

Mythical 67

Chapter 67: Not Arrogance, but Confidence

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Before the meal, Chen Xi curiously observed Lu Su. With his insight, he could easily see Mi Zhu frequently signaling Lu Su. However, Lu Su neither expressed any intention to refuse nor to join. What was going on? Was this guy here just to visit and tour?

Chen Xi was confused, and so was Lu Su himself. Though Lu Su didn't have much experience, he could tell that Liu Bei's actions were genuine and not just for show. This made Liu Bei a more suitable choice for a lord compared to the impulsive Yuan Shu.

Furthermore, with Mi Zhu already pledging allegiance, Lu Su found himself in an awkward position. Following Mi Zhu's lead and joining Liu Bei seemed like a reasonable choice. In Lu Su's view, personal virtues of a ruler were not as critical as their public virtues. As long as a ruler was willing to employ capable people, the actual governance would naturally be handled by those talented ministers.

After all, even Duke Huan of Qi once asked Guan Zhong, "Prime Minister, do you think I can become a hegemon when I love beautiful women, enjoy horse racing, hunting, and can't resist rare treasures?" Chen Xi guessed that Duke Huan's voice probably got lower and less confident as he continued speaking, feeling a bit guilty about his indulgences.

Guan Zhong's answer was interesting. Glancing at Duke Huan, he said, "It won't affect you." When Chen Xi read this part, he thought that Guan Zhong probably found these issues trivial.

Duke Huan was delighted and asked, "Then what would hinder my path to becoming a hegemon?"

This time, Guan Zhong answered solemnly, "Not understanding the virtuous, knowing them but not employing them, employing them but not trusting them, and trusting them but allowing petty people to interfere. These are the things that hinder you, my lord."

Hearing this, Duke Huan entrusted Guan Zhong with the administration of the state, and indeed, he became a hegemon.

Similarly, Lu Su believed in Guan Zhong's principles. The world could not be governed by one person alone. A ruler's job was to select and employ the talented. As long as the ruler kept the well-being of the state in mind, his personal flaws were secondary. The state would remain the same, with the most that could happen being some inconvenience for the ministers.

Having seen Liu Bei's reliance on the young and capable Chen Xi for the administration of Taishan, Lu Su was very satisfied with Liu Bei's approach. This was the epitome of a wise ruler in his mind. Age was not a barrier; ability was what mattered. Promoting the capable and demoting the inept were timeless principles.

As for the ruler's personal virtues, Lu Su had no excessive demands. Whether kind-hearted or indulgent, as long as the ruler employed capable people, the state would still run effectively. The officials might be slightly troubled, but they wouldn't mysteriously disappear without a trace.

Because of these beliefs, after witnessing Liu Bei and Chen Xi's conduct, Lu Su had already approved of Liu Bei. However, he was still conflicted by his initial plan to observe for a longer period before making any decisions. Now, joining immediately seemed a bit rushed to him.

"Zichuan, you entertain Zijing. I'm sure you both have much to discuss. Zizhong, if you don't mind, please stay the night. Zhongkang," Liu Bei said with a smile. Finally understanding Chen Xi's hints, he made this rather unconventional arrangement.

"Thank you, Xuande Gong," Chen Xi smiled slightly. He was eager to know how a renowned statesman like Lu Su would evaluate his policies in Taishan—whether they were good or bad, and what flaws there might be.

Leaving Liu Bei's residence, Lu Su finally snapped back to reality and looked at Chen Xi, cupping his hands in salute. "Chen Junshou truly has Xuande Gong's favor..."

The moment he started speaking, Lu Su realized something was off. Since meeting Liu Bei and Chen Xi, he had never heard Chen Xi refer to Liu Bei as his lord. Moreover, when they greeted them earlier, Chen Xi only stood half a step behind Liu Bei, not directly following him. Lu Su smiled wryly, wondering why he hadn't noticed this simple fact. Indeed, the simplest methods are often overlooked.

"You and I are of similar age. How about we address each other by our courtesy names?" With that, Chen Xi removed the crown from his head, showing sincerity.

Lu Su was taken aback. He knew about the crown-removal ceremony, which symbolized an equal and unrestricted exchange, but doing it on the street seemed overly casual. Still, he didn't comment, instead silently removing his own crown. "Forgive my rudeness. Is Zichuan always so unconventional?"

"My head was just itchy," Chen Xi said casually, scratching his head and then pressing the crown back on.

"Hahaha, Zichuan, you truly are a unique character," Lu Su laughed. Without the constraints of social norms, he found the situation amusing.

"Let's go to my place for tea. You can tell me your thoughts on Taishan," Chen Xi suggested, shaking out his hair with a smile.

"Alright, I have many questions for you, Chen Zichuan!" With no restrictions, Lu Su responded boldly.

"Then let's have a good debate and see if you, the renowned Lu Zijing, can out-argue me, the Taishan Chen Zichuan!" Chen Xi laughed heartily.

Chen Xi and Lu Su sat down, and soon Chen Lan brought the dishes. Fan Jian stayed for a brief moment and then left, closing the door behind her.

"When I first saw you, Lu Zijing, I knew you would have questions for me. Show me what you've got. Unfortunately, I don't have any good snacks. Let's make do with this," Chen Xi poured a cup of fermented rice wine. "I don't have any proper alcohol. Drink this; it's sweet lately."

"Zichuan is so certain I would have questions?" Lu Su smiled. "Aren't you afraid I might just flatter you?"

"I accept flattery too. After all, these are my achievements. With the granaries filling up and soon distributing ritual codes, what's wrong with accepting some praise?" Chen Xi joked. "When I, Chen Zichuan, do something, I accept the accolades for the good and take responsibility for the bad."

"As for why I'm certain you have questions, it's simple. Any strategist worth his salt passing through Taishan without considering its implications is not a true strategist. I, Chen Zichuan, am not belittling the world but am confident that what I've done here is enough to spark the intellect of any wise person passing by." Chen Xi exuded confidence. "Those who can identify the problems are undoubtedly the wise of the world. Those who sense something but can't pinpoint it are the backbone of the nation. As for those who only skim the surface, they are mere mediocrities!"