

## Longevity 96

### Chapter 96: Gathering Strength! Mother's Birthday! (Part 4)

Zhao Feng was well-aware of the promotion process for Capital Commandants and above. However, for ranks below Capital Commandant, promotions were reported directly to the Military Judge for ennoblement, so he was naturally less informed about those details.

"My Lord," Luo Hua said, his eyes fixed fervently on Zhao Feng. "In the battle for the Han Capital, you led us to be the first to breach the gates. The greatest merit belongs to us! Then, our Commandant Camp captured the King of Han, another major achievement. As a result, our Commandant Camp received more promotions than any other. Nine men were promoted to Junhou, fifteen became leaders of five hundred, and a full eighty-nine were made centurions. Of course, many others who didn't receive an official promotion were still raised by one rank of nobility!"

Luo Hua knew exactly why their Commandant Camp had secured so many promotions—it was all thanks to Zhao Feng's formidable and valiant strength.

"We are all brothers from the same camp. We must not lose touch in the future," Zhao Feng said meaningfully to the group.

"Please rest assured, My Lord," they immediately responded.

"Han Xi."

Zhao Feng turned to Han Xi.

"This servant is here," Han Xi replied, bowing low.

"Are you familiar with Wei City?" Zhao Feng asked.

"I have been to Wei City once with the King of Han," Han Xi replied.

"Do you know of any hidden places in Wei City? Preferably somewhere far from civilization," Zhao Feng asked.

"My Lord, such places are easy to find," Han Xi answered immediately.

"Very good." Zhao Feng nodded in satisfaction. "Find me several such hidden locations. I will use them as training grounds for my Dead Soldiers."

"This servant obeys," Han Xi nodded at once.

"My Lord," Zhang Han spoke up, hesitating slightly, "I have a question that may seem somewhat insolent."

"Speak," Zhao Feng said, his gaze shifting to Zhang Han.

"My Lord, you have now been promoted to Deputy General. While not the highest of ranks, it is a position of great stature and authority within the army. Why do you need to cultivate Dead Soldiers? This is a major taboo. If you are discovered and reported to the Imperial Court, it could bring great disaster upon you," Zhang Han said, his face etched with worry.

Hearing this, the expressions of the others grew tense.

Cultivating Dead Soldiers was indeed a great taboo for an official. Although there was no specific law against it, being discovered would inevitably lead to suspicions of disloyalty.

It wasn't as if Zhao Feng was the only one; across the land, a great many powerful individuals maintained their own private forces. In Qin, these Dead Soldiers were also known by another name: retainers.

The era of retainers in Qin reached its peak under Lv Buwei, who kept three thousand such men in his residence.

After him came Lao Ai. Using the favor he held with Empress Dowager Zhao Ji, he was ennobled as the Marquis of Changxin. After establishing his own residence, he raised thousands of retainers, who eventually became the capital he used to launch his rebellion.

It was only after this incident that the King of Qin, upon taking the throne and ruling in his own right, issued a decree: Qin officials were forbidden from keeping retainers. Any found doing so would be severely punished without mercy.

Since then, the practice had waned. The nobility still secretly kept some men, just not as many, and no longer so brazenly.

"I am cultivating Dead Soldiers for the future," Zhao Feng stated slowly. "Furthermore, once I begin, I will be able to clearly ascertain their loyalty. You need not worry about any information being leaked. I can see the truth in all of you as well."

No one in this world knew what the future held. But Zhao Feng, with his knowledge of history, knew exactly what was coming. At the end of its reign, the Qin dynasty would fall. If he were to say such a thing now, no one would believe him. Besides, there was no need to.

"Ascertain their loyalty?" The men immediately grasped the deep implication of Zhao Feng's words. To see loyalty so clearly... what kind of power was that? But then they recalled the cultivation technique Zhao Feng had granted them and his ability to summon objects from thin air, and their hearts filled with an even deeper sense of awe.

"I understand, My Lord," Zhang Han said with a deep bow.

"Alright," Zhao Feng said to the group. "We'll leave these matters as they are for now. You are all dismissed to make your preparations."

"Yes, My Lord." The men respectfully took their leave and slowly retreated.

After everyone had left, Zhao Feng walked slowly towards the entrance of the hall. Night had already fallen. Outside, hundreds of Sharp Warriors stood on duty. The bright moon hung high in the sky, casting down a faint, silvery light.

Today is Mother's birthday. I wonder how she and Sister are doing. It's been almost eleven months since I left home. Back when I was in the Logistics Army, I thought I'd be discharged and head home after two years. I never imagined I'd be transferred to a main combat unit, let alone reach the rank of a Deputy General of Qin. Perhaps even Mother and Sister wouldn't believe it if they heard. I wonder when I'll be able to go home and see them. This is the first time since I was born that I haven't been with my sister to celebrate Mother's birthday. If this news were to spread back home, it would surely astonish everyone in the village.

Looking at the bright moon, Zhao Feng felt that perhaps, at this very moment, his mother and sister were looking at it too.

「Sha Village.」

Under the moonlight, Mrs. Zhao and her daughter, Zhao Ying, were sitting in the courtyard. Mrs. Zhao was mending clothes while Zhao Ying ground medicinal herbs.

"Mother," Zhao Ying said gently, seeing that her mother wouldn't stop her work. "I told you I would do the sewing later. You should go inside and rest. Today is your birthday! I showed off my cooking skills for you tonight. It might not be as delicious as Brother's cooking, but it's not bad! Now, you should go to sleep and get some proper rest."

"Alright, alright." Mrs. Zhao put down the clothes and smiled affectionately at her daughter. "Mother knows her Ying'er is a good, filial daughter. But I really can't sleep."

"Mother, you're already frail. It's so late. If you don't rest, your body won't be able to take it," Zhao Ying said with concern.

"I'm not that weak," Mrs. Zhao said with a gentle smile, looking up at the bright moon. "It's just... I'm thinking about your brother. You two just turned sixteen not long ago. I've always celebrated your birthdays, and on my birthday, your brother would always find new ways to make me happy. But this year, he isn't here by my side," she said, her face full of longing and worry.

"Mother," Zhao Ying said with a smile, "Brother will be back in just one more year. Then our family can all live together again."

"Yes." Mrs. Zhao nodded, her eyes filled with wistful hope. "When your brother comes back, our family will live together forever."

As the mother and daughter were talking, a figure slowly approached from outside the courtyard.

Hearing the sound, Zhao Ying looked over, immediately stood up, and called out, "Mr. Wu, why have you come at this late hour?"