

1. Departure

The Lydia, a domesticated species, is much like the foxes that rule the land. We are quadrupeds, much larger, heavier, and more powerful than the foxes. Our shoulders and tails are almost horizontal when we stand up straight and the curve between them is about the height of an adult fox's shoulders when he stands up tall.

Lydia do not walk upright or wear clothes like the foxes. Instead, they can pull heavy objects and run very fast on all four legs, even with a fox on board. They also eat many times more food than the Kitsune. They do not like or dislike anything., they will eat anything, except for the foxes, of course.

The Lydia's natural enemy is a large dragon species called Windia. When the Kitsune call them dragons, they are referring to these large beasts that attack from the sky. But dangerous dragons have been hunted by the Kitsune and there are not many of them left. More importantly, wild dragons rarely come to a town full of Kitsune. Even if they did, Lydia has the ability to run away and even has horns, albeit short ones.

Well, we are tied up rather often and our horns grow backwards.....

Even if a dragon were to come near us, I am sure someone would protect us. To the foxes, we are their partners, and we are valuable labor and fresh meat that they can get anytime.....

Let's not think about that now.....

So, I am a grey short-haired male Lydia, a cavalry beast kept by the Kitsune tribe, and my name is Risty. Mia gave me this cute name.

Lydia do not speak the same language as the Foxes, and I can barely understand their language. But there are exceptions to everything, it seems, and one of the Lydia's is very smart and understands the language of the Foxes. I guess you could say that I'm smart, but I'm not, and in Lydia's opinion, that's a big deal. And I am the exception. I can actually speak a little bit of the Kitsune language. "Good morning, thank you," and all that. "I'll do my best, please don't turn me into meat," I'm secretly practicing.

Even though I know the words, I live my life pretending to be a normal Lydia. I never speak the language in front of the hunters. But when I'm working, I'm gagged, so it's never possible in the first place.

Oh, a gag is an animal implement made of leather or iron that we bite on with our mouths. It is used to give instructions to the ride. When we put on the gag, we also put on a leather harness called a head harness, which is called a head harness because it is made up of several leather straps that are tied around the animal's head. Once attached, the headgear does not come off or even shift, even if you shake your head or roll around on the ground. It's a very strange and slightly constricting tool that was made to fit the shape of our heads.

Anyway, as usual, I pretend to be a normal, very loyal and very observant Lydia. I'm actually quite uncomfortable being gagged, but I make an effort to not even flinch when they put it on, and I even try to bite the gag myself.

When I'm good, the hunters look at me with kind eyes and praise me with lots of strokes on my cheeks. Of course, this doesn't make my gear any lighter. On the contrary, I'm sometimes given extra cramped gear or a little extra luggage because I'm the most patient of the bunch.

If my hard work makes things easier for the other Lydians, I'm happy with that.

The early morning breeze brought the smell of trees, bedstraw, and breakfast. The sun has not even gone up yet, but the slightly humid and warm breeze is telling me that today is going to be hot.

But still, there were more voices and footsteps flying around this morning than usual. To be honest, it was so noisy that I woke up earlier than usual.

I work for the first-rate hunter clan "Golden Leaves". My role is, of course, as a carrier. I carry cargo and hunters.

The hunters are merciless when it comes to their prey, but they take very good care of us, the Lydians. They groom us every morning when they are not hunting, the rooms are clean, and they provide us with plenty of dry bedstraw to make us feel comfortable. The water is fresh and we get a full meal.

Today's breakfast was cooked rice with lots of chopped beans sprinkled on top. It was a little bland for me, but the freshly made rice, with plenty of fresh ingredients was warm, fluffy and tasted wonderful. The Kitsune don't seem to like rice very much, but I often think it's a shame that they don't eat something so tasty and filling. I wonder if they don't like it sticking to their fur when they eat it.

A normal Lydia would not be paying much attention to others while eating her meal. But I'm a bit of a strange Lydian, so I spend most of my time observing the foxes while I eat.

One of the hunters, Mia, has been carrying heavy-looking beast gear for a while now. Mia is a young female fox and she doesn't seem to have much experience in hunting. Her limbs are thin and her strength is low, so she is often assigned to chores to help her build her body. Mia is wearing an unfamiliar outfit today. She is wearing a short red cape tied in an unfamiliar way, but I'm worried that she might snag it somewhere and choke herself. On Mia's chest is a brand-new piece of light armor made of leather and metal. It's a very hunter-like outfit, but it looks so warm that I wish she would take it off now. I wonder if this is some kind of training for Mia.

Mia is carrying a sturdy harness made of leather and metal. The harness is an animal gear that we wear on our bodies and is made of many leather straps, metal fittings, and leather cushions. It is used to pull a cart or wagon, but it is also used to force us to keep our heads up or, conversely, to prevent us from lifting our heads.

The harnesses are heavy for the foxes, so they are divided into several sections for easy transport. They are then joined together around our bodies, and we put them on as if we were assembling them into a single piece of equipment.

