

Great Ming 1321

Chapter 1321 Big Brother Only Needs to Fight

Chen Qianhu was the first to charge through the breach in the wall.

Behind him came six hundred soldiers from the Guyuan Frontier Army.

Among all the units of the Gao Village militia, these six hundred men were the most terrifying and the strongest.

They were masters of cold weapon combat.

After joining Gao Village, they had also learned how to fight with firearms.

And deep inside their minds still remained the traditional frontier soldier mentality of chasing battle merits and reward money.

Because of that, when they fought, they were far less gentle than the other militia units.

The moment the six hundred monsters rushed through the breach, they all raised their firearms.

Six hundred guns fired blindly into the smoke-filled city.

No one could see anything through the dust anyway.

So why bother aiming?

Just shoot first.

After firing a volley, they casually pulled out grenades and tossed them into the thick smoke ahead.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

The smoke only grew thicker.

Suddenly, from behind a broken section of wall, a squad of Zu Dashou's soldiers rushed out.

Each of them held a long spear.

They formed a small spear formation of several dozen men, intending to block the breach.

Under normal circumstances, firearm troops would have shot them down easily.

But right now the battlefield was covered in dust and smoke.

No one saw them coming.

By the time they burst through the smoke, they ran straight into Chen Qianhu.

Chen Qianhu bared his teeth and roared.

"Where is Zu Dashou?"

The spear soldiers were startled.

Several dozen spears thrust toward him at the same time.

Even Chen Qianhu could not fight dozens of spears head on.

He immediately rolled backward across the ground.

While rolling, he calmly lit a grenade and left it on the ground where he had just been.

The spear soldiers chased after him.

They stepped right onto the grenade.

BOOM!

The explosion blasted them into chaos.

Most of them fell to the ground, wounded or dead.

Only a few lucky ones remained standing in confusion.

Chen Qianhu seized the chance.

He jumped up.

One slash cut down a soldier.

Another thrust stabbed a second one to death.

Then he pointed his blade at the last terrified soldier.

"Where is Zu Dashou?"

The man was trembling in fear.

He quickly pointed toward a direction hidden within the smoke.

Chen Qianhu nodded.

"Thanks."

Then he turned and ran toward that direction without killing him.

The soldier blinked in confusion.

You are not killing me?

You are even turning your back to me?

Is this not suicide?

He raised his spear and prepared to stab Chen Qianhu from behind.

Suddenly pain exploded in his lower back.

A blade pierced through his waist and came out of his abdomen.

The attacker even twisted the knife half a circle inside.

The soldier turned his head.

Only then did he realize that Chen Qianhu's subordinates had already arrived.

The man who stabbed him leaned closer and whispered in his ear.

"I was going to capture you and send you to labor reform."

"But you insisted on seeking death."

"Well, that saves me some trouble."

The spear soldier's vision went dark.

He collapsed to the ground.

The six hundred Guyuan Frontier soldiers poured into the city.

Right behind them came Cao Bianjiao leading more than two thousand Guanning Cavalry.

Lu Xiangsheng was not willing to fall behind either.

He waved his hand.

Three thousand Tianxiong Army soldiers charged in as well.

Six thousand troops surged into the city at once.

Zu Dashou's soldiers had just been stunned by the explosion.

There was no way they could resist such an assault.

Small battles erupted everywhere near the wall.

Before long, some of Zu Dashou's soldiers began surrendering.

They knelt by the roadside, begging for mercy.

Chen Qianhu kept searching for Zu Dashou as he fought his way forward.

He entered the city streets.

Only then did he suddenly realize something.

Damn.

What if the fighting dragged innocent civilians into it?

But then he quickly noticed something strange.

The houses in Jinzhou City were completely empty.

There were no civilians at all.

Not even rats.

Only spiders, centipedes, and other crawling creatures lived inside the abandoned homes.

The wooden doors were rotten.

One kick could shatter them.

Spiders hurriedly pulled back their silk threads and hid in the center of their webs.

Seeing this scene, Chen Qianhu suddenly remembered something.

The civilians had all been eaten.

In the story A Small Soldier of the Ming Army at Daling River, it described how Zu Dashou's troops, when trapped by the Qing army at Daling River City, had eaten all the civilians inside the city.

