

Mythical 141

Chapter 141: The Agricultural Expert from the Palace

Hua Xiong was currently very irritated. Quite a few people had been eyeing his horses, and the most shameless of them was a county magistrate who tried to accuse Hua Xiong of stealing horses and attempted to arrest him. How could Hua Xiong tolerate this? In the end, he beat the magistrate half to death and left. Li Ru had warned him to avoid killing officials in Yanzhou as much as possible to maintain some semblance of civility.

Hua Xiong generally didn't listen to others. He was straightforward and usually just charged into battle. But fortunately, this time, he had Li Ru with him, who managed to curb his temper and prevent him from killing all those who eyed his horses. Had it been the old Hua Xiong, he would have already drawn his sword.

"Qu Hanmo, I warn you, if you keep running around, I'll tie you up!" Hua Xiong grabbed Qu Qi by the collar, lifting him like a chick, and threw him into the carriage.

"Hey, Zijian, that was a huge ear of rice. Let me pick it!" Qu Qi protested as he tried to rush out again. Unfortunately for him, Hua Xiong sat firmly on the carriage, forcing him back inside. This guy had already collected quite a few so-called excellent seeds along the way and nearly got into a fight over a ripe ear of rice once.

"Are you done yet? You've collected plenty already. Half of our conflicts with the people in Yanzhou are because of you picking rice ears!" Hua Xiong glared angrily at the young man.

"Who told you to stuff me into a sack and bring me here? I was farming happily in Shanglinyuan. You asked if I knew how to grow cotton, I said yes, and then you stuffed me into a sack. Do you know that this is threatening an official?" Qu Qi retorted swiftly, leaving Hua Xiong at a loss for words.

"You say I threatened an official? You were farming in Shanglinyuan, a royal garden. Private farming there is punishable by death!" Hua Xiong stubbornly replied.

"Sigh~" Qu Qi sighed, his disdainful expression deeply wounding Hua Xiong. This guy's expressions and tone were always enough to deal a heavy blow. "Go, bring me that big ear of rice from earlier. I need to study it."

Hua Xiong suppressed his anger. He had been tormented by this guy whom he had stuffed into a sack. He ordered his soldiers, "Give that person some money and uproot the rice stalk!"

Despite being a brute, Hua Xiong had received decent education from Li Ru. He treated capable scholars fairly well, especially Qu Qi, who claimed to be an expert in agriculture and had already produced results in Shanglinyuan.

When Hua Xiong sneaked into Shanglinyuan to get what Chen Xi had requested, he soon stumbled upon a piece of farmland. The crops were indeed growing well, estimated to yield an extra dan per mu. Even though the land was well-irrigated, this was still impressive.

Hua Xiong approached Qu Qi, who was working in the field, with a smile. "Sir, do you know which one is cotton? And where are the seeds? I heard Shanglinyuan grows exotic plants, so why is there wheat here?"

Qu Qi glanced at Hua Xiong disdainfully. "Shanglinyuan is indeed for exotic plants. That one is cotton, and the seeds are in that house. As for the wheat, do you not think that a mu yielding over five dan is exotic?"

Hua Xiong was taken aback. He had farmed before and understood what five dan per mu meant. Even with perfect conditions, five dan was shocking. This man must be extraordinary.

With this realization, Hua Xiong didn't hesitate. He shamelessly asked, "Sir, may I know your name? I am Hua Xiong, Hua Zijian."

"Household Officer Qu Qi, Qu Hanmo," Qu Qi responded arrogantly.

Hua Xiong didn't mind the arrogance; he believed capable people deserved to be proud. He continued, "Sir Qu, do you have any of these wheat seeds left? Could you spare some?"

"They're all over there. Take as many as you want," Qu Qi replied, satisfied with Hua Xiong's humble attitude.

"Shouldn't I leave some for you as seeds?" Hua Xiong asked.

"As long as I'm here, seeds are never a problem," Qu Qi said confidently. Hua Xiong then took advantage of Qu Qi's complacency, stuffed him into a sack, and carried him off. After all, such a versatile agricultural scholar was rare and valuable, just as Chen Xi had instructed.

Thus, Qu Qi felt justified in tormenting Hua Xiong along the way. Of course, Hua Xiong couldn't catch him in the act. As a Household Officer specializing in agriculture, Qu Qi's so-called troublemaking often involved picking the best seeds or analyzing soil fertility, things Hua Xiong didn't understand but felt were impressive. So, he could only endure the headache and clean up Qu Qi's messes.

Despite his difficult personality, Qu Qi was genuinely skilled. Though he didn't know much about military or civilian farming, he had his own insights on increasing crop yields. For instance, he discovered that planting soybeans for a year, then burning the stalks and mixing them into the soil, increased the next year's grain yield.

In summary, despite his abrasive personality, Qu Qi was valuable, which is why even Jia Xu and Li Ru tolerated his daily nuisances. Increasing yield by just one dou per mu could save lives. Qu Qi claimed he could increase it by three to five dou, making him indispensable.

While enduring the constant headaches caused by Qu Qi, Hua Xiong soothed him, advising him to stay in the carriage. Ever since he felt the prying eyes, Hua Xiong had been on high alert. Though he doubted Cao Cao would dare to ambush him, it was better to be safe than sorry. As he calmed Qu Qi, his warrior instincts sensed danger.

Discreetly signaling, Hua Xiong's troops formed a defensive circular formation. This was the only defensive formation Hua Xiong had learned from Li Ru and could use proficiently.

"General, should we attack?" one of Cao Hong's guards asked.

"Four thousand horses, right in front of us. Not taking them would be unbearable," said Cao Hong, known for his stinginess, as he eyed Hua Xiong's horses. To pull off this heist, he borrowed hundreds of men from Xiahou Dun, Xiahou Yuan, Cao Ren, Li Dian, and Yue Jin, training them for a few days until they moved in unison. Now, Cao Hong was ready to ambush Hua Xiong.

Xiahou Dun, Xiahou Yuan, Cao Ren, and the others all knew what Cao Hong intended. Even Cao Cao was aware but turned a blind eye. Cao Cao even prepared a backup plan to deny involvement if things went south. Four thousand war horses without any mules — such a bounty was invaluable for Cao Cao, who currently had no cavalry.

Chapter 142: Bandits and Robbers Have No Human Rights

Hua Xiong cautiously drove the carriage in the middle of the formation. Li Ru, Jia Xu, Cai Yan, and Qu Qi's carriages were all surrounded by Hua Xiong's guards. He could feel the constant surveillance from unknown forces. Carefully, he directed his subordinates to solidify their formation. He knew that unless absolutely necessary, neither Li Ru nor Jia Xu would make a move here, as Cao Mengde knew both of them.

After ensuring all identifying marks were removed, Cao Hong grabbed a handful of mud, smeared it on his face, and charged down the hill with a howl.

"..." Hua Xiong was dumbfounded. He had been worrying about which direction the ambush would come from, but now a fool had charged down. What was all their previous preparation for?

"Hey, thief!" Cao Hong called out in an awkward Bingzhou accent, addressing Hua Xiong, "This road is opened by me, and this tree is planted by me. If you want to pass, leave a toll!"

"..." Hua Xiong was stunned again. Before he could respond, Qu Qi couldn't hold back any longer. "What kind of bandit are you? Claiming this road is opened by you and this tree is planted by you. This is an official road. Did you open an official road? Which dynasty's emperor are you? The Han Emperor is still in Chang'an. Are you rebelling? This tree is planted by you? This tree is four hundred years old. Are you a person from the previous Han dynasty? An otherworldly person? Do you have the elixir of life?"

