

The Farmers Fall

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A frantic knocking came from the door. The Farmer hurried over and to his surprise James, his old friend, was shaking on doorstep.

"James? The fuck are you doing here so late?" James lived a few miles south from where The Farmer lived. At this hour he must have left just as the sun descended.

"I saw something and you're gonna wanna hear this I promise," James walked through the door and found the hearth to warm up.

"So important it couldn't wait until market later this week?"

"Yes" James brushed his hands by the burning fire.

The Farmer sat down with his friend and brought him water. Surely he was parched after his journey this far north.

"You know the caravans? The ones that we always see travelling back and forth from Storm's Hope and the Boglands?" James finally broke his silence.

The Farmer nodded.

"Well I got a glimpse of what's underneath. You wouldn't believe it. Metals, wood, coins, my god the sacks of coin."

"So what? It's a trading caravan, of course they're gonna be carrying goods. Look James unless you tell me something I don't already know I'm gonna start getting pissed,"

"Ok, ok! These things aren't guarded. There's the driver, and a navigator. They travel the Gold Road, just these two guys, and they have a goddamn treasure trove behind them."

The Farmer chuckled to himself as his friend went on about this caravan.

“You’re implying we knock over one of these caravans? For what? You’re doing fine aren’t you?

This is your greed showing again friend. There’s no need to take more than we need, and I think you’re suffering from exhaustion from your trip up here. You can take the spare room, the Mrs. wont mind,”

“Im not exhausted, but I won’t press on it. I’m just saying...If you change your mind, I have a few others who are interested. Interested, but by no means smart enough to formulate a plan.” James tapped his head. “That’s why I came to you, you’re the smartest person I know and could formulate something easy!”

“Buttering me up isn’t changing my mind James. Now get to bed. I won’t hear any more about this.” The Farmer sent him to bed as if he were the Farmers own child. The Farmer helped his friend off the floor, and showed him to the spare room. The next morning, James apologized for suggesting any type of burglary, and promised not to bring it up again.

The ride down to the market is always a pleasant one. The Farmer lived on the northernmost stead, so he got to see just about all of the Frontier as he rode his grains down. He left his boys at home to tend the remaining crops. The sun was out, a slight cool breeze was coming in, and the Farmer felt like nothing in the world could possibly bring him down. He took in the rolling fields and pastures with a smile on his face. Cows and horses and goats could be seeing from his caravan, and the chickens and hens made sure anyone in the area knew they were around. Albeit stuck in a coop.

As the Gold Road came into sight, the Farmer saw the usual crew setting up shop, and displaying their wares. James had his usual stock of various cuts from his cows, Allison had fruits and vegetables lining her stand along with Perry. Carter had a slew quilts, blankets, and even a few articles of clothing.

Mary was already building a crowd with her slow cooked stew. A few others brought their wares as well, but the Farmer considered them acquaintances rather than close friends. The day went along as expected, people came, people left, some bought, some haggled, and some left empty handed. Around mid-day however a caravan came rolling through. For the first time, the Farmer eyed up the caravan and noticed the strain being put on the spokes. James was right, the caravan was absolutely packed to the gills with....well who cares what with. The driver jumped down to buy some things and peruse, the navigator stayed with the wagon.

"I told you," James snuck behind his awe struck friend. He subtly pointed towards where the caravan came from. "They come by my stead every week, sometimes twice a week."

Admittedly, the Farmer couldn't help but wonder what was inside the caravan, and how much it could be worth. The Farmer wasn't dumb though. There was no reason to risk everything for a wagon full of junk. He had a nice home, a healthy farm, healthy beautiful children, and a loving wife.

"Wheat, Barley, what's that other grain you had last time. Started with a q or something?" the Driver from the caravan appeared next to the Farmer.

"Oh, quinoa." The Farmer shook his gaze free from his customers caravan and focused on him. "Not technically a grain, but the same texture. How much do you need today?"

"I'll take the lot at half," The driver started grabbing bushels and looking around for crates.

"At half? No sir, I'm sorry but I can't do that. Its still full price even if you buy the lot." The Farmer rebutted.

"I'll take it all at half, like I do for everyone else here. You're just gonna sit on it anyways." The driver and navigator were now both loading up their caravan with the grains from the Farmers stall, not even waiting for a response. They placed payment on his counter. "Customers always right, and we

deserve a discount if we're gonna buy in bulk. Don't have to worry about storage now do ya?" The driver gave a toothy grin and moved onto the next stall. The Farmer heard them giving the same spiel to Perry and Allison.

The sun began to set, and everyone began packing things up. James walked over to the Farmer.