Chen Qianhu had thought that only happened at Daling River.

He never expected Jinzhou City to be the same.

He roared in fury.

"Zu Dashou!"

"Get out here!"

Suddenly a door beside the street burst open.

A Jinzhou soldier jumped out and swung a blade at Chen Qianhu's back.

CLANG!

The blade struck his back.

But Chen Qianhu wore armor made of aluminum alloy.

The blade bounced off harmlessly.

Chen Qianhu swung backward with his own blade and cut the attacker down.

Then he shouted loudly.

"Everyone listen!"

"There are no civilians left in this city!"

"They were all eaten by these bastards!"

The Tianxiong Army soldiers who had followed behind gasped.

"What?"

"Is the northeast really this brutal?"

The Guanning Cavalry, however, looked much calmer.

"This is the frontier."

"In places like this, all kinds of scum exist."

"The laws of any country can be followed or ignored here."

"Hiss..."

"Then kill these beasts!"

"Forget capturing them for labor reform."

"People who eat humans deserve nothing but death!"

Soon the sound of doors being kicked open echoed everywhere.

Soldiers searched through houses, dragging out hidden Jinzhou troops.

Shouts and the clash of weapons spread across several streets.

Chen Qianhu kept cutting down enemies while asking them where Zu Dashou was.

Finally he chased the trail all the way to the north gate of the city.

The gate had just been opened.

Zu Dashou was mounted on a fine horse, preparing to escape.

Chen Qianhu cursed.

"Escape my ass."

He pulled out a firearm.

BANG!

The gunshot rang out.

Zu Dashou's horse screamed and reared up.

It threw him off its back.

His bodyguards quickly rushed over to help him up.

By the time he stood again, Chen Qianhu and a group of Guyuan Frontier soldiers were already standing before him.

There was nowhere left to run.

Zu Dashou drew his blade.

His bodyguards did the same.

Chen Qianhu sneered.

The Guyuan soldiers also drew their blades.

Both sides wore Ming army uniforms.

The only difference was that the Gao Village soldiers all carried small decorations in the colorful symbols of Dao Xuan Tianzun.

The atmosphere became tense.

Heavy.

Oppressive.

If anyone made the first move, it would immediately turn into a massive brawl.

Then suddenly...

One of the Guyuan soldiers muttered.

"Damn. I suddenly can't tell whether we are the good guys or the bad guys."

"Why does it feel like we are following Zu Dashou while attacking Ming troops?"

Another soldier laughed.

"The real Ming soldiers over there even have square faces. They look like honest men."

"Honestly, I am starting to wonder whether we are the good guys or the villains."

Zu Dashou blinked in confusion.

"???"

Chen Qianhu spat angrily.

"This is not the time for jokes!"

"Wait a minute..."

He suddenly remembered something important.

"Where is the reporter?"

"Did our reporter follow us in?"

"If nobody records me killing Zu Dashou, how will anyone prove that I am the good guy?"

At that moment, a soft voice came from behind.

"I am here. I am here."

It was Zhou Daya.

"Brother Chen just focus on fighting."

"Your little sister is filming everything."

Chen Qianhu's spirit soared.

Combat power increased by 320 percent.

Chapter 1322 Zu Dashou, Cut Him Down

Zu Dashou's expression darkened slowly, the kind of expression a seasoned general wore when something felt fundamentally wrong, not because of danger, but because the situation itself made no sense.

He had been surrounded.

That much was clear.

Yet instead of pressing the advantage, the enemy had started chatting like they were attending some casual gathering, and to make matters worse, there was even a soft looking young woman standing off to the side, speaking in a gentle, almost syrupy tone as if she had wandered into the wrong scene entirely.

What kind of battlefield was this supposed to be?

Did they think he was a joke?

A surge of anger rose in his chest as his thoughts spiraled, his pride as one of Liaodong's famed commanders flaring up like dry grass catching fire.

He was one of the so called three great generals of Liaodong, standing alongside He Kegang and Zhao Shuaijiao, and if not for the bizarre and unreasonable firearms these people had pulled out of nowhere, Jinzhou City would not have fallen even if Hong Taiji himself had come knocking.