Qu Qi's rapid-fire questions left Cao Hong dumbfounded, unable to come up with a coherent answer. Qu Qi looked at him with disdain, "Never seen such a stupid bandit. What's the point of talking before robbing? Just compare who has the bigger fists. Now you're dumbfounded!"

Hua Xiong helplessly pushed Qu Qi back into the carriage. This guy had a sharp tongue, but some words didn't need to be said. Saying them now was just asking for trouble!

"Charge!" Hua Xiong shouted. The formation burst open into eight parts. Meanwhile, Jia Xu and Li Ru, sitting inside the carriage, simultaneously acted. Jia Xu rarely used his mental prowess, but now his eyes seemed to see the next moment. Using Li Ru's spiritual power, he adjusted the trajectory, forcefully manifesting the Eight Gates Formation.

A sound like the clashing of iron and the grand scene of iron horses filled the air, pouring into the army formation. The soldiers' morale soared, and the previously slow-moving cloud energy started spinning rapidly.

In an instant, what seemed like a loose formation turned fiercely imposing. Each soldier radiated a layer of light. Although the colors varied, over time, the eight colors blended into a gray mist that enveloped the entire formation.

Seeing this, Cao Hong was terrified. Any general would recognize what was happening. The next moment, Cao Hong scrambled up the hill to hide. Fighting against such a divine force would only end badly. Though he had prepared ten thousand soldiers, they weren't meant to fill this bottomless pit!

As the gray mist rose, the soldiers inside the formation had no trouble seeing, but from outside, even someone with Lu Bu's vision couldn't see through it. This purely defensive, ambush-type formation had no physical defense against material objects. In other words, if someone launched a barrage of crossbow bolts, they would still hit.

Seeing this for the first time, Cao Hong was frightened. Without a word, he turned and ran. The four thousand war horses were tempting, but with such divine protection, his ten thousand soldiers would be crushed. He was here to rob, not to die!

Hua Xiong held his sword, glaring in the direction of the hill, cursing inwardly at how fast the opponent ran. But because of this, Hua Xiong didn't suspect Cao Hong's identity. Only bandits and robbers would act so shamelessly, running at the first sign of trouble. He never considered that someone from the Cao family, despite being a member of a noble family, would be so stingy, calculating every penny.

Taking a deep breath to calm his anger, Hua Xiong decided to use these bandits to establish his authority. "You there, thief! Listen well. I am General Hua Zijian of Taishan. Today, I will show you my might!"

With that, Hua Xiong's blade burst out from the mist. Unlike the previous chaotic slashes in Yongzhou, this time the aura harmonized perfectly with his power. A nearly three-hundred-meter-long fiery blade, radiating intense heat, cleaved the hillside in two. The split even showed signs of scorching.

"Glory to the General!" Hua Xiong's soldiers cheered. Having a fierce general leading boosted their morale, and the higher the morale, the faster they could draw upon the surrounding energy, speeding up the flow of cloud energy. This was why a fierce general could tip the scales in battle even with equal forces.

With one slash, Hua Xiong split the hill. He didn't linger; the enemy's life didn't matter. What mattered was intimidation. Today's display would be enough to deter any would-be troublemakers in Yanzhou.

"Increase speed! March without rest! Avoid cities, and march in force! We must reach Taishan within a day!" Hua Xiong estimated the distance and decided that with their current pace, they could make it to Taishan in one go. No more hiding. He believed Zang Ba would come to meet them at the border.

"Yes, sir!" The soldiers responded loudly, then started running at a steady pace. This was no challenge for them.

Hua Xiong never skimmed on food. Any rewards or loot were shared with his soldiers. After all, this was a habit cultivated in the harsh environment of Xiliang. To earn loyalty, aside from leading by example, sharing the spoils was essential. As long as the general got a big share, the soldiers had to get something too. This practice made Hua Xiong very popular among his troops.

Because they were well-fed, Hua Xiong's soldiers each developed their first trace of internal energy. While it wasn't much use in a fight, it greatly improved their endurance.

Cao Hong, hiding in the dirt, had resisted the urge to use his internal energy during Hua Xiong's attack. Rolling on the ground, he narrowly avoided the slash. He knew using his internal energy would make him a target, and his ten thousand soldiers would be crushed. This would be a huge blow to his elder brother Cao Cao, who had just become Governor of Yanzhou. So, even if it meant his death, he couldn't reveal himself!

Fortunately, Hua Xiong saw him as insignificant, attacking casually without targeting him specifically. This oversight spared Cao Hong's life. Now, he had no time for fear; he had to warn Cao Cao. No one

should attempt to intercept this group. The person escorting the horses wasn't just any nobody; it was Hua Xiong, the fierce general from Hulao Pass, who slaughtered experts like chopping vegetables. And the scene he witnessed had to be reported to Cao Cao — it was terrifying!

Chapter 143: Let's Also Seek Support...

The near thousand support troops that Cao Hong had arranged not far from the front were scattered by Hua Xiong's single strike. No one was foolish enough to stay and fight against such an unbeatable force; they all ran faster than rabbits, knowing it was wiser to flee than to stand their ground.

Although Hua Xiong's march was swift, moving several thousand people together couldn't compare to the speed of a few riders delivering a message.

When Hua Xiong and his troops reached Dongping, Cao Cao, stationed in Shanyang, had already received the latest intelligence.

"Ah, how many talented ministers and fierce generals does Liu Xuande have! I didn't expect that even for such a significant task as delivering tribute, he would send Hua Xiong, using this opportunity to clear Hua Xiong's name by meeting with the Emperor. I thought it would just be a ceremonial official handling this. It seems this man has his eyes set on the world," Cao Cao sighed deeply after reading the report.

Since Chen Xi's great victory over the Yellow Turbans and his subsequent consolidation of their forces, Cao Mengde had been staying in Shanyang, trying to understand Liu Xuande better. According to him, the situation in Taishan shouldn't be any better than in Chenliu. Liu Xuande had the support of Tao Qian, just as he had Zhang Miao providing grain. Yet, the more he studied, the more significant the disparity seemed.

Thus, Cao Mengde put aside his plans to attack Taishan and began a detailed study. The more he delved into it, the more he found Chen Xi's methods promising. However, those methods seemed only suited to Taishan because it lacked powerful clans...

Standing like a wall beside him, Dian Wei hummed and hawed, indicating his dissatisfaction.

"What's on your mind, Evil Lai?" Cao Cao asked, smiling at Dian Wei's grumbling.

"I don't believe I'm weaker than Hua Xiong. Please, my lord, give me a chance to fight him!" Dian Wei said, his voice resonating like a drum, his muscular frame straining his armor.

"Hahaha!" Cao Mengde laughed heartily. "Liu Xuande has his Guan and Zhang, and I have fierce generals like you. Let's go and intercept Hua Xiong; I also want to see this formation that Zilian described!"

Just as Cao Cao was preparing to take his guard, Dian Wei, to intercept Hua Xiong, Xun Yu appeared. "My lord, Zhong Yao from Yongzhou reports that Li Jue and Guo Si have defeated Lu Bu with an army of three hundred thousand, and Wang Yun was killed outside Chang'an."

Xun Yu handed the dispatch to Cao Cao, who read it with a deepening frown. "How dare those traitors!"

He rose in anger and slammed the letter onto the table.

"My lord, please calm your anger. Fortunately, the Emperor is unharmed. We still have time to gather our strength and rescue him," Xun Yu said calmly, though the Emperor's plight was unacceptable to him.

