

Longevity 120

Chapter 120: Zhao Ying: My Brother Became a General? (Part 4)

Authority brings many changes. Originally, Chen Fen's attitude toward Wu Lizheng was lukewarm, but now there was a fawning undertone to his demeanor. After all, Wu Lizheng was the most respected elder in the village and also the Village Chief. Furthermore, based on Zhao Ying's attitude toward him—treating him like a grandfather—this likely extended to the legendary General Zhao as well. Offending Wu Lizheng would mean offending the future General Zhao, a man with limitless potential. Chen Fen was not that foolish.

"The Great King has personally issued a Royal Edict for Mr. Zhao," Wu Lizheng said, his astonishment growing.

"Miss," Chen Fen began, turning to Zhao Ying. "Please take this register of your brother's Annual Salary and military achievements. With this year's disbursement complete, I am not authorized to deliver General Zhao's Annual Salary. Upon my return to the Prefectural City, the Prefectural Governor himself will come to disburse General Zhao's Annual Salary. He will also deliver the deed for the thousand mu of fertile land granted with his title."

Very respectfully, Chen Fen offered the register to Zhao Ying with both hands.

Zhao Ying glanced at Wu Lizheng. At his nod, she stepped forward and accepted her brother's register of military achievements, also with both hands.

"Fellow villagers," Chen Fen raised his head and called out to the crowd at the village entrance. "All Annual Salaries and pensions for Sha Village have now been distributed. If there are any objections, please speak now. If not, I will proceed to the next village to continue the disbursements."

As his voice fell, the villagers who had received their salaries all shook their heads, indicating no objections. They had already counted everything.

"In that case, Wu Lizheng, I will take my leave," Chen Fen said, clasping his hands in a salute.

"Farewell, sir," Wu Lizheng replied, quickly returning the gesture.

"Miss Zhao," Chen Fen added, turning back to her with great respect. "After I return to the Prefectural City, I will immediately report to the Prefectural Governor. Within the next two days, he will surely come in person to deliver General Zhao's Annual Salary." The fawning tone of his words was unmistakable.

"Thank you for your trouble," Zhao Ying replied immediately.

Seeing this, Chen Fen smiled with satisfaction, then swung himself onto his horse and led his troops away. The five hundred Prefecture Soldiers escorted the salary wagons, gradually disappearing from sight.

Once they were completely gone, every villager's gaze turned to Zhao Ying, whether they were old friends or mere acquaintances. Now, all their eyes held an air of sycophancy.

"Zhao family lass, congratulations to you!"

"Your brother is a general! Your family's fortunes have turned."

"I heard that Left Shuzhang is a truly high noble title, hereditary, and comes with a thousand mu of fertile land! Miss Zhao, my husband passed away early, and I only have a single mu of land I tilled myself. Could you lease a few mu to your aunt at a lower rent?"

"Miss Zhao, my family is in the same boat! Seven mouths to feed with just two mu of land. Could you rent a few mu for my family to cultivate?"

...

At that moment, a crowd of villagers swarmed around her, their ingratiating voices overlapping as they all spoke at once. Many of them had a single goal: they wanted land to farm. After all, not everyone in the village held a title, nor did everyone have land. To get land to farm, one either needed a son with a title or had to rent surplus land by paying a share of the crop.

Since ancient times, the fundamental reason for the rise and fall of dynasties has been the consolidation of land. Why was the national power of Qin so formidable now? It was because Shang Yang's reforms had effectively carved up the wealth of the nobles and distributed it to the Sharp Warriors who had earned titles through military merit. In the Various Countries, land consolidation had reached its peak, and commoners who wanted to farm had to pay exorbitant rents to the nobility—this is a cycle of reincarnation.

Faced with the villagers' intense fervor, with everyone clamoring for a piece of her family's new land for their own reasons, Zhao Ying was completely flustered. She had never encountered a situation like this before.

Just then, Wu Lizheng strode over and bellowed, "Disperse, all of you!"

As a village elder and the Village Chief, he naturally commanded some authority. At his rebuke, the chattering villagers surrounding Zhao Ying scattered.

Wu Lizheng walked to Zhao Ying's side, then swept his gaze over the villagers with great dissatisfaction. "We are all from the same village! What is the meaning of this? You all know the Zhao family's situation. Zhao Feng and his sister are still young, and their mother is frail. Now that Zhao Feng has finally made something of himself, you're all here demanding this and that. By what right?"

"I'm telling you, Zhao Feng earned his generalship with his life, and he deserves it! His thousand mu of fertile land belong to him. If he chooses to lease it to you at a low rent, that would be his benevolence. If he doesn't, that is also his right!"

"How many people in this village has the Zhao family helped over the years? Without the medical skills of Zhao Ying and her mother, who knows how many of us would have died or suffered from illness. You all know how low their medical fees are—probably not even one-twentieth of what you'd pay a doctor in the county seat. And what are you doing now? Forcing Zhao Ying to give you her brother's land? Are you trying to take it by trickery or by force?"

Wu Lizheng's voice was filled with a rare anger as he berated the crowd. In all his years, it was the first time he had been so enraged. As the village elder, all three of his sons had died on the battlefield, yet he had never uttered a word of complaint. The survival of Zhao Feng, his sister, and their mother was largely due to Wu Lizheng's many years of care, a testament to his benevolent character. For him to become so angry now was perhaps a sign of his disgust at the villagers' shamelessness.

Faced with Wu Lizheng's tirade, the clamoring villagers hung their heads in shame, not daring to argue.

"Alright," Wu Lizheng said, his voice still firm. "I've said my piece. Regarding Zhao Feng's land, I will discuss it with his mother. For the families in the village who are truly in difficulty with no land to farm, I believe she won't stand idly by. After all these years, don't you understand that the Zhaos practice medicine with benevolent hearts? Was it necessary to corner young Ying like this?"

"Let's go, young Ying," he said, his tone softening as he turned to her. "Go back and tell your mother the good news. She has been sick with worry for your brother for so long. It's time she knew."

Wu Lizheng then personally cleared a path for Zhao Ying, and they headed into the village. The villagers quickly made way for them.

Zhao Ying followed close behind Wu Lizheng, a look of lingering fear in her eyes. The villagers' behavior just now had been truly terrifying, completely different from how they used to be.

Watching Wu Lizheng and Zhao Ying walk further away, some of the villagers began to mutter amongst themselves again. But now, they no longer dared to be so audacious, their voices dropping to hushed whispers.