

Longevity 116

Chapter 116: Annual Salary Arrives at Sha Village! The Anticipation of Zhao Ying and Her Mother!

After Chen Fen swept his gaze over the bamboo slips one last time, the reading of the roster for the Annual Salary distribution was complete.

"The Annual Salaries for all surviving and uninjured Sharp Warriors from Sha Village have been fully distributed," Chen Fen announced loudly, closing the bamboo slips.

As soon as he finished speaking, the dozen or so households in the village that had not yet received their Annual Salary descended into panic.

"My son's name wasn't called! Could something have happened to him on the battlefield?"

"No, that can't be. My son has only been enlisted for two years. Nothing could have happened to him, he's only seventeen."

"No, he must be fine."

"Sir, my son, Wu Lin, is he really not on the list to receive the Annual Salary?"

"Sir..."

Everyone who had not received their payment was distraught, including Zhao Ying. She had been on edge the entire time, but now, her heart leaped into her throat, and her face turned pale.

"Silence! Everyone be silent!" Wu Lizheng shouted, seeing the scene spiraling out of control. He walked over to Chen Fen and asked, "Sir, does this mean that those whose names haven't been called have all...?"

He didn't need to finish his question; the implication was already clear.

"The Annual Salaries for all surviving Sharp Warriors and soldiers have been distributed," Chen Fen explained to Wu Lizheng. "Those not yet announced are the soldiers who were disabled or killed in action for the country."

Wu Lizheng nodded. He then turned to the villagers who had started crying and said in a gentle, comforting tone, "It's all right. Let the official finish reading the rosters. Nothing is certain yet."

With Wu Lizheng's reassurance, the crowd settled down slightly. However, the joyful atmosphere that had filled the village entrance moments before completely vanished. Everyone fell silent. Even the families who had already received their salary were not so heartless as to laugh at such a moment; they all lived in the same village, after all.

"Now, I will announce the list of those disabled in service to the country."

Chen Fen took another set of bamboo slips from a soldier behind him.

"From Shaqiu County's Sha Village, there are a total of seven disabled Sharp Warriors. By the grace of the Great King, they will receive double the Annual Salary for their rank and office, and a suitable post will be arranged for them in their hometown. By Royal Edict, the Great Qin will never forget any Sharp Warrior who has served the country."

"Wu Er: Rank 2, Office of Shizhang. For his rank, an Annual Salary of one hundred stones. For his office, a monthly salary of three stones, totaling thirty-six stones per year. By the Great King's grace, this compensation is doubled, for a total received Annual Salary of two hundred and seventy-two stones," Chen Fen read aloud.

As his voice faded, Wu Er's family stepped forward with tears in their eyes. Though they had previously feared their son was dead, they now felt a wave of relief. Being disabled was better than not coming home at all. At least he was alive.

"May I ask, sir," Wu Er's mother inquired anxiously, "my son is disabled. When will he be able to return home?"

"The Shaofu arranges the return of disabled Sharp Warriors to their hometowns. It should be within this month," Chen Fen replied.

"Thank you, sir," Wu Er's mother said gratefully, stepping aside with the money.

The other families who had not yet been called grew even more tense. If their sons could return home, even with injuries, it would be a blessing. To come home alive was the greatest blessing of all.

Big brother, you must come back,

Zhao Ying clasped her hands tightly, her heart pounding with dread. Even if you're disabled, you have to come back. If you don't return, Mom really won't be able to hold on, and neither will I. You promised to take good care of me and Mom, and to personally see me married off. You can't break your word.

At this moment, she was just like the other villagers waiting for news of their sons. She would rather hear that her brother was returning home disabled than hear that he had fallen in battle.

"Cao San: Rank 3, Office of Commander of a Hundred..."

Chen Fen continued reading. In the blink of an eye, the names of the remaining six disabled Sharp Warriors due for discharge had all been called. This brought a wave of relief to those six military families.

Could my brother really be...

Zhao Ying panicked completely, her legs threatening to give out from under her.

"Ying, dear, it's all right." An auntie nearby rushed forward to support her, her voice full of concern. The other women who had already collected their salary also gathered around, afraid Zhao Ying would collapse.

From the looks of it, Zhao Ying's brother had indeed been killed in action. His name was not on the list for the Annual Salary, nor was it on the list for the disabled.

Besides Zhao Ying, four other families were in the same situation. Unable to bear the reality, they slumped to the ground, wailing loudly. Other villagers naturally came forward to offer comfort, but it was futile.

Seeing this, Wu Lizheng could only sigh helplessly. Zhao Feng... alas, what is his mother to do now? She went through so much to raise the two of them. How could he have been killed in action?

In Wu Lizheng's mind, there was no other explanation. Zhao Feng must have perished.

Even Chen Fen, the official distributing the salaries, had a look of helplessness in his eyes. This Sha Village isn't the first village I've visited to distribute the Annual Salary. Before coming here, I had already been to several others and naturally encountered such scenes. Such sorrow... how could anyone with parents not feel it?

But as the official in charge, Chen Fen had to fulfill his duty.

"I will now announce the list of the fallen," he declared.

He picked up the final roster. By now, the few remaining families had lost all hope.

The list of the fallen... it must be for our families whose names haven't been called. They were all slumped on the ground, utterly powerless before a fate they could not change.

"Wu Ke of Shaqiu County's Sha Village: Rank 1. Annual Salary of fifty stones. By the Great King's magnificent grace, this is tripled, for a total awarded Annual Salary of one hundred and fifty stones. Furthermore, the local Government Office will provide for his family."

As the words fell, a piercing wail tore through the air.

"AH... AHH..."

"My son..."

"How could you die?"

"My child..."

Faced with this raw grief, Chen Fen could only continue reading, "From Shaqiu County..."

With every name called, another household would erupt in heart-wrenching sobs. The agony of losing a son, the torment of losing a grandson—it was a pain that cut to the very bone. The scene was harrowing, but in this chaotic era of rival states, it was merely a microcosm of the times. Wars were incessant, and the calamities of battle were everywhere. As long as humanity existed, war would never cease. Even if the world were unified into a single nation, conflicts of interest would ensure that the bloodshed never truly stopped.

This is human nature.

But as Chen Fen finished reading from the last roster, he announced loudly, "All the names on the list of the fallen have been read."

Six Sharp Warriors had fallen, and six families in Sha Village were wailing endlessly. But Zhao Ying, who was still slumped on the ground with tears streaking down her face, looked up in utter astonishment. The villagers around her were just as baffled, their gazes shifting from Chen Fen back to Zhao Ying.

Under their confused stares, Zhao Ying suppressed her heartache as a new glimmer of hope ignited within her. She slowly walked forward, looked at Chen Fen, and asked, "Sir... why wasn't my brother's name on any of the lists?"