

Longevity 324

Chapter 324: The Road Back to Xianyang! Bygone Days! (Part 2)

"On a future battlefield, I will certainly compete with you, General Zhao. I will not be a mere spectator as I was this time," Li Xin declared, staring at Zhao Feng with fighting spirit and an unconquerable will. It was as if he were issuing a formal challenge.

Hearing this, Zhao Feng remained impassive, but the trusted aides behind him all turned to look at Li Xin, their eyes filled with dissatisfaction.

"Good," Zhao Feng said with a faint smile, cupping his fist toward Li Xin. "Then I shall await that day. However, my time here is limited, so we must part ways. If fate allows, we will meet again."

"Take care, General Zhao." Li Xin did not try to make him stay.

For him, this visit was a chance to see what the legendary Zhao Feng was really like. After all, among the generals of Qin, he, Li Xin, was second to none. He had measured himself against Meng Tian and Wang Ben, even feeling he had a slight edge. But now, with Zhao Feng suddenly bursting onto the scene, it presented a new challenge. He refused to be outdone. In his view, he could have accomplished the same things Zhao Feng did in the Zhao state; he just lacked the opportunity.

「After leaving Hangu Pass.」

"My lord," Zhang Ming couldn't help but say as soon as they were clear of the pass, "that Li Xin is so arrogant, daring to challenge you like that!"

"He is arrogant, but he harbors no ill will," Zhao Feng said with a smile. "At least he doesn't resent others for their accomplishments. He simply wants to prove himself."

Li Xin was a fierce general of Qin, and his ability to command troops was undoubtedly strong. However, he was also notoriously arrogant in his early career. Historically, when Qin sought to annihilate Chu, Wang Jian requested an army of 600,000 men to ensure victory through overwhelming numbers. Li Xin, however, confidently claimed he could do it with just 200,000, only to suffer a crushing defeat. Perhaps Li Xin now had some of the same traits as Zhao Kuo and still needed to be tempered by experience. Of course, that had nothing to do with him.

"Mr. Wei," Zhao Feng said, turning to Wei Quan with a smile, "now that we have left Hangu Pass, it's time for you to lead the way."

"Yes," Wei Quan nodded immediately, a look of anticipation on his face.

Since enlisting, Wei Quan could count the number of times he had been home on one hand. He had half a month of leave in his third year, and another half a month later when there were no campaigns. But once the war to conquer Han began, he, like Zhao Feng, had no opportunity to go back. Nearly four years had passed since he had last seen home.

「Hangu County.」

「Linguan County.」

It was a county with a population of over one hundred thousand people. As a Qin county adjacent to Hangu Pass, it was the first stop for many merchants and visitors from other states. Thus, the county was populous and bustling. In this era, there was no policy of suppressing commerce in favor of agriculture. On the contrary, while many elites looked down on merchants, calling them mere traders, their wealth gave them real power and a significant social status. Furthermore, the former Chancellor of Qin, Lv Buwei, had risen from the merchant class to invest in a future king, an act that had greatly elevated the standing of all merchants.

「At the gates of Linguan County.」

A few Prefecture Soldiers stood lazily at their posts, lacking the crisp military bearing of the Sharp Warriors. Their duty was to collect the entry fee at the city gate. This was not unique to this county; it was standard practice in Qin and every other city under Heaven. Outsiders had to pay an entry fee to enter the city, with the amount based on the number of people and the quantity of goods they brought with them. This was a crucial source of tax revenue for the Government Office's operations. However, unlike the other Various Countries, Qin's great National Power allowed it to charge a much lower entry fee. The weaker a state's National Power, the higher its fees, creating something of a vicious cycle.

"Wake up! Stand to attention!" one of the Prefecture Soldiers hissed. "A procession like this means someone important is arriving!"

As he spoke, the observing soldiers caught sight of a cavalry formation of trusted aides slowly approaching the city. "They're all wearing Sharp Warrior Battle Armor, the attire of trusted aides! And... and each of them holds a nobility rank of at least the fifth level! This is serious!"

At the sound of his voice, the other Prefecture Soldiers, some of whom had been dozing, snapped to attention, standing ramrod straight. As garrison troops on duty, they had seen countless people and were adept at reading situations.

To be escorted by trusted aides meant one of two things: either you were a Main General, or you held a noble title of the tenth rank or higher. Seeing so many trusted aides, it was obvious what this meant. This had to be a Main General.

"Could it be General Li Xin from Hangu Pass?" one Prefecture Soldier wondered aloud. "He's known for his strict discipline, but why would he come to Linguan? For a drink?"

"Unlikely," another replied. "Even if General Li wanted a drink, he'd send someone to buy it for him. He wouldn't come personally. This has to be some other great figure."

"All of you, stand straight!" the Wuzhang warned them. "Don't cause any offense, or no one will be able to save you."

The Prefecture Soldiers stood stiffly, their eyes fixed anxiously on the approaching cavalry of trusted aides. As Zhang Ming drew near, the Wuzhang immediately stepped forward and bowed respectfully. "May I ask which general this is?"

"Our general is General Zhao Feng," Zhang Ming announced, his tone authoritative.

"Zhao... General Zhao Feng?" The Wuzhang and his men looked on nervously, their gazes quickly finding Zhao Feng riding a warhorse among his trusted aides, his presence magnificent. Instantly, they all bowed deeply. "We salute you, General Zhao!"

The common folk entering the city also turned to look.

"General Zhao?"

"Could that be General Zhao Feng, whose fame now shakes the world?"

"Across all of Qin, the only one young enough to command such a large retinue of trusted aides is General Zhao Feng!"