And now these people dared to treat him like this.

The insult cut deeper than any blade.

"Kill them!" he roared, his voice exploding across the battlefield as his patience finally snapped.

The personal guards around him surged forward at once, their movements sharp and decisive, the kind of discipline forged through countless real battles.

The moment they moved, the Guyuan Frontier Army on the opposite side reacted instantly, rushing forward in a wave that felt less like soldiers and more like a sudden landslide.

Steel clashed against steel, blades ringing out in rapid succession as the fight erupted without hesitation.

Not a single shot was fired.

Blades met blades, sparks jumping in the air as men collided head on.

Zhou Daya tilted her head slightly, her soft voice carrying a trace of genuine confusion that somehow remained completely sincere even in the middle of chaos.

"Eh, we clearly have matchlock guns, so why are the brothers all using swords?"

Li DaoXuan appeared beside her as if he had always been there, his presence as casual as someone strolling through a marketplace instead of standing in the middle of a battlefield.

"At a moment like this, using blades feels more romantic," he said, spreading his hands with an expression that suggested he had just delivered a profound truth.

Zhou Daya blinked, her concern immediately overriding any attempt to understand his logic.

"But that's dangerous," she said softly. "Master, shouldn't you stop them?"

Li DaoXuan shrugged, looking entirely unconcerned.

"If I step in now and tell them to switch to guns, it might hurt their feelings," he replied. "Wounds are a badge of honor for men, so what if they get cut a couple of times..."

He was still speaking in that carefree tone when his eyes suddenly shifted, catching a glimpse of something that made his expression stiffen for just a fraction of a second.

A Guyuan soldier had just taken a hit.

The blade came dangerously close to his neck, missing by mere inches as the soldier twisted his body at the last moment, the strike slamming into his shoulder armor instead.

The aluminum alloy plate held, deflecting the attack with a dull clang that sent the enemy blade bouncing away.

The soldier himself did not seem particularly shaken, his body already moving again as if near death moments were just part of his daily routine.

For him, death was just another possibility in war.

For Li DaoXuan, however, it was something else entirely.

Those were his people.

His tiny people.

A flicker of anger flashed across his face as he stepped forward without hesitation, his body slipping straight into the chaos of clashing blades.

A Jinzhou soldier thrust his weapon toward the back of a Guyuan soldier, aiming for the kidney with lethal precision.

Li DaoXuan stepped in between them as naturally as someone stepping into shade on a hot day, placing himself directly in the path of the attack.

The blade sank into his abdomen with a wet sound.

He looked down at it for a moment, then lifted his head and grinned.

A slow, unsettling grin.

The Jinzhou soldier froze.

Anyone would freeze.

The man he had just stabbed was smiling.

Behind Li DaoXuan, the Guyuan soldier had already turned around, his eyes widening as he realized what had just happened, a surge of emotion rushing through him so fast it almost broke his composure.

He swung his blade in a clean arc, striking down the stunned attacker in one motion.

Li DaoXuan moved again, stepping left to block another strike, then right to intercept a different blade, at one point even grabbing a weapon with his bare hand, his actions less like fighting and more like deliberately tilting the balance.

It was not a fair fight anymore.

The Guyuan Frontier Army already had better food, better rest, and better training, their physical condition giving them a natural advantage.

Now they also had someone interfering directly, skewing every exchange just enough to tip the outcome.

The result was inevitable.

Within moments, Jinzhou soldiers were falling one after another, their formation collapsing under pressure that kept increasing without pause.

Soon, only two figures remained standing in active combat.

Chen Qianhu.

And Zu Dashou.

As a commanding general, Zu Dashou rarely fought on the front lines, his reputation built more on strategy than personal combat, and while he was far from weak, he was not exceptional compared to hardened frontline fighters.

Chen Qianhu, on the other hand, had spent recent years immersed in the colorful distractions of life, filming, signing autographs, and drifting toward a more command oriented role, his martial skills no longer as sharp as they once were.

When the two clashed, the result was unexpectedly... underwhelming.

To the surrounding soldiers, it looked less like a duel between generals and more like two amateurs stubbornly refusing to admit they were outmatched.

