

Mythical 49

Chapter 49: The Old Hometown of Yingchuan

The army was stationed outside the county seat of Yingchuan. To be honest, Liu Bei's arrival almost scared the county governor of Yangzhai, Chen Liang, to death. Although this was the seat of Yingchuan, having over ten thousand elite troops stationed outside the city would terrify anyone, especially in these chaotic times when the situation was unclear.

Chen Liang immediately locked the city gates and mobilized all defensive forces within the city to guard against Liu Bei's potential attack. After all, the Han dynasty had not yet fallen, and moving troops without proper authorization was strictly prohibited.

When Liu Bei presented the grand general's military order from the base of the city walls, Chen Liang finally understood that it was a false alarm. He also realized that no matter how they traveled, Liu Bei would never reach Taishan through his territory. Nonetheless, no one would be foolish enough to quibble over such matters during these tumultuous times. Chen Liang had no intention of provoking this formidable regional governor, who clearly had both military and political power, a far cry from his own powerless position.

"Governor Chen, there's no need for such formalities. It is indeed inappropriate for me to pass through your territory, but I am compelled to visit this land of talent and virtue in Yingchuan to seek out worthy individuals," Liu Bei courteously greeted Chen Liang at the city gate, showing no arrogance and instead offering him a way out.

"Lord Xuande is too modest. It is indeed necessary to balance civil administration with military might. Although Taishan County is plagued by bandits, your brave soldiers can certainly defeat them. However, you lack capable civil officials, while Yingchuan is renowned for its scholars," Chen Liang smoothly accepted the gesture, subtly hinting at his interest in Liu Bei's impressive cavalry.

As Chen Liang hinted, Liu Bei followed suit. These soldiers were his lifeline; he didn't have enough to share, and there was no way he would let Chen Liang take any. Chen Xi couldn't understand what his clansman was thinking.

Feasts were held to welcome and entertain Liu Bei's troops. Whether Chen Liang was befuddled or genuinely favored Liu Bei, the hospitality was impeccable. He even invited prominent families from the city to join in welcoming Liu Bei, including Chen Xi's father-in-law.

"Zichuan, what are you doing here?" After the feast, Chen Xi noticed that Fan Liang had signaled him and nodded, slipping out of the banquet. Liu Bei was exceptionally lenient with the few subordinates he had.

"How is Uncle? I have been to Hulao Pass and witnessed the ambitions of the warlords. The aspirations of the Gwangwu lineage have ended. I am now following Lord Xuande, hoping to find some fortune," Chen Xi smiled, feeling that Fan Liang was trustworthy enough to share such audacious thoughts.

"Mind your words!" Fan Liang rebuked.

"I only speak this way with you, Uncle. With others, I wouldn't dare. What do you think of Lord Xuande?" Chen Xi asked with a smile.

"He is destined for great things," Fan Liang said after a long silence. "He has the aura of a king."

"Only the aura of a king?" Chen Xi teased, showing little respect. To him, Fan Liang was more of a family member than a figure of authority, and he didn't feel the need for formalities.

"He has the aura of an emperor, but he should have faced misfortune, which seems to be suppressed by something. His original destiny of hardship and late blooming has been forcibly elevated to a prosperous path. This isn't the appearance of a founding emperor. Without sufficient trials, establishing a nation is impossible!" Fan Liang said after a long pause.

"Uncle's eyes are as sharp as ever," Chen Xi remarked. The accumulated knowledge of a thousand-year-old family was indeed different from ordinary families, even if they had declined.

"Your appearance..." Fan Liang furrowed his brows.

"Uncle, let's talk about Fan Jian instead. There's no need to read my face," Chen Xi smiled, diverting the topic.

Family matters were more important than face reading, and Fan Liang quickly shifted his focus to his daughter's marriage. He wasn't willing to pay double the head tax for his unmarried daughter; it wasn't about the money but about saving face.

"Jian'er is doing well, just waiting for you to marry her. It's evident that Liu Xuande treats you well. Since you've chosen your path, I won't say much. Take Jian'er with you and notify us when the wedding is set. Your aunt and I will come to Taishan then. Honestly, I underestimated you," Fan Liang said, smiling before his expression turned serious, praising Chen Xi.

"Just take her? Isn't that against the rules?" Chen Xi frowned. "As for whether you underestimated me, that doesn't matter. I know my own abilities."

"Just take her. If you're establishing a career, you should start a family first. Cao Mengde mentioned you in passing. How do you think the other warlords will view you?" Fan Liang dismissed Chen Xi's concerns, emphasizing the practical over formalities. The Fan family was no longer as prestigious as it once was, and the engagement had been set long ago.

"It doesn't matter. Cao Cao has a capable subordinate now. He probably wants Lu Bu to deal with Li Ru and Dong Zhuo. By openly exposing the mistrust among the three, any future schemes will be less effective. Unfortunately, while Li Ru is highly intelligent, Lu Bu lacks wisdom, and Dong Zhuo is tyrannical. Bringing the mistrust into the open will only make it worse," Chen Xi shrugged, explaining that such a scheme was purely to humiliate.

From Fan Liang's words, Chen Xi deduced that Cao Cao had acquired his first capable adviser, Xun Yu, a figure not featured in the Romance of the Three Kingdoms but mentioned in Records of the Three Kingdoms. Cao Cao was formally consolidating his power. Simultaneously, Cao Cao's initial recruit, Zao Zhi, was likely making significant progress on the strategic tool of land reclamation, which would soon be operational.

"Zichuan, you seem well-versed in these matters. I didn't expect the once frail youth to grow into this. Old Chen would be astonished if he were still alive," Fan Liang said, satisfied with Chen Xi's commentary and his casual demeanor.

Seeing Chen Xi's silence, Fan Liang continued, "Zichuan, I imagine you came to Yingchuan not just to visit us but also to seek talents for Liu Xuande. However, remember not to approach the Chen family unless they seek you out to connect with Liu Xuande. Otherwise, avoid them. Great families have their ways, and you should stay away from such matters until you are strong enough."