Cao Cao sighed, abandoning his plans to intercept Hua Xiong. "Wen Ruo, do we have enough grain?"

"We have enough for only a month. The Yellow Turban rebellion has ruined most of the fields we cultivated last year. We lack seeds and farming tools for the summer planting. Even if we plant on time, it will be four months until the harvest. Moreover, we have over half a million refugees," Xun Yu said, his tone full of helplessness.

Cao Cao barely heard Xun Yu's words, having asked only to keep Xun Yu from noticing his mood. His mind was still on the previous report—Minister Wang Yun had jumped from the walls of Chang'an, and Liu Xie, under the threat of Li Jue and Guo Si, had not uttered a single word in Wang Yun's defense, just bowing his head as Wang Yun, despondent, leaped to his death. Liu Xie then issued an edict to execute Wang Yun's family and abandon their bodies in the wild.

Cao Cao didn't know how to feel—disappointed or disheartened.

If Liu Xie had said even one word in defense, Wang Yun probably wouldn't have regretted his decision. Even if he jumped from the walls, he would have cursed Li Jue and Guo Si as traitors. Afterward, countless righteous men would have rallied to defend the nation. But Liu Xie had yielded, saying nothing in his defense out of fear.

[If the sovereign treats his ministers like dirt, they will treat him as a bandit.] This thought emerged in Cao Mengde's mind, suddenly liberating him, his aura becoming majestic.

[If the sovereign treats his ministers like dirt...] Cao Mengde sighed, a seed of rebellion taking root in his heart.

"My lord!" Xun Yu said, frowning slightly.

"Haha, Wen Ruo, don't mind me. I was just moved by the report. Let's get back to business. How large is our grain shortfall?" Cao Cao apologized to Xun Yu, smiling without a trace of his previous demeanor.

"The shortfall is significant. Even with assistance from the local families, it's not enough. We lack both funds and grain in the treasury. Ordinary means won't cover the deficit; we'll have to find another way," Xun Yu said, a hint of gratitude in his eyes, which then calmed. Sometimes, maintaining composure was essential for planning.

"What do you propose?" Cao Cao asked excitedly. Grain had always been a major worry for him. If Xun Yu had a solution, it would be a relief.

"If we lack grain in Yanzhou, we should take it from our enemies. While we don't have enough, Taishan, Xuzhou, and Yuzhou do," Xun Yu said, his eyes gleaming coldly.

"After the coalition against Dong Zhuo, the forces in the land divided into Dong Zhuo's in the west and the eastern coalition. However, the eastern coalition split further into two factions centered around Yuan Shao and Yuan Shu. The rise of the White Horse General further complicated matters. This is why Chen Zichuan could pressure Yuan Shao despite being at a disadvantage. By aligning himself with Yuan Shu's faction, he secured substantial support and time to recuperate," Xun Yu explained.

"And now we must also choose a faction. Although we've been aligned with Yuan Shao, we haven't formed an official alliance. It's time to strengthen our ties with Yuan Shao. We're not the only ones who can receive support; others want to support us too," Xun Yu's face softened into a gentle smile.

Seeing Xun Yu's smile, Cao Cao was reassured. Whenever Xun Yu smiled, it meant the situation was under control. If Xun Yu said so, it couldn't be a joke.

Chapter 144: It's Just a Few Words

"Xuzhou's Tao Qian would be the best choice, but since Taishan County, the gateway to Xuzhou, is in Liu Xuande's hands, we can't border them directly. Thus, borrowing grain is out of the question," Xun Yu said calmly. "So, like Liu Xuande, we must use weakness to pressure strength. We'll target here."

Cao Cao stared at the spot on the map where Xun Yu pointed. "Yuan Shu is indeed a good choice, but I fear I can't handle it alone!"

"Liu Xuande borrowed Gongsun Zan's strength, why can't we rely on Liu Biao? You must know that Nanyang, a wealthy region, is under Jingzhou's control, and Liu Biao has consolidated his rule there," Xun Yu said with a smile.

"Really?" Cao Cao asked in surprise.

"Even if it's not true, Zhicai will make it so. I've heard Yuan Shu plans to adopt Sun Jian's eldest son as his godson. Given Yuan Shu's loyalty and Sun Ce's fierceness, a conflict with Liu Biao is inevitable!" Xun Yu explained the current situation with a calm demeanor, intending to open a route to Liu Biao while simultaneously making Runan a detached territory of Yuzhou. Then, he would seize the opportunity to plunder resources, taking all the money, grain, and people.

Cao Cao's gaze followed Xun Yu's finger to Fan County. He estimated that only three thousand men would be needed to capture the city, which would effectively eliminate ninety percent of Yuzhou's Runan!

Sliding his gaze along Xun Yu's finger, Cao Cao saw the ultimate target: Xuzhou. Taking Runan would directly border the wealthy Xuzhou. He acknowledged that Taishan's soldiers were tough, but those from Dan Yang, weakened under Cao Bao's command, were experienced soldiers. A campaign from here could strike East Sea and Pengcheng, putting Tao Qian directly under Cao Cao's blade!

“However, challenging both Xuzhou and Yuzhou simultaneously is somewhat...” Cao Cao pondered for a long time, almost agreeing with Xun Yu's strategy but hesitating because, despite its weaknesses, Xuzhou still had soldiers and grain. Moreover, since Dong Zhuo's fall, Yuan Shu had become one of the top powers in the land.

“There's no need to worry. Nanyang is the richest place in the realm. As long as Liu Biao shows the slightest hint of ambition, Yuan Shu won't tolerate it, even if that region is technically part of Jingzhou!” Xun Yu smiled. “As for Tao Qian, if it were ten years ago, I wouldn't dare underestimate him. But now, he's like the setting sun, devoid of his former sharpness, merely a pushover.”

With Xun Yu's assurances, Cao Cao no longer worried. He desperately needed a fertile region. Without such a place, he would never feel secure. Borrowing grain from others was not a long-term solution; no warlord aiming for the realm would put their lifeline in another's hands.

While Cao Cao began scheming against Yuan Shu, Chen Xi, returning to Fenggao, was already worried about what to do next. The shortage of officials was severe.

With about 1.4 million Yellow Turbans, according to Han dynasty standards, they needed about 1,400 officials and at least 7,000 clerks. However, even 7,000 clerks wouldn't suffice. According to Chen Xi's calculations, 7,000 clerks would barely manage Qingzhou's agricultural affairs. As long as no significant issues arose, the administrative framework could function.

This was the downside of lacking local noble families. With local gentry, you could simply hand over people to them, and they would handle everything, as the gentry had an inherent system for managing large populations. For instance, if you threw 300,000 refugees into the Zhen family's territory, they'd automatically organize everything. Of course, if you dumped a million, even the Zhen family would be overwhelmed.

When Chen Xi returned with the troops, he was welcomed by Liu Bei himself, along with other civil and military officials, giving him the full honors. Normally, Chen Xi didn't care much about such formalities...

The latest news was that Guan Yu's wife, Hu, had come from Hedong with their son, Guan Ping, after hearing about Guan Yu. However, the young man, who resembled his father greatly, seemed intimidated by Guan Yu's imposing presence and didn't dare approach him. Guan Yu, on the other hand, inadvertently pressured his son with his silence.

Seeing the fourteen-year-old Guan Ping already at the Refining Qi into Gang level, Chen Xi could only marvel at the genetics. In the future, with more training, Guan Ping might not match his father but could still rival Hua Xiong. His physique and muscles were impressive. Who said Liu Bei had no successors? Guan Ping alone, with his high martial prowess, was enough to rival two members of the Cao and Xiahou families.