The Guyuan soldiers, now relaxed with victory already in hand, began to cheer from the sidelines.

"Zu Dashou, come on, put some strength into it!"

"Don't lose this one, or we're going to look down on you!"

"Zu Dashou, cut him!"

Zu Dashou's mind stalled.

Why were the enemy soldiers cheering for him?

He was fighting their commander.

Shouldn't they be cheering for their own side?

Was this some kind of psychological tactic?

Chen Qianhu's face darkened with rage.

"Damn it, all of you shut up!" he roared.

Zu Dashou thought grimly that this made perfect sense, because any commander would be furious if his own troops were cheering for the enemy.

Chen Qianhu lunged forward, his blade slicing through the air.

Zu Dashou dodged narrowly.

The crowd erupted.

"Ah, what a pity, Zu Dashou!"

He swung back instinctively, forcing Chen Qianhu to dodge in return.

"Beautiful move, Zu Dashou!"

Confusion piled on top of confusion, pressing down on his mind like a weight he could not shake off.

In the middle of combat, his thoughts began to drift, trying to make sense of something that refused to be understood.

That single moment of distraction was enough.

A fist suddenly filled his vision.

"Bang!"

The impact landed squarely on his face, sending him stumbling backward as pain exploded across his senses.

"Nice punch, Zu Dashou!" the crowd shouted.

"I'll kill you all!" he roared in fury.

Another punch slammed into his face before he could finish the sentence, cutting him off mid curse.

His body tilted backward, balance breaking as he began to fall.

Chen Qianhu stepped forward, his blade swinging down, only to be stopped by the protective mirror plate on Zu Dashou's chest.

"Catch this, Zu Dashou, here's a hammer!" someone shouted from the side.

Zu Dashou instinctively reached out.

Another voice immediately snapped back.

"Why are you reaching for it, you idiot, that's for Zu Dashou!"

His hand closed on empty air.

Chen Qianhu grabbed the hammer.

Then he brought it down.

Hard.

The blow struck Zu Dashou's chest with a heavy thud, the kind of impact that made even bystanders wince.

Zu Dashou let out a hoarse cry, rolling across the ground in a desperate attempt to escape.

Chen Qianhu raised the hammer again, then again, his movements turning into a relentless barrage as he smashed downward like someone playing a violent game of whack a mole.

Each strike sent dirt and stone flying, some blows hitting the ground, others landing directly on Zu Dashou's body.

At first, Zu Dashou could still roll, still dodge.

After a few hits, his movements slowed.

Then stopped.

The hammer continued to fall.

Again.

And again.

Until there was nothing left to resist.

Silence settled over the battlefield in the wake of the final strike.

Chen Qianhu stood there, chest heaving, lifting the blood stained hammer high above his head as he turned toward Zhou Daya, his face breaking into a wild grin.

"Did you get that on film?" he shouted. "Did you capture it? I killed Zu Dashou with my own hands! I finally cut off this cursed fate, hahaha!"

The Guyuan soldiers erupted into cheers.

"Good! Zu Dashou wins!"

"Our Zu Dashou defeated the enemy's Zu Dashou!"

"The one on our side is clearly the real one, the other one looked like a decent guy, there's no way he could be Zu Dashou!"

Their voices overlapped in a chaotic chorus that made absolutely no sense and yet somehow fit perfectly into the absurd reality of the moment.

And just like that, with confusion, laughter, and blood all mixed together, Jinzhou City changed hands.

Chapter 1323 Am I Really That Scary?

On the walls of Jinzhou City, the banner of Lu Xiangsheng finally rose into the night wind, its fabric snapping softly as rows of oil lamps began to glow along the battlements, casting a steady golden light over stone that had only just stopped shaking from the earlier explosions.

A massive "Lu" dominated the main flag, while beside it, slightly lower but no less proud, other banners followed in formation, bearing the names of Cao Wenzhao, Chen Qianhu, and Shen Shikui, all of them swaying together as if celebrating a victory that felt strangely unreal even to the men who had just won it.

