

Mythical 62

Chapter 62: Moving Money from the Left Pocket to the Right Pocket

As Zang Ba fell from his horse, a fleeting thought crossed his mind—this must be Zhang Fei, who dared to challenge Lu Bu at Hulao Pass. Before he could ponder further, darkness overtook him.

Zhang Fei casually picked up the fallen Zang Ba to prevent him from being trampled by the following cavalry. He had realized that Zang Ba's defeat wasn't due to weakness but because his opponents had reached a superhuman level.

"Zang Ba has been captured by me! Surrender now or face the consequences!" Zhang Fei shouted, his voice overpowering the sounds of Zang Ba's army's cries.

"Surrender!" With their commander captured and their army divided, the only option left was death. The already demoralized Zang Ba's troops completely lost their will to fight after his capture. Zhang Fei's command made them wilt like frostbitten eggplants.

Hua Xiong directed his men to capture Zang Ba's troops. Usually, capturing prisoners after a battle was a task for the rear guard, as the front troops were typically exhausted from the fight. However, Hua Xiong's forces were too small to have a rear guard, and his bandit troops had no concept of such logistics. They simply obeyed Hua Xiong's commands, finding capturing prisoners much safer than carrying heavy stones up cliffs. Besides, they had already subdued these bandits, leaving little to worry about.

Hua Xiong divided his troops, assigning five hundred lightly wounded soldiers to round up the prisoners like ducks, three thousand to guard the perimeter, and the rest to scout as sentries.

The prisoners, though outnumbering their captors twenty to one, dared not resist, indicating that Zang Ba's forces were thoroughly broken. They wouldn't muster any thoughts of rebellion against the silent army that had defeated them.

"Zijian, I didn't realize you had such impressive training methods!" Zhang Fei exclaimed, giving Hua Xiong a thumbs up.

"Don't mention it. I don't even know what's happening. The strategist told me to train them this way, and now they aren't afraid of death and follow my orders without question," Hua Xiong explained, waving dismissively. It wasn't his training skills; it was all Chen Xi's plan.

"Oh, so Zi Chuan had this trick up his sleeve? I'll have to ask him why he didn't teach it to me," Zhang Fei said, initially delighted but then grumbling in frustration, vowing to confront Chen Xi.

"Don't bother giving the strategist a hard time. Wake up Zang Ba, then go secure the surrounding routes. The strategist ordered us to capture Sun Guan, but I have no idea where he is. Let's hope Zang Ba knows," Hua Xiong said with a wry smile. Chen Xi's task wasn't difficult, but finding Sun Guan in Taishan was a challenge, which was why Hua Xiong had taken the risk to attack Zang Ba.

Zhang Fei fetched a basin of water and splashed it on Zang Ba, indifferent to concerns about wound infections or humane treatment. In this era, prisoners were treated based on the captor's discretion. Fortunately, internal energy masters like Zang Ba rarely fell ill, but when they did, it usually meant imminent death.

Coughing and spitting blood, Zang Ba opened his eyes and saw the two men standing over him. Realizing he was captured, he spat out a mouthful of blood and asked, "Was it Zhang Yide who defeated me?"

"Haha, Yide, he recognizes you! Maybe he's an old friend?" Hua Xiong teased.

"Hmph, I don't associate with bandits. He probably recognized me from my formidable skills and imposing figure," Zhang Fei retorted irritably.

"No need to guess; Zi Chuan already told us. Many might not recognize you, but they know the serpent spear. Your weapon is more famous than you are," Hua Xiong continued to tease Zhang Fei, who didn't intimidate him.

"You, how did you recognize me?" Zhang Fei grabbed Zang Ba and asked menacingly.

Hua Xiong, imitating Guan Yu's intimidating glare, looked at Zang Ba from the side. The stare sent shivers down Zang Ba's spine.

"Alright, Yide, stop joking. Leave Zang Ba to me. I have some questions," Hua Xiong said, stopping the banter.

"I'll leave him to you then. I've had my fun. I feel a bit restless after the battle, but my troops are all cavalry, not suited for mountain warfare," Zhang Fei said, tossing Zang Ba to Hua Xiong. "Looks like I'll have to join my brother in gathering refugees from Qingzhou."

In these early chaotic times, pure disaster relief efforts were no longer effective. People didn't trust the Han court to distribute food without strings attached. Even when news of relief reached Qingzhou, displaced people were reluctant to believe it, preferring to rely on their own efforts for survival.

Understanding this reality, Chen Xi abandoned the idea of opening granaries for free distribution, deeming it unprofitable. Why spend so much on limited returns when thousands of able-bodied individuals could generate profit elsewhere? It was a waste to turn them into dependents instead of productive workers.

Instead of opening granaries, Chen Xi implemented a work-for-relief program. Able-bodied refugees could work for their food, earning their keep and preserving their dignity. Although state disaster relief was a duty, providing jobs and food seemed more reasonable, and it stimulated commerce and hope for the future.

With this approach, Chen Xi dismissed the notion of free food distribution, focusing instead on building a new system that included some private interests. For instance, teaching refugees to build houses and offering wages they could use to purchase those houses later, or leasing land to them with flexible repayment terms. This policy aimed to instill self-sufficiency and long-term stability.

"Xuande Gong, does the treasury have enough funds for this?" Liu Bei asked, stunned by Chen Xi's ambitious plans.

Chen Xi responded with a silent smile, thinking to himself, which eye of yours saw me spending money? This isn't spending; it's moving money from the left pocket to the right pocket. After the process, the money stays in our hands, with more people to generate wealth.