To Chen Xi, physical strength and combat ability were innate traits. To excel further, one needed reformation. However, leading troops, strategizing, and planning could be developed later. While not everyone could become a genius, competent middle-level talents could be trained, and Chen Xi was confident in this. Just like universities in later times could produce batches of mid-level talents, but training a genius was less reliable.

With a height of about 1.8 meters, robust muscles, and a single garment, calling Chen Xi, Zhang Fei, and others uncles created a strong sense of dissonance. Guan Ping seemed around fourteen; according to Zhang Fei's boasting, he should be ready for battle by sixteen...

Having killed people, Guan Yu had been a fugitive for fourteen years. Seeing his son, Guan Ping, made him quite excited. Liu Bei, Zhang Fei, Zhao Yun, and Tai Shici were equally enthusiastic. These bachelors were thrilled to have a nephew.

Back in Fenggao, after handing over command and returning to camp, Chen Xi felt a great sense of relief. Without a word, he ordered his carriage to take him home. If he could ride a horse, he wouldn't mind galloping home.

As for the prohibition against galloping in the city, Chen Xi could ensure it didn't apply to him. Secretly observing a few times, he found that causing injury while galloping was unlikely unless the city was overcrowded during festivals. But even then, a sane person wouldn't gallop.

However, just before reaching home, his carriage was stopped by Lu Su. Seeing the short distance remaining, Chen Xi ignored Lu Su. Passing by one's home without entering was something Dayu did; Chen Xi couldn't do that. A few words of affection with his wife were worth more. The lack of such words once led to an extra son eight years later. Alas.

Now that Lu Su was the governor of Taishan, Chen Xi was essentially unemployed. Any issues were Lu Su's problem, not his. With Guo Jia, Liu Ye, Lu Su, and Man Chong in Fenggao, there was nothing that couldn't be resolved.

With such reassurance, Chen Xi ignored Lu Su's antics. Covering his ears, he pretended not to hear. He'd have a good time with his wife, take a bath, sleep, eat some buns and porridge in the morning, then leisurely go to the government office to handle affairs. That was the way to go. Listening now meant no rest. Out of sight, out of mind.

Chapter 145: Even a Piece of Toilet Paper Has Its Value

Lu Su felt helpless. Although it wasn't appropriate to bother Chen Xi with governmental affairs immediately after his victory, seeing Chen Xi act so stubbornly, Lu Su knew there was no chance of getting help today. Today was just a reminder; Chen Xi would likely take over the current troublesome affairs of Qingzhou at the government office tomorrow.

During dinner, Chen Xi observed Fan Jian and Chen Lan's expressions under the lamp. He concluded that it wasn't a matter of him not noticing before; they genuinely didn't resemble each other. Smiling wryly, he resumed eating, realizing that it wasn't a matter of similar looks.

"Lan'er, why do you think our husband keeps staring at us?" Fan Jian asked curiously after Chen Xi left the table.

"I don't know," Chen Lan replied, shaking her head in confusion, still lost in the sudden change of becoming a lady of the Chen family.

"You're not paying attention to our husband's changes," Fan Jian sighed. "Lan'er, remember, no matter how your status changes, you still depend on our husband. Without him, you are nothing." Seeing Chen Lan's mind wasn't on Chen Xi, Fan Jian frowned and decided to give her a piece of advice. Whether she listened or not was up to her.

Chen Xi didn't intentionally eavesdrop on his wives' conversation, but he did notice that his home now had many songstresses. While it looked pleasant, it felt a bit unusual to him. Among them were two literate girls of about thirteen or fourteen, rare in those times. Where did they come from? Did the Yellow Turbans produce such talents?

Chen Xi didn't delve into it further. He figured it came about through one of several means, and asking the maids would only open old wounds. Since Liu Bei sent them, accepting it without overthinking was the best approach.

The next day, Chen Xi arrived at the government office around noon, where Lu Su, Liu Ye, a drunken Guo Jia, Man Chong, Jian Yong, Sun Qian, and Liu Yan were all waiting for him.

"Hey, everyone's here early," Chen Xi greeted, raising his hand. "What's the occasion?"

"We were waiting for you," Guo Jia said, reeking of alcohol.

"I've been looking for you. Yesterday, Xuande personally came to receive me, and you sent word that you were drunk and didn't show up! How shameless!" Chen Xi scolded Guo Jia, who had been indulging excessively lately.

"Good wine. Try some!" Guo Jia grinned, pushing Chen Xi's hand away and sliding back into his chair, continuing to drink from his jug.

Chen Xi was speechless. At least Guo Jia knew to mix something into the potent liquor, making it safer to drink.

"Zixu, please take the main seat. Xuande was here earlier but left due to other matters," Lu Su said, pointing to the main chair and indicating Chen Xi should sit there. For these people, sitting on chairs wasn't a breach of etiquette; it was just about comfort, and these elevated couches were better for their legs.

Chen Xi didn't dwell on Guo Jia's issue. Since Guo Jia was here drunk, it meant the matter wasn't military but purely administrative. However, what kind of administrative matter required such serious attention from everyone?

Casually sitting in the main chair, Chen Xi retrieved the governor's seal and read the document Lu Su handed over. Sure enough, there was trouble. After defeating the Yellow Turbans, with no officials to manage them, the situation had turned chaotic.

“Recruit clerks!” Chen Xi placed the stack of papers on the newly crafted desk.

“We don’t have enough literate people, let alone scholars willing to manage Yellow Turbans,” Liu Ye said bitterly.

“Your Taishan Academy barely has enough students, let alone enough to recruit. How do we recruit clerks? Even if we had literate twelve- or thirteen-year-olds with capability, can they handle this?” Man Chong said, his face darkening.

“Even if we send all the students from Taishan Academy to Qingzhou, including the literate scholars Wei Shuo recruited, we’re still short by over a thousand. Each person would have to handle multiple positions, and they can only manage a thousand people each at most,” Lu Su said helplessly.

No matter how talented you were, you needed subordinates to execute tasks. When Chen Xi governed Taishan, he relied on nearly a hundred scholars from Yingchuan to build the framework. The scholars recruited by Liu Bei were then distributed throughout Taishan, allowing it to develop steadily. Without these people, despite their talents, the individuals here couldn’t manage the administrative burden alone.

“Military control is the best option,” Liu Yan eagerly suggested, recalling how effective it was in controlling internal chaos.

Everyone glared at him, and Jian Yong said bluntly, “You better focus on promoting Taishan’s achievements. Just listen to this discussion...”

Liu Yan didn’t get angry. He just opened his fan, fanned himself, and struck a handsome pose.

Chen Xi smiled at Liu Yan. He was a scholar recruited by Liu Bei, noted in history for being poor at governance and strategy, but Liu Bei liked him, and he liked Liu Bei, so he stayed.

Lu Su and the others thought of him as someone just to keep around, but Chen Xi believed Liu Yan's loyalty was invaluable. In history, he was one of the four scholars who followed Liu Bei through hardships without leaving. Although his capabilities were weak, his loyalty was exceptional. This kind of loyalty, even as mundane as toilet paper, had its uses.

So, Chen Xi gave Liu Yan the task of promoting Taishan's image, using a generous budget for activities. He traveled around, making connections, enjoying music, and writing poetry, all while promoting Liu Bei's virtues.