Lu Xiangsheng stood at the edge of the wall and looked toward the section that had been blown apart, where shattered stone still lay piled in uneven heaps, and as he stared at the crude breach that had ended the battle so abruptly, a faint sense of absurdity crept into his chest, because no matter how he tried to process it, the city had fallen far too easily.

Before coming here, he had prepared countless siege scenarios in his mind, refining one plan after another until even he had grown tired of his own caution, and he had even considered the possibility that if the siege dragged on for more than ten days, the enemy might send reinforcements to rescue Zu Dashou, forcing him into a desperate strategic decision that could determine the fate of the entire campaign.

All of those carefully constructed possibilities had collapsed into nothing.

The battle had begun at dusk, and by the time the night had fully settled in, it was already over.

Across the walls, soldiers of the Shanxi Army moved methodically as they lit lamps and secured positions, turning the entire city into something that resembled a sleepless stronghold rather than a recently conquered battlefield, while troops from Pi Island hauled stones and debris into place, stacking them quickly to seal off the breached section of the wall with whatever materials they could find.

The men of the Tianxiong Army, who had barely managed to contribute anything meaningful during the fighting, seemed especially restless, and so they threw themselves into the repair work with an almost excessive level of enthusiasm, as though trying to compensate for a failure that no one had actually accused them of.

Lu Xiangsheng pressed his fingers against his temple and quietly asked himself what role he had played in this entire battle, and the longer he thought about it, the more uncomfortable the silence in his mind became, because no matter how he approached the question, he could not find an answer that satisfied him.

Below the wall, a group of soldiers from the Guyuan Frontier Army passed by, humming a strange tune while laughing among themselves, their mood so light that it clashed completely with the idea of a freshly taken city.

"I am starving after that fight, do you still have any luncheon meat left, give me a piece."

"Not a chance, I am not sharing with you."

"You are stingy."

"Then give me some of your chocolate."

"I am not giving you anything."

"You are even more stingy."

They continued walking, still humming the same ridiculous melody about not having answers and searching for something that probably did not exist, their voices fading into the distance as if the war had already become a joke that they could afford to laugh about.

Lu Xiangsheng could only stand there in silence, watching them go, his expression growing increasingly complicated as the gap between expectation and reality widened further.

Not far away, Cao Wenzhao and Cao Bianjiao were leading their personal guards along the wall, inspecting positions and exchanging brief words with the soldiers they passed, and as they approached, Lu Xiangsheng quickly stepped forward to stop them.

"General Cao, General Cao."

The two men immediately returned the greeting with proper respect, their posture relaxed but attentive.

Lu Xiangsheng did not waste time on formalities, because the confusion in his mind had already reached a point where it demanded an answer.

"I do not understand this battle," he said, his tone calm but clearly troubled, "throughout the entire engagement, I barely issued any commands, and from what I observed, you did not give many detailed orders either, you only shouted simple instructions such as advance or fall back, which is completely different from the structured command systems that I am familiar with, so how exactly did this work."

Cao Wenzhao looked at him as if the answer was obvious.

"The soldiers are smart," he replied, almost casually, "they do not need to be told every detail because they already know what needs to be done."

Lu Xiangsheng blinked, clearly caught off guard by the simplicity of the explanation.

Cao Wenzhao continued, his tone steady and practical, "as long as the training is thorough enough, the soldiers will develop their own judgment, so once they step onto the battlefield, they can make decisions on their own, and the role of the commander is simply to set the overall direction, after that, they will carry out their tasks without needing constant supervision, and that is all there is to it."

Lu Xiangsheng fell silent, because what he had just heard sounded almost too straightforward to be believable, yet the events of the battle had proven that it worked, and the contradiction between theory and reality left him struggling to reconcile the two.

He finally let out a slow breath and forced himself to move on, because there were more pressing matters to deal with.

Reaching into his sleeve, he pulled out a rolled map and spread it open, revealing the terrain of Liaodong in careful detail, and then he placed his finger firmly on the position of Jinzhou.

"Now that we have taken this city, we have effectively seized the throat of the enemy's route into the Central Plains, which means we must establish defensive points and fortifications outside the city to intercept the cavalry of Dorgon when they attempt to return."

Cao Wenzhao nodded in agreement.