Just by looking at the beast equipment that Mia brings in, I know what my job is for the day. Placed in front of me are a familiar neck ring and saddle, along with a frame that is designed to distribute the weight of a load. If that is the case, I'd have guessed that today's job would be to carry the luggage. However, there is a large, unfamiliar cushion-like object made of leather with indentations strapped to the frame.

Come to think of it, my saddle has a number of fittings that I've never used before, but which sometimes clap against the saddle as I walk to assert their presence.

Mia wiped the sweat from her forehead with her arm. She has already carried five of the sturdy harnesses, which even I, a big guy, would feel the weight of. It was a lot of hard work to do so early in the morning, still, Mia's round eyes sparkled with curiosity, and it was clear that she was enjoying her work.

Mia moved back and forth, placing one piece after another in front of Boku's cell and then moving on to the other cells.

Apparently, the Lydia who had been fed earlier had finished eating. I poked my head out to check on them and saw that Mia was in the process of putting a harness on the others. The familiar sound of metal fittings being tightened reverberated through the air of the stall. The carry harnesses have so many metal fittings and are so intricately made that it seems to be very difficult to put them on and take them off, it would probably be easier if we could put them on and take them off by ourselves.

I had just finished eating my rice and was licking off the remaining grains when it was my turn for the harness.

"Hey Risty, I hope you're doing good today too!"

Mia always enters my cell with an angelic smile and a friendly air. So, even though what she holds in her hands constricts our bodies, restricts our movements, and turns us into tools, I'm willing to put up with it for Mia's sake.

Mia lifts up a large neck ring. It's a very heavy and sturdy one, used to pull a chariot or something like that. Mia is lifting it high so that I can easily put my head through it. As usual, I go through the neck ring. As the large ring flows through my vision, it feels like a ritual of commitment. Let us do our best today too.

When the ring laid down on my chest, I felt a little weight. Mia works quietly as she places the saddle on my back, light as if it were made of wind. Before I knew it, the saddle was on my back as I tilted my head to align the neck ring.

Mia quickly slides between my body and the wall as she attaches the saddle to my body. Every time I heard the sound of the clamps, a strap around my body would tighten.

While I was concentrating on staying still, a leather strap was placed over a different part of my body than usual. I felt tight around the waist and uncomfortable. I wondered if there was such a thing as a belt for the rear thighs.

The harness this time seemed to be a little different from the usual ones. There were more straps around my waist, and it felt like my whole body was being held in place. To be honest, it was hard to move. What am I going to do with it?

After Mia finished putting the harness on my body, she brought me a headband. The work would be a lot easier if I didn't have this tool, but Lydia usually use a gag to receive instructions, so I've been following their lead. It's not always easy being a carrier.

Mia didn't put the headgear on me, but went to put on the others harnesses first. She was trying to make sure that we spent as little time gagged as possible. I always loved that about her.

After a while, Mia put gags on all the Lydia she would be using today. The Lydia with complete gear were taken out by the hunters in turn as Mia returns to my cell.

Mia entered through the half-open door and picked up the mouth piece.

She said, "I'm sorry," in a gentle tone of voice.

I could tell that her words were sincere and heartfelt. But I also sense in them the sternness of a master, the domineering strength of someone who tells you that resistance is futile and that you have no choice but to obey them.

The iron gag is clean and shiny. Mia always cleans them after use.

I gently open my mouth and take the cool metal in my mouth. Then, I work it with my tongue to the back of my mouth where it would not hit my fangs. When I touched the gag with my tongue, I heard a chattering sound. The gag is an iron rod with a loop at both ends, and there is a joint in the middle where the gag is placed in the mouth that moves freely. This gag is actually a much better type of gag. The leather ones smell bad right away, the ones with prongs to hold the tongue are quite uncomfortable, and before I came here, I remember how painful a gag with many thorns was. I had scars all around my mouth then, and I was so sore for days that I didn't even want to drink water.

Some hunters came into the animal pen. They must have come to help Mia. They seemed to be gagging the other carriers, and I could hear them scolding Lydia and the sound of the gag clanging up here and there.

I left the cell with Mia, firmly dressed from head to base of the tail as a carrier. The feeling of my head and body being hugged by the Harness was both uncomfortable and reassuring, like I was being protected. And while I'm wearing it, I'm definitely protected.

Mia holds my reins firmly just below the gag and leads me along. I walk carefully, matching Mia's stride. This is my favorite moment. Mia looks only at me and speaks softly to me. I'm always nervous that I might kick Mia or smear her with drool from the edge of my gag as I walk.

Come to think of it, I wonder who will hold my reins this time. If possible, I would be very happy if Mia would take the reins.

All the Lydia were pulled out of the stall and gathered in front of a large warehouse. There are hunters and Lydia that I don't know. There are a great number of people here. Including me, there are 14 in all, 6 of which are equipped for riding, so I guess that means the rest of us (8 of us) have to carry the load.

To be honest, it's easier for me to be with the loaders because I don't have to concentrate so much on the instructions, but I'd rather with the riders because they are often required to be more competent than the loaders. Although the saddle part is small. the harnesses for carrying loads, have a lot of belts, which is especially hot and suffocating at this time of the year.