The results were astonishing, even shocking Lu Su. A prominent scholar promoting Taishan's virtues quickly led to widespread acclaim. After Chen Xi's confrontation with Jizhou, Liu Bei was lauded as the foremost candidate for restoring the Han Dynasty.

Liu Bei's reputation soared, almost to the point of embarrassment, though he couldn't help but feel proud. Though not yet renowned throughout the realm, Taishan's Liu Bei was now a well-known figure in Central Plains.

Chapter 146: Perspective is Very Important

That's why Liu Yan, this idle talker, could mingle with Lu Su and the others. Even Lu Su and Liu Ye now had a high opinion of his abilities. Building a reputation isn't as easy as it sounds, but Liu Yan seemed to do it effortlessly, as if he were cheating in a game.

Of course, this was partly due to Liu Yan's good nature. Apart from being somewhat romantic and fond of literary contests, he was otherwise similar to Jian Yong, and extremely self-aware. Not knowledgeable about governance, he refrained from giving random advice even when in a high position.

Instances like this, where he blurted out about military governance, were rare and likely due to a moment of hotheadedness. Normally, Liu Yan was the type who would "just watch and not speak," letting others do their thing. Thus, bringing him along was Lu Su's way of showing that everyone valued him and hoping he'd help boost their reputations.

After Liu Yan quieted down, everyone turned to Chen Xi, hoping he had a solution. To them, the situation seemed very troublesome, but based on Chen Xi's past clever solutions, they hoped he could resolve it.

"Select minor officials," Chen Xi said after some thought. "Promote all officials currently stationed in Qingzhou by one level and make them formal officials. Then, select new minor officials."

“But where do we recruit them from? Even if we send all the literate people from Taishan to Qingzhou, it won’t be enough,” Lu Su said, half-laughing, half-crying. If it were that easy, they wouldn’t need Chen Xi.

“Why do they need to be literate? We’re just selecting minor officials. Ziyang, you’ve been dealing with Qingzhou affairs. Explain the current situation in Qingzhou,” Chen Xi said casually, then asked Liu Ye directly. He might not have a perfect solution, but with a perspective two thousand years ahead of the times, he had methods.

“The main problem is a lack of officials,” Liu Ye replied honestly, a bit flustered by the simplistic nature of his answer.

Chen Xi covered his face, then turned to look at Lu Su, his eyes almost saying, “I gave you a great strategist, and you’ve reduced him to this?”

“Ahem, Ziyang, Chen Xi is asking you to explain why the people in Qingzhou are causing the current situation,” Lu Su said, embarrassed, quickly clarifying for Liu Ye.

“Oh, most of the problems in Qingzhou arise from land disputes, customs, and old feuds. Each of these issues has three to five causes and three to five scenarios. It’s very complicated,” Liu Ye said, rubbing his head. He was overwhelmed by these complexities, which explained his earlier simplistic answer.

“There you go. Break it down, and it’s just about thirty scenarios. Each one can be handled, right?” Chen Xi asked, exasperated. How could they let it get so complicated?

“That’s not the problem. I can come up with fifty ways to handle each situation. The issue is the lack of people to implement these solutions... wait, you mean this could work?” Liu Ye was initially frustrated but then realized what Chen Xi was implying, looking at him in surprise.

“Exactly. It’s that simple. The Yellow Turban refugees have few demands. Just find some people to implement the solutions. You’ve been struggling with this for so long. You, Liu Ziyang, have plenty of strategies. Why not create people who can handle these tasks? Explain the methods to them and have them follow the steps,” Chen Xi said, feeling exasperated.

Liu Ye and Lu Su exchanged glances, realizing this novel approach could work. The Yellow Turban refugees had straightforward demands. Liu Ye could easily resolve these issues, spending a day drafting solutions for various scenarios, and then distributing them. The problems could be managed with just about anyone implementing the strategies.

“Alright, let’s recruit minor officials. Officials need both virtue and talent, but minor officials just need to manage their tasks. Ziyang, Zijing, write a manual detailing all possible administrative scenarios in Qingzhou and the corresponding solutions. Print it out and give each of the hundred or so officials a copy,” Chen Xi casually assigned the task, confident that Liu Ye’s mind would make quick work of it.

“Alright!” Liu Ye and Lu Su nodded, recognizing the merit in the plan.

“As for the minor officials, recruit them locally in Qingzhou. It doesn’t matter if they’re literate or not. As long as they claim they can do the job, let them take it. After a month, evaluate their performance. If they’re competent, keep them; if not, replace them. For severe cases, execute them. And make sure officials teach them how to handle various scenarios,” Chen Xi said coldly. Recent events had made him more inclined toward harsh measures when necessary.

“Understood. Ziyang and I will start working on it immediately. We’ll have it ready in three days. Have the craftsmen print it within two days, and we’ll solve this within ten days,” Lu Su said decisively. He was efficient and recognized this task wasn’t too daunting, especially with Liu Ye doing the heavy thinking. His job was to match strategies to situations, his forte.

“No problem,” Chen Xi said nonchalantly. “The craftsmen aren’t too busy. If needed, they can work an extra shift. No big deal.” He just had to give the orders; the actual work was for others to handle.

Sending Lu Su and Liu Ye off to their tasks, Chen Xi planned to take the administrative duties home. Meanwhile, Liu Yan, on public expense, was planning to meet scholars Liu Xi, Wu Fan, and Zhao Da to drink wine, play music, and climb Taishan. He even reported his budget for the day’s activities. What a life!

However, according to Hua Xiong’s latest report, a notable figure would soon arrive at Taishan. Handling the renowned Cai Yan, who they had conveniently brought along, would be tricky. Her father’s reputation alone made it difficult to deal with her. Bringing her to Taishan could cause trouble, and Liu Bei might even need to formally welcome her due to the previous acquisition of the Cai family’s books.

As Chen Xi walked out, carrying the administrative documents, he pondered whether he should also craft himself a reputation as a scholar. After all, only scholars could freely roam the territories of various lords and receive excellent treatment. Aside from renegade figures like Mi Heng, scholars generally enjoyed great respect.

Chapter 147: A Single Sword Strike Cuts My Loyalty

Chen Xi carried a stack of manuscripts, planning to head back and deal with them. Although his administrative duties were almost nonexistent, to promote harmony among the civil officials, Chen Xi decided to take a stack of manuscripts home. Being envied for no reason wasn't pleasant. Even someone as carefree as Liu Yan, who drank and lazed around on public funds, was often extorted by Guo Jia. After all, brothels also cost money.

Chen Xi had only taken a couple of steps when he was blocked by a wall of a man. He moved left, then right, but couldn't get around him. He jumped back and glared at Xu Chu, "Zhongkang, what are you doing? Don't block my way if you have nothing to do!"

"The lord invites the military advisor to his residence," Xu Chu said in his gruff voice.

"What's it about?" Chen Xi asked curiously, though he quickly remembered that Xu Chu would never tell him.

"I don't know," Xu Chu replied honestly.

"Oh, Ruan Yuliang, come here," Chen Xi called out to a familiar face. "Take these manuscripts to Fengxiao. I remember you're his captain of personal guards. Tell him to drink less, and if he goes to the brothel, don't let him stay the night. Just carry him back."

"Yes, sir!" Ruan Yuliang replied loudly, surprised that Chen Xi knew his name. Taking the manuscripts, he quickly went to find Guo Jia, who was likely already lying in Guo's mansion. As captain of Guo Jia's guards, Ruan's fate was tied to his superior. If Guo Jia did well, so would he. So he was happy to find Guo Jia more work.