"We can do it. I floated the idea to Allison and Perry. They both said if you go they will. They said they're having troubles with their produce, and also just plain don't like those traders. Just wanna leave the option open" James patted him on the back and left the Farmer for his long trip back home.

When the Farmer got home, he greeted his family, his kids seemed more reserved than normal but he thought nothing of it. He tucked them into bed, and laid in bed with his wife. He couldn't help but mull over the idea of taking what was in that caravan. He had storage for whatever could be in there. Worst case scenario, he could always clear out a small area in his field to help obscure the treasure from any passersby, not that any would come this far out of their way anyway.

"It's finally done," The Farmer walked back inside his home to his wife. Sweat was dripping from his brow, his shirt and pants were stained with dirt. His two kids walked in behind him in much the same state.

"How much is left?" His wife just finished making dinner and placed it on the table for the Farmer and their two boys.

"A tenth. I sold everything we had stocked up a few weeks ago. It doesn't look good Julia." The Farmer slumped at the dining room table. He appeared absolutely defeated, slumped over he gazed towards a bottle of whiskey on the counter.

"We'll get through this. We always do. A tenth is about what we started with anyway. We'll just go ask James for some meats, Perry may be able to spare some produce, and my friend Michael could

help us out with money for a little until we get a fresh crop growing. But we will make it through this, I promise,” She kissed his dirty forehead, leaving a lip shaped mark in its wake.

“No,” The Farmer grumbled.

“No? What do you mean no?” Julia retorted

“No, I’ll figure something out. I’ll work for others, the boys will tend the crops in my stead.” The Farmer started poking at the food in front of him. “Shouldn’t be that hard now that there’s a fraction of what we once had.”

“Come on now there’s no shame in asking for help...”

“It’s not that I’m shameful” The Farmer interjected with a bold-faced lie. “We can’t rely on others when we’re left wanting. How do you think that makes us look?”

“Well if you think you can work through this without help that’s fine,” Julia made no effort to hide her annoyance at her husbands bull-headedness. “When you’re ready to accept help let me know, and I’ll make the rounds,”

He sat and finished his dinner. His boys watched as he solemnly ate. They whispered amongst themselves what he could be thinking about later that night. What would cause their father to sit and stew on something all night that he wouldn’t play with his boys?

“Allison and Perry are just inside. I’m really glad you decided to run with this.” James showed the Farmer inside the barn.

Allison and Perry were both looking over the hodgepodge of items arrayed on a table in the center of the barn. Cows flanked the table in their pens, the whole place stank of shit. The Farmer smiled at the two and sat down at the table.

“Well thank you all for coming,” James stood at the head of the table and addressed the three of them. “I’m not much of a planner, quite frankly that’s why we needed you to move forward,” James motioned towards the Farmer. “So don’t think of me as the leader of this. We’re in this together, and we’ll get out of it together. As for the items,” A flourish of his hands spread as if to reveal something hidden on the table. “Pitchforks, bows arrow, sledgehammers, and bandanas as requested. Now please enlighten me as to how this is going to work?”

“The fuck we have bows for? We’re bloody farmers not hunters,” Allison broke her silence. “You ever shot a bow before Per?”

Perry shook his head.

“It’s not about being able to shoot them, its about the threat of the arrow going through them,” The Farmer responded as he stood up. “Here’s how this whole thing is gonna go,”

The Farmer obscured himself in the weeds. The yellow bandana obscured his face from the eyes down. Across from him he could barely make out a similar bandana that belonged to James. A little further down the road They were lying in wait for the usual caravan to come cruising through. The Farmer looked down at the sledgehammer in hand, and the three-pronged pitchfork lying down in the weeds next to him. He could do this, the other option was for him and his family to starve. The way he saw it there was no real choice.

He heard the rattling of the carts wheels heading down the Gold Road. He steadied himself and looked across the road towards James. They both nodded.

As the caravan rolled along, both James and the Farmer leapt up from their hiding spots, and swung the hammers as hard as they could into the back wheels. The driver and navigator were both shouting words at them, but the adrenaline pumping between the men caused the words to sound

jumbled. The hammers connected with the wheels as a loud crack rang throughout the area. The wheels erupted into splinters as the sledgehammer made light work of the spokes. Even the back axel began to show cracks. The back of the caravan hit the ground with a thud. Some metals and bundled wood spilled out the back. The horses were spooked and tried to run off at the crack. They were able to drag the cart a little further down before ultimately the weight of the caravan dug in and slowed to a halt. James and the Farmer hurried back to the weeds to grab their pitchforks.

Further up the road Perry and Allison jumped out with bows drawn and trained on the driver.

“Shut those horses up or we’ll fill them full of arrows!” Perry shouted towards the caravan.

