plentiful, bringing a light sweetness that seemed to blend fruit and vegetable flavors together.

Then Xiulote picked up a dried cactus fruit the size of his fist, which closely resembled a dried dragon fruit, filled with many small seeds. After a bite, the sweetness shone through. Xiulote's eyes lit up, biting twice more, appreciating the slightly gritty texture. The Elder told Xiulote that this was last year's dried fruit and that fresh cactus fruits in October would taste even better.

After drinking some more, the warriors around the bonfire became rowdy. Soon, with bellies full of food and wine, some warriors began a war dance by the fire, while others cheered them on. The other warriors sent by Totec loudly clamored for Otomi girls to come and dance. The village elder looked panicked and helpless, standing in place.

Xiulote waved his hand to calm the warriors down.

"Rest early and conserve your strength, for we return at dawn." Xiulote commanded, authority emerging from his youthful face. Only then did the warriors stop, agreeing to leave.

The village elder quickly prostrated himself in thanks. The bonfire banquet came to an end, and the young man decided to go to sleep. The elder vacated his own house for him—the best wooden hut in the village, clean and tidy inside.

Xiulote was about to thank the elder, but saw him bring a young girl, claiming her to be his granddaughter, to serve the Priest. The youth looked at the girl, about his age, her shy gaze downward, timidly standing next to the elder. The young man, who had just been emanating authority, suddenly turned a shade of embarrassed red.

Bertade softly smiled, stepped forward, and spoke a few words about Mexica warrior tradition to the elder, who then quickly apologized and led the young girl away.

Farmers, craftsmen, warriors, and nobility. Youth, young adults, middle-aged, and the elderly. Lords and vassals. Boys and girls. Snippets of life flashed through Xiulote's mind.

He thought about the lives of the Otomi, the Mexica, and all the tribes of Mexico. Images swirled until finally settling on the girl's disappointed yet resigned smile as she left. The youth returned the smile, then, amidst the tumult of thoughts, sunk into a deep sleep on the soft grass mat.

And on the ground mat next to him lay the quietly watchful Bertade, gazing into the distant night.