"Let's go and see," Chen Xi said, waving as he followed Xu Chu, wondering what Liu Bei wanted. It was strange Liu Bei didn't attend the recent important meeting about Qingzhou. Could he be eating barbecue with Guan Yu and Zhang Fei?

Xu Chu stopped at the main gate and stood to the side. Chen Xi walked to the inner courtyard, hesitating at Liu Bei's door. He could sense the oppressive atmosphere inside before he even entered.

"Zi Chuan, come in!" Liu Bei called in a low voice, probably hearing Chen Xi's footsteps.

Chen Xi pushed the door open to find the room in disarray. The bookshelves and furniture were overturned, ink and paper scattered everywhere. Liu Bei's favorite white porcelain cup lay shattered, and his sword was broken, half embedded in a pillar and half on the floor.

"Sit anywhere, Zi Chuan. Look at this!" Liu Bei said, slumped against the wall, sitting on the floor.

Chen Xi saw Liu Bei's despondent expression and was stunned. When had the usually resilient Liu Bei ever been like this? Had someone stolen his woman?

Glancing at the bamboo slip, Chen Xi covered his forehead. Liu Xie, could you be any more disappointing? This was a devastating blow to those loyal to the Han dynasty. It was like self-destruction.

While Cao Cao had senior informant Zhong Yao reporting, the merchants under Mi Zhu weren't idle either. Although the distance was greater, they had only received the news a few hours later than Liu Bei.

Chen Xi remained silent, tossing the bamboo slip aside and sitting on the floor. He knew Liu Bei had something to say.

"The Han Emperor, this is the Han Emperor? Has he forgotten the dignity of the emperor? Has he forgotten that his every word and action sets an example for the world? Does he not realize how much damage his actions cause us?" Liu Bei roared, "How can a Liu of our lineage be such a heartless, ungrateful ruler? Would it have killed him to say one word? Li Jue and Guo Si wouldn't dare harm him! I, Liu Xuande, would be the first to raise an army!"

Unlike Cao Cao, who dared not speak his thoughts openly, Liu Bei, verified as a royal clan member by the Court of the Imperial Clan, faced no such constraints. Criticizing the emperor wasn't a big deal, especially when the emperor was at fault.

Chen Xi didn't respond, letting Liu Bei vent. In this era, any member of the Liu clan had the potential to become emperor. Protecting the Han dynasty's legitimacy and those loyal to it was, in essence, self-preservation. In simple terms, Liu Xie's actions had infuriated Liu Bei.

Liu Bei had ambitions, but he was also a recognized member of the Han royal family. His status had elevated him from a nobody to a warlord. After conquering Qingzhou, he became a major power. While his own efforts and the support of his followers played significant roles, so did the legacy of the Han dynasty.

This is why Liu Bei remembered to make offerings to the emperor first when he became successful. When white porcelain appeared, he chose the best pieces to send to the emperor. It wasn't that he lacked ambition, but Liu Bei felt he had already received great imperial favor. To ask for more would trouble his conscience. Besides, he had heard the emperor was wise. When Dong Zhuo was defeated, Liu Bei couldn't sleep from excitement, feeling the Han dynasty's restoration was imminent. Working hard to become the new Duke of Zhou seemed more feasible than anything else.

But just as Liu Bei solidified his image as a loyal Han clan member, the Han emperor's actions were like a direct attack on his nascent loyalty. This wasn't just a blow—it was a fatal strike to Liu Bei's ideals.

Liu Bei was disoriented. His dreams shattered, he felt unworthy and deeply hurt by Liu Xie's actions. He didn't know what to do anymore. Restore the Han dynasty? Did Liu Xie still deserve his efforts? Liu Bei, having just transformed into a loyalist, couldn't recover from the shock.

"Zi Chuan, tell me, what should I do?"

"Hah, what's the big deal? Your goal is to restore the Han dynasty, and my goal is to make China strong and respected. Do we need to care about such things? Let's just do what we need to do. The emperor doesn't necessarily represent the Han dynasty or China. We should focus on our tasks, which are to stabilize the central plains and bring peace to the land," Chen Xi said, glancing at Liu Bei, unfazed by the situation. Even if the emperor were incompetent, people still needed to live their lives.

Liu Bei stared at Chen Xi, then slumped back down, “Zi Chuan, you don’t understand. You don’t understand how I feel. Do you know, I once fantasized about becoming emperor? I am a descendant of the Han dynasty; I have the right. But as I climbed to this position, the imperial favor I received made me feel unworthy of coveting the throne!”

Chapter 148: Their Own Ideals

Chen Xi was dumbfounded. What was Liu Bei talking about, saying such things? "Deeply indebted to the imperial grace, I cannot harbor any ambition for the throne!" You're not that kind of person! In history, you ascended to the throne. Now you say you have no ambition for it—is this a joke?

Seeing Chen Xi's astonished expression, Liu Bei sighed and explained, "Whether it is ambition or desire, I have both. But since I've stepped into this position step by step, I've encountered no obstacles. Tao Gongzu, Kong Wenju—they all helped me. The might of the Han Dynasty still protects me. Even if I had any dissatisfaction, it still gave me opportunities."

"Zichuan, have I ever fought for anything?" Liu Bei asked.

"No," Chen Xi thought for a moment and replied.

"Exactly. I haven't fought for anything, yet because of my surname and bloodline, I've gained so much. Maybe before the incident with the postal inspector, I thought these were all deserved. But after that, I understood that in this world, besides ability, one also needs the lingering favor of ancestors!" Liu Bei's face showed bitterness, his words almost incoherent, but Chen Xi understood the underlying meaning.

This was Liu Bei's greatest pain. Despite his efforts, he still couldn't escape the need to rely on his ancestors. And now, even more painfully, he relied on his ancestors yet still desired to covet the legitimate line they left behind!

Even if the other party was at fault, Liu Bei felt that others had the right, but he did not. He believed that as a collateral family member, the main family had given him a chance to thrive. Now, should he strike down the legitimate heir and take his place? His conscience wouldn't allow it!

Chen Xi smiled bitterly, finally understanding the situation. Unlike the historical Liu Bei, this Liu Bei had not experienced hardship!

In the previous life, besides the title of "Imperial Uncle," Liu Bei enjoyed no benefits from the royal family. Even with the help of some loyal Han officials, those resources had long been exhausted over time. Except for an empty title, Liu Bei started almost from scratch and owed nothing to the Han Dynasty, so he felt no pressure to ascend the throne as the last remaining royal member, Liu Xuande.

In this life, Liu Bei had royal documentation and benefits, quickly rising from a nobody to a great lord ruling over a populous region. He even gained a title. Though he fought for some of it and had Chen Xi's strategies, without loyal Han officials like Tao Qian, Liu Bei wouldn't have risen so quickly.

Because of this, Liu Bei felt deeply indebted to the Han Dynasty. The situation wasn't too dire yet; there was still hope for salvation if efforts were made. Hence, his conscience easily suppressed his ambition, and he aspired to be like Duke of Zhou, not aiming to become emperor. His dream was to bring peace to the world and restore the Han Dynasty, not to claim the throne.

This was why he was so hurt by Emperor Xian's actions. Otherwise, Liu Xie doing such things would have been a favorable situation for Liu Bei. If Liu Xie disappointed the loyal officials, following the principle that any royal member could ascend, wouldn't Liu Bei, hailed as a great hero by Liu Yan, be the best choice?

Understanding all this, Chen Xi knew how to respond.

"Xuande, may I say something?" Chen Xi said with a smile.