“Hey now we’re just merchants we don’t want any trouble,” The driver put his hands up.

“Then shut the fucking horses up if you don’t want any trouble,” Allison pulled back the drawstring at her bow. Everyone except the merchants knew that if she loosed it the arrow would stick in the ground, or go flying far off its mark.

“OK, ok. Calm down there girls its ok,” The merchant started patting the horses to try and calm them down. “Your alright calm down,”

James and the Farmer returned with pitchforks in hand.

“Do you have saddles for the horses?” The Farmer pointed his pitchfork towards the navigator.

“Of course, b-but they’re in the back,” The navigator stammered.

The Farmer motioned his pitchfork towards the back of the caravan to tell the navigator to retrieve them. The man did as was commanded, and began to saddle the horses. Perry and Allison lowered their weapons and ran around to the back of the caravan, inspecting their current haul.

“Get yourselves to Storm’s Hope, and don’t say a word about this.” James commanded as he untied the horses. “If you do, there will be more trouble I can promise you that,” He gave the horses a slap, and the two men were off.

“You don’t really think they’re gonna listen to you do you? We just robbed them blind James,” The Farmer turned to his friend after the horses disappeared from sight.

“Of course not, but I sounded cool didn’t I?” James flashed a smile as the pair met with Perry and Allison.

The four stood awestruck for a moment at what they beheld. Wood from the Boglands, sturdier than and more long lived than any other tree can possibly produce. Silver, iron, coal, and gold from the mines of Storm’s Hope, cases upon cases of hard material. Sacks with coin overflowing from them. Even a few well crafted tools for metal working amongst the trove.

The party began to holler and hug each other with excitement. They quickly started unloading what they could, and began dragging it off into the weeds. Carts from James’s farm were waiting to help carry the goods to and from one caravan, to the Farmer’s wagon.

The Farmers hands were numb. He couldn’t believe what he had just done. He’s now set for life as long as no one comes looking at his stead. Something that was bothering him a little bit was that those men they sent off scared had done nothing wrong. He knew deep down that he had done an awful thing, but it was either they get a little minor hiccup with their supply lines, or The Farmer and his family starve. Some part of him still couldn’t help but feel bad for what they had done.

“Alright now get this up north with you, we wait for some law types to come around asking questions, then we can distribute the score evenly between us,” James snapped the Farmer out of his own thoughts and brought him back to reality.

"Of course," The Farmer responded. "Perry, Allison, help James get the rest of that junk off the road. And don't say a word to anyone about what we have. The last thing I need is another turn of bad luck and have someone rat us out" The words just started to spill out without him trying. He heard the words and couldn't believe what he was saying. He sounded like some sort of criminal. "I'm taking this haul back to mine. Come by when you're ready to collect and remember," He looked into each of their eyes. "Don't tell a bloody soul what we did here today," The Farmer whipped the horses to head up the trail leading north back to his stead.

The wagon bounced behind the Farmer with the loot inside. A grin spread across his face that he couldn't hide. The high that he felt while robbing the caravan was one unlike any other. On his return trip he reflected on everything that happened. He was elated, and never felt more alive. How would he explain this to Julia? Has she ever done something she knew she shouldn't do? He knew he only had a few hours to figure out what to tell her, and how he would explain their newfound riches. He didn't think that a lie would work with her.

"What's got you all smiley up there?" Julia called from the porch to her husband.

"I've got a surprise, and don't be alarmed. I'll explain everything," The Farmer stopped his horses and jumped down. "James got me for a job."

"Oh lord not James. Is this another hair brained scheme of his to get rich? What's in the wagon what did he con you into buying?" Julia walked around to the back of the wagon and opened the doors. She stood awestruck.

"We robbed one of the caravans that goes up and down the Gold Road,"

The two stood there, taking in all of their newfound riches. And it was theirs, The Farmers shared all of his wealth as well as his debts with Julia. She had been there with him through thick and thin.

“Did you enjoy it?” Julia broke the silence

“I did it for our family. We’re in dire straights and I acted out of necessity, not out of greed, or want to commit crimes,” The Farmer spoke around the question, refusing to give her the straight answer which was a resounding yes.

“Well. Looks like we have some stuff we can store away for later. Who else helped besides James? We need to take care of them so they don’t turn us in.” She was speaking very matter of factly. When she was frustrated, Julia began to take things in and categorize them, making sure each thing was handled individually and with care so she didn’t have to do them twice.

“Perry and Allison. Fruits and veggies are on their way out apparently.”

“Is this a regular thing? Do you need patching up?” Julia began lifting his shirt to inspect him for wounds.