And to be honest, the other hunters scare me a little. They often hit us and use spurs. The spur is very painful and can cause wounds. Mia also wears a spur, but when she uses it, she only puts it on gently. Even a slight touch is enough for me to know what Mia wants. No, I'm sure any Lydia can tell at a glance what Mia wants. After all, Mia is the most skilled cavalryman in this clan of hunters.

After that, we were tied together in a line with an empty load. Then we all moved together. Of course, we all got along. It was a bit like taking a walk, since we were all load free.

After half a day's walk, we arrived at a hut near the forest. It has a familiar symbol painted on it. It is quite far from the hideout, but I guess this is also the property of the hunters.

While I was thinking, the tools of today's work were assembled in front of me. It consisted of a wooden arch reminiscent of a hanging platform and a bar with branches sticking out on either side of the arch to hold it up. The wooden frame is supported by eight wooden platforms to prevent it from falling over.

There are fittings to connect the Lydia to the branches attached on either side, so it looks like we are supposed to transport the arch vertically.

Oh, but this arch has a metal collar on a chain, which looks like it would be a good place to hang some creature. Judging from its size, it's not for a Lydia, is it? There are also thick chains, iron rings, and sturdy-looking ropes here and there.

As I anxiously observed the arch, I heard the hunters talking about dragons.

I see. A dragon would fit under this arch. If this is a wooden frame to tie the dragon to so that it cannot escape, then this chain would be in the right place.

I have never carried a dragon before, so this is my first experience. I'm a little excited, but I'm more worried. I hope the dragon doesn't kill me.

The eight of us were put in our respective positions. They were all wearing harnesses of similar construction to mine, though the shape of the gear was slightly different with each one.

First, Hunter ordered us to get down. Next, he told us to move sideways. It was a bit of an odd move, but we are Lydia of the Hunter clan, so we are trained to do all sorts of odd moves.

I managed to slide my body under the horizontal bar of the wooden frame. I and the Lydia to my left were first connected to the crate. Since my front and back were tied to the crate, my body stayed right under the horizontal bar. By the way, my neighbor today is a prairie girl with a long mane.

The other Lydia were tied to the wooden frame one after another, and when all eight were in place, the hunters slowly ordered them to stand up. Just before I was completely on my feet, I felt the weight of the crate on my back. It was quite heavy, but once everyone's strength kicked in, it felt much lighter than my usual load.

The hunters quickly fastened the horizontal bars of the crate to our saddle. As soon as they tightened the mysterious metal fittings, the horizontal bars of the crate sat firmly in place, as if they were part of our backs.

When the ground support was removed, the crate wobbled a little. I was worried that it might topple over, but the unusual harness we were now wearing came to the rescue. When the crate tilted, the opposite side of the harness seemed to be designed to help the crate tilt back by allowing the weight to rest on my waist.

We carried the crate for a while. The space between the two Lydia was much wider than in the two-pull cart. Thanks to this, there is good ventilation, and for the time being, it is more comfortable than usual in that respect. However, the harnesses are tightly fastened to our bodies, and the harnesses are also tightly connected to the crates, so it was a little difficult to walk until I got used to it.

When the eight of us were beginning to get our feet in sync with each other, we were told to stop after a while in the forest.

There it was, just beyond a large bush.

Among the countless ropes and chains, I could see its pure white fur and hair like the night sky under a full moon. A pair of large wings sprouted from its back, dark-colored wing membranes. Two stone-colored horns, facing backward, each with two halves, one large and one small. And legs similar to ours but much more powerful, and hands similar to those of the fox tribe. A dragon.

The dragon was tightly bound, with metal fetters and chains on its limbs, harnesses on its body, and ropes and chains extending from front to back and left to right, connecting it to the trees. I have only known dragons as predators that attacked from the sky and snapped Lydia's neck with a single kick. This dragon seems to be unable to move at all, but how in the world did it catch such a fearsome creature?

The other Lydians were naturally excited to see the dragon. It was the first time I had seen a dragon up close since I was still a child, living in the meadow. The metal fittings on my body turned the trembling of my heart into sound.

We moved forward and placed a crate directly above the dragon. The crate, like an executioner's table, was positioned over the dragon.

Although we were tied to the crate and could not sit with it, we lowered our posture as instructed by the hunter. It felt as if we were hanging from the crate. While the hunters tied the dragon to the crate, we held down the crate like a living weight.

A rope was attached to the crate, the rope was pulled to lift the dragon up, and the dragon's upper body was raised. The dragon let out a few small roars and began to thrash about furiously. Seeing the many chains attached to the wooden frame, the dragon must have immediately understood that if it was tied to these chains, it would be finished. However, the dragon, pulled from three directions by ropes from both sides and above, was as helpless as an insect caught in a spider's web. Twisting its body, its fur rippling as it tried to somehow grasp a chance to its freedom, it formed a powerful muscular image typical of a wild animal.

In the face of the dragon's desperate resistance, a collar extending from a wooden frame was fitted around its neck, and a chain was also attached to the back of the leather harness.