"Please speak, Zichuan," Liu Bei said calmly. After venting for a while, Liu Bei felt a bit regretful for saying things he shouldn't have, but he was much calmer now.

"Xuande, how did the ancestors' favor come about?" Chen Xi asked, his eyes twinkling with a hint of a smile.

"It was the result of Emperor Gaozu cutting through thorns and overthrowing Qin's tyranny, competing with Xiang Yu, and leaving blessings for us descendants," Liu Bei said fervently.

"To Emperor Gaozu, there's no distinction between close and distant descendants, right?" Chen Xi asked with a smile.

"You can't say that," Liu Bei frowned.

"Alright, then let's change the topic. What kind of Han Dynasty did Emperor Gaozu hope for?" Chen Xi continued to ask.

"Enduring, passed down through generations," Liu Bei paused, knowing this wasn't realistic.

"And for each generation's hope?" Chen Xi asked with a smile.

"..." Liu Bei didn't answer, but his eyes flashed with a light.

"Did the ancestors hope their descendants would rely solely on their glory, or did they want their descendants to surpass them?" Chen Xi's smile grew clearer.

Liu Bei didn't answer, but his whole demeanor changed, shedding his earlier despondency.

"Xuande, no ancestor wants their descendants to live solely off their glory. The glory they created and the solid foundation they laid were meant to support their descendants during tough times until they could rise again," Chen Xi said slowly.

Liu Bei stood up and extended his hand toward Chen Xi. "Let's create more glory for our descendants, lay a stronger foundation, and surpass our ancestors!" Liu Bei's last words were almost squeezed out through clenched teeth, but once spoken, he seemed filled with strength, radiating energy.

"Ancestors, forgive your descendant's disrespect. Today, I, Liu Xuande, swear to the heavens: If I cannot surpass the past generations, I will never covet the throne. Let the ancestors witness this!" Liu Bei passionately declared to the sky, his eyes filled with determination, giving Chen Xi the feeling that Liu Bei was serious this time.

"Zichuan!" At this moment, Liu Bei seemed shrouded in a layer of solemnity. He extended his hand again, "Tell me your ideal. Don't give me that lie about wanting to be the head of the Chen family. With your ability, that position is like picking something out of a bag! Speak your ideal, Zichuan!"

Chen Xi paused, then put away his playful expression. For the first time, he showed no sign of dislike and placed his hand on Liu Bei's. "My ideal... Through the ages, let China always stand at the pinnacle of the world. Whether in the past or the future, let others only look up to us; let the people be well-fed and clothed, with paths for advancement, the wealth, wisdom, and talent of the world not monopolized by noble families, and everyone able to earn a fair return for their contributions!"

"Good! That's the Chen Zichuan I know!" Liu Bei laughed heartily, then turned to Chen Xi. "Zichuan, make a vow. One day, I will inscribe your vow today in the Liu family's ancestral teachings. I, Liu Xuande, will surpass my ancestors. My loyalty lies with the Han Dynasty, not any single person!"

Chapter 149: Liu Xuande's Enlightenment

Chen Xi left Liu Bei's house feeling utterly disoriented. When did he become so melodramatic? Is it true that if you aren't dramatic, you aren't young? What a joke! Chen Xi was depressed.

"Damn it, Liu Bei, you lunatic! You dragged me into your madness and infected me with it. You bastard!" Chen Xi's face was dark, emitting an aura that kept people at bay as he cursed Liu Bei furiously in his heart.

On the other side, Liu Bei felt rather good about himself. He thought his earlier display of grandeur was enough to make his current self tremble. Saying he would surpass his ancestors—heroes truly needed to have moments of hotheadedness to achieve greatness!

"Indeed, Zichuan is not a man to be underestimated. How could a genius settle for just being the head of a family? If his ambition were so small, wouldn't it waste his talents? Like-minded! Truly like-minded!" Liu Bei laughed heartily. Bringing Chen Xi into his madness today was a pleasant surprise. No matter how lazy Chen Xi appeared, his ambition, his vision, and his scale of thinking were unparalleled. Even the idea of surpassing their ancestors was something Chen Xi could shoulder!

Chen Xi had no idea about Liu Bei's expectations for him. Even if he did, he'd feel conflicted. Right now, he still felt uncomfortable. Every time he recalled Liu Bei holding his hand, enveloped in a dramatic aura, he thought he should just rest and recover.

Chen Zichuan fell ill. Although the exact illness was unknown, he stayed home every day, lying in bed motionless, even when Fan Jian came over. He would just cover his head and continue lying there, mumbling that his laziness was acting up.

"Husband, get up. You've been lying in bed for many days," Fan Jian, this middle schooler, pulled on Chen Xi's arm, trying to drag him out, but to no avail. Chen Xi remained motionless, stubbornly clinging to the bed.

"Zichuan, big brother ordered me to take you out of the city!" Zhang Fei's loud voice shook the dust off the beams.

"I'm so tired. If third brother needs something, find Zijing." Chen Xi's weak voice emerged from under the blanket. Initially, he felt embarrassed, but now he simply felt that resting was comfortable. Lazing in bed all day was also a way of life—a very good one.

"Madam," Zhang Fei said, bowing to Fan Jian, "please excuse me. There is an important matter today, so I must ask Zichuan to come with me. I hope you understand."

"General, there's no need for such courtesy. I've been trying to get my husband to go out more as well, but..." Fan Jian sighed as she spoke.

"Leave it to me, old Zhang. It's just some sunbathing, right? I'll make sure to take Zichuan out every day from now on." Zhang Fei pounded his chest like a drum.

"Thank you, General Zhang. Oh, by the way, I have some wine at home. I'll fetch it for you." Fan Jian smiled and turned to leave, giving Zhang Fei the chance to take Chen Xi away.

"Hey, third brother, what's the matter? I was sleeping. Disturbing someone's dream is not a good thing." Chen Xi pulled off the covers and poked his head out. He wouldn't give Zhang Fei the excuse to roll him up in his bedding and carry him off, nor would he give him the chance to carry both the bed and him. He'd been caught off guard before when Zhang Fei carried him and the bed out together, still moving swiftly.

"Zijing is back," Zhang Fei said excitedly. Hua Xiong, a guy he liked to spar with, had returned, giving him another opponent.

"Oh, he arrived at the Taishan border ten days ago. The ceremony seems off," Chen Xi said, getting up.

Chen Xi knew what was going on. Liu Bei had been fuming recently. Though Chen Xi had calmed him down, Liu Bei had heard about the imperial envoy's arrival, which reignited his anger. He declared that he and his officials would fast for nine days to honor the imperial decree.

Liu Bei felt he couldn't control his anger with the envoy's arrival. He hadn't faced many hardships and was far from hiding his emotions. Rather than letting the world see his displeasure with Liu Xie, he chose to stall, hoping to calm down before meeting the envoy.

This fasting was just for show. Liu Ye, a Han clan member, understood Liu Bei's feelings after hearing about Wang Yun's situation. The angrier a person was, the more loyal they were. Those who remained silent were either disillusioned or had turned rebellious.

Zhang Fei patted Chen Xi's shoulder. Sometimes he was careless, but other times he was incredibly perceptive. He knew what was going on but didn't question Liu Bei because Liu Bei's choices always represented him.

"Let's go. Since Zijing is back, let's welcome him. Have the accommodations for Miss Cai and those two friends been prepared? Are the furniture and decorations all set?" Chen Xi asked as he got dressed.

"Everything is ready," Zhang Fei nodded.