“No guards, so no wounds. We were pretty quick I’m gonna be honest. Almost professional,” The Farmer couldn’t help but smirk.

“I know that’s not pride I hear in your voice. This is a one time thing, no more. Hurry up and get this to the barn, I’ll send the boys out to help you unload.” She pushed him back to the drivers seat of the wagon and hurried into the house to get their boys.

The Farmer and his boys unloaded all the metals and woods and coins into the barn. They were hauling well into the night when a knock came from the entrance.

“Boys, inside.” Julia stood with authority at the entrance. The boys ran by her and up to the house. “the other thieves are here.”

James, Perry, and Allison walked into the barn with the Farmer.

“We got the wagon off the road, junked it up a little bit too for a little bit of dramatic effect.” Perry spoke excitedly.

“Did some target practice on it too. We’re becoming crackshots aint we Per?” Allison laughed and nudged Perry.

The group of them shared a chuckle. Julia stared daggers from the barn door. She turned and left them to it.

“As to the shares.” The Farmer spoke up. “Coins are divided evenly into crates, you each get one. I’m keeping the raw materials for building.”

“Fuck you gonna be building that needs all this?” Perry protested.

“A kiln, a shed, I don’t know Perry what would you do? Smelt it down with your forge at your produce farm?” The Farmer quipped. “It’ll be for community use I assure you. Also moving the rest of this would be a pain in the ass for us,”

Perry blushed at the remark. The rest nodded in agreement.

“Market’s a week from now.” James finally said something. “I’ll let you know then if they come questioning me. Also quick thing. “ James approached the Farmer and whispered to him. “Sorry for getting you in trouble with Julia. She gave me a talking to once I entered your property,”

“Think nothing of it James. It was a one time thing after all.”

The next week was hell for the Farmer. He couldn't get over his jubilation from the robbery. Everything felt mundane, boring, sluggish, useless, fruitless. He tried tilling the soil and preparing the grains again. Take his mind off it. Every pierce of the shovel into dirt he imagined a crowbar to a crate instead. It was eating at him. Gnawing until he would give in. When the time for market came around, he had nothing to bring. Not for lack of trying, but grains can only grow in so fast. The Farmer decided on something that week. He told Julia his plans. The saint that she was, she would be with the Farmer through this as well. He grabbed a bandana, a sledgehammer, and his horse, and headed for market at the crack of dawn.

Once more the wide and open Gold Road came into view for the Farmer. He tied his bandana tightly around his face, once more obscuring him from the eyes down. The market was open, and trade was slow. A few customers here and there. But the backdrop was ominous. The caravan from last week was in plain view on the side of the road, knocked onto its side with the broken underbelly exposed. Perry and Allison turned the caravan into a pin cushion with their target practice. Arrows protruded from all points of the carriage.

"Cost of doing business went up, so we need to pay less. We got fucking robbed by one of you so don't give me a sob story about how you 'cant afford to part with your precious fucking food at twenty five percent'. You're lucky the law didn't find anything or you'd be locked up!" The shrill voice of the trader permeated the air as he was "negotiating" with the other farmers.

"Twenty five percent is robbery for the quality meat I provide for not only Storm's Hope, but to the Boglands as well. Don't blame your shit luck on me your twat" James spat back at the trader.

The Farmer pulled his horse directly behind the trader and made his presence known. James looked up at him and saw the bandana and hammer and knew immediately what the intentions of his old friend were.

“We’ve fed the cities for decades,” the Farmer spoke. “and you have the audacity to say we owe you more for fair wages?”

The trader turned around and pointed up at the Farmer.

“Someone arrest this man now! He’s the one who stole our stuff! I can tell by that ugly piss soaked bandana,” The trader was yelling at everyone around him. No one made a move.

“We’ve sown the seeds that allowed the cities to start,” The Farmer hopped off his horse, sledgehammer in hand and moved towards the caravan. “And we reaped the ability to continue our way of living” He struck the back wheel, knocking it off the axel. “We sowed the seeds that allowed the cities to flourish” He disappeared behind the caravan. “And we reaped decreased plots of land, and continued to assist the cities,” a thud came as the other back wheel was knocked off the axel. He spoke from behind the caravan, and reappeared climbing on top of the roof. “And now you come, and try to sow seeds of poverty into our soil? No.” the Farmer raised the hammer above his head. “We will continue to reap from the previous seeds we’ve sown.” He brought the hammer down onto the backdoor of the caravan. The doors ruptured open revealing the trove inside. “This is the Frontier. And I am Marshall. Your caravans are the first and second tribute to this new sovereign land. If you wish to arrest me, find me in my stead to the far north. But you will receive no more hospitality throughout your travels here.”