"Good. Inform the others. I'll fix my hair and join you. As for the strong wine, drink less of it. I'm not joking; too much could be deadly," Chen Xi said, signaling Zhang Fei to leave, assuring him he'd be ready soon.

After Zhang Fei left, Chen Lan helped Chen Xi with his hair. Chen Xi then took a carriage to the city gates to welcome Hua Xiong and his party. He already knew his official position and title; he just needed to make an appearance and receive his seal.

The announcement of the imperial decree was brief. Everyone's thoughts were elsewhere. The Han Dynasty was unstable, unable to pay salaries. Official positions meant nothing if you couldn't assume office.

Liu Bei showed respect for the decree, but his true feelings were unknown. Chen Xi knew Liu Bei's loyalty to the Han Dynasty was genuine, but his loyalty to the current emperor was unreliable. Liu Bei's recent dramatic declarations revealed his dissatisfaction with the emperor. The hurt was too deep.

This time, Liu Bei wasn't here to welcome the envoy or Miss Cai but to meet Chen Xi's friends.

Liu Bei had realized that to achieve his grand vision, he needed talented people, the higher their caliber, the better. Each additional talent brought him closer to his goal. Chen Xi was already extraordinary, so his friends couldn't be weak. Welcoming them was a duty for a hero like Liu Xuande!

So, he understood now. To fulfill his lofty ambitions, Liu Bei needed the best people, and Chen Xi's friends fit that bill.

Chapter 150: It's All Liu Xuande's Fault!

Chen Xi had no idea what was going through Liu Bei's mind. If he knew, considering Liu Bei's previous actions, he would probably give him the title of a "melodramatic hero." But speaking with such grandiose words, even Chen Xi found himself extending his hand in confusion. If it were anyone else, they might have been moved to tears and knelt in reverence. This shows that a melodramatic aura is almost equivalent to a kingly aura.

Liu Bei personally helped Jia Xu and Li You off the carriage. As someone who rose from the lower ranks without the education of noble families but reached a high position, Liu Bei lacked the sense of distance that noble families maintained. In simple terms, Liu Bei could casually leave Chen Xi on the carriage and drive himself, something Yuan Shao would never do, regardless of the talent of the person.

Comparing the current statuses of Yuan Shao and Liu Bei, they weren't too different. Thus, Liu Bei's conduct seemed exceedingly gracious to many scholars. Although Lu Su often felt it was unnecessary, he still appreciated Liu Bei's actions.

Liu Bei was likely aware of his changing status, but the rapid change left him no time to adjust. He had become a central figure among the Central Plains warlords. His habit of respecting scholars and treating

people kindly had not changed, even though he now held a high position where most had to look up to him.

Liu Bang never changed his habits over the years, leaving a legacy of the "style of Gaozu" in history, regardless of whether it was good or bad. This shows that it's hard to change one's nature. Liu Bei was in a similar situation, habitually welcoming scholars personally and sharing unfinished food with his officials.

Liu Bei might not realize how his habits appeared to others—how gracious it seemed for a high-ranking lord to be so humble. The Yellow Turbans raiding Qingzhou primarily targeted Taishan, yet no scholar fled their posts. This was largely due to Liu Bei's past gestures of hosting banquets, escorting scholars out of the city, and bowing deeply. Such actions deeply moved scholars from humble backgrounds, inspiring them to serve him loyally.

It didn't matter that the Yellow Turbans hadn't attacked the city; these scholars would have fought to the death rather than surrender, showing their unwavering loyalty to Liu Bei.

"Li Wenru from Yongzhou, Jia Wenhe from Liangzhou, greet Lord Xuande," Li You and Jia Xu bowed to Liu Bei.

[Such a gracious demeanor, even previously unknown scholars are treated with respect. The Central Plains Warlord? It's not impossible,] thought Li You as he watched Liu Bei from a distance. Using some esoteric methods, he observed auras of purple energy and faint multicolored insignias around Liu Bei, though lacking the form of a dragon or tiger, just floating scattered around him.

"Please rise. Zichuan has mentioned both of you many times. Would you be willing to join me?" Liu Bei asked directly, somewhat stunned. If they refused, he would be humiliated in front of so many people.

"Are you so confident, Lord Xuande?" Li You asked curiously.

"No, because I'm not afraid of being refused. I've been refused many times but still reached this point. I, Liu Xuande, will not rest until I achieve my goals!" Liu Bei declared firmly.

"Honored by your confidence, I, Wenru, am willing to assist in correcting any shortcomings," Li You nodded, acknowledging Liu Bei's determination.

"And you, Wenhe?" Liu Bei asked Jia Xu.

"I have a question," Jia Xu pondered. Since Li You had already leaned towards Liu Bei, he had to make a choice today. Though he admired Liu Bei, admiration didn't equate to joining. Jia Xu's primary concern was his personal safety.

"Please ask, Wenhe," Liu Bei quickly understood that Jia Xu favored him but had reservations. This question was crucial and might be what Chen Xi referred to as "the last straw that breaks the camel's back," so Liu Bei had to be cautious.

"Who is responsible for the current chaos in the world?" Jia Xu asked calmly.

As soon as the words were spoken, Liu Ye angrily retorted, "How dare you speak like that, old man!"

"Ziyang, stand down!" Liu Bei, though displeased, reprimanded Liu Ye. He knew the question but was unwilling to answer. Too many were at fault—the royal family, eunuchs, scholars, consort clans, ministers, and noble families. Who could claim innocence? How to answer?

"Lord Xuande, let me answer this. Jia Wenhe's question is difficult, but I know the answer the world will want in the future," Chen Xi saw Liu Bei's dilemma and stepped forward, unable to let Liu Bei handle it alone.

"Wenhe, may Zichuan answer for me?" Liu Bei asked, delighted but then turned to Jia Xu.

"Alright, I'd like to hear Chen Zichuan's answer," Jia Xu nodded.

"Zichuan, it's up to you!" Liu Bei patted Chen Xi's shoulder.

"The answer is simple: it's Lord Xuande's fault," Chen Xi said without pressure.

"What? All the chaos is Liu Xuande's fault?" Liu Bei was dumbfounded, as were the others who heard. How could everything be Liu Bei's fault?

"Explain," Jia Xu asked expressionlessly.

"Lord Xuande was born too late and not strong enough. Otherwise, the world would already be at peace. So, it's his fault for not having the ability to pacify the world and ensure the people's well-being. Does this answer satisfy you? If not, ask the world in twenty years! They will tell you the same," Chen Xi said calmly, looking at Jia Xu.

"As expected of Chen Zichuan. I'm not satisfied with this answer, but I plan to ask the world in twenty years," Jia Xu smiled slightly, nodded to Liu Bei, and saluted, "Greetings, my lord."

"Good, today we have gained two great advisors!" Liu Bei laughed, "Thanks to Zichuan, I couldn't have answered without you."

"No need for thanks, Lord Xuande. Just remember, the fault of the world lies with you," Chen Xi warned.

Chen Xi wouldn't admit that he answered this way on purpose. Jia Xu didn't want the answer he gave, but the meaning behind it was enough for everyone to ponder. If Liu Xuande dared to take on all the past faults, how high would his ambition and vision be? This was worth considering.

[Surpassing one's ancestors is not easy. First, you must dare to take on all their faults. Only then will the world acknowledge you!] Chen Xi thought silently.

Chen Xi was sure Liu Bei hadn't considered these issues. Most of Liu Bei's grand statements were made in a feverish state, without a complete plan or even knowing where to start. Since Liu Bei had made such claims, it was up to him to push Liu Bei onto the path he desired!