"The main concern," Lu Xiangsheng continued, "is that the news of Jinzhou's fall will reach the enemy soon, and Hong Taiji will likely move to retake the city and retrieve his forces, we should be able to defend Jinzhou itself, but the smaller outposts outside will not withstand a full-scale assault."

Cao Wenzhao allowed himself a faint smile.

"Your concern is valid, but in this matter, you do not need to worry too much, because the main force of Hong Taiji will not be able to come here."

Lu Xiangsheng frowned slightly, clearly unconvinced.

"And what makes you so certain of that."

"Because we are not fighting alone," Cao Wenzhao replied, "the Mongols have already begun their movements."

Lu Xiangsheng's eyes widened in surprise.

"How do you know that."

"A messenger just arrived with the information," Cao Wenzhao said, producing a letter as if it had been waiting for this exact moment, "I was about to show it to you."

The letter, which had been fabricated not long ago but now carried the weight of official intelligence, described Mongol cavalry launching raids against multiple northern positions, forcing the enemy into a state of constant harassment and preventing them from concentrating their strength.

Lu Xiangsheng read through it carefully, and as he finished, the tension in his expression eased into visible relief.

"This is excellent news, although I still wonder whether the Mongols alone will be sufficient, given their past record against the enemy, I cannot help but question their effectiveness."

At that moment, Shen Shikui stepped forward and clasped his hands.

"My lord, allow me to return to Dandong and create the appearance of an imminent attack on Shengjing, which will force the enemy to keep their main forces in place, making it even less likely for them to move against Jinzhou."

Lu Xiangsheng's face brightened immediately.

"General Shen, that would be a great help, I will leave this matter to you."

Shen Shikui exchanged a brief glance with Cao Wenzhao before departing, heading toward the coast where a fleet awaited to carry him back toward Dandong.

After considering the overall situation, Lu Xiangsheng turned back to Cao Wenzhao.

"General Cao, I will entrust Jinzhou to you for the time being, I will return to Beizhili at once to deal with Dorgon, while you block his route back to Liaodong from here, and together we will trap him between us."

Cao Wenzhao bowed.

"As you command."

Satisfied, Lu Xiangsheng made his way to the shore and boarded a transport ship, his mind already shifting toward the next phase of the campaign as he prepared to return west.

Once he had left, Cao Wenzhao and the others went to report to Li DaoXuan.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun, Lu Xiangsheng has departed."

Li DaoXuan nodded, his expression relaxed in a way that did not quite match the scale of what had just happened.

"Good, now that he is gone, we can finally operate without restraint, the village will begin transporting large quantities of supplies immediately, and we will rebuild Jinzhou into a proper frontline fortress."

As he spoke, he let out a soft sigh, and for a brief moment, the absurd confidence gave way to something quieter.

"It is a pity that there are hardly any civilians left here."

Cao Wenzhao responded without hesitation.

"There are still people hiding in the nearby mountains and forests."

Li DaoXuan's eyes lit up instantly.

"That is even better, the people of Liaodong have suffered enough over the years, especially around Jinzhou where both sides have taken turns stripping everything they could from the land, so we must bring them back with gentle policies and make sure they are properly settled."

Cao Wenzhao bowed again.

"As you command."

At that moment, Chen Qianhu appeared below the wall, walking past with a few soldiers while humming happily, his expression full of pride as if he had personally conquered the entire city.

Li DaoXuan raised his voice.

"Chen Qianhu."

Chen Qianhu immediately turned around and rushed over, dropping into a respectful bow.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun, what are your orders."

Li DaoXuan looked at him for a moment before speaking in a tone that was almost too calm.

"We are going to bring the civilians back into the city, but with you here, they will be too frightened to approach, so I am reassigning you to return to the capital and assist Sun Chuanting in handling the situation there."

Chen Qianhu froze completely as the words sank in, and then his entire body collapsed forward onto the ground in one smooth motion, as if all strength had been drained from him at once.

"Am I really that terrifying."

Chapter 1324 Lord Lu Is Too Modest

Capital. Imperial Study.

The Emperor, Zhu Youjian, sat behind his desk doing what he had been doing for what felt like a thousand years, which was reviewing memorials that never seemed to end, except today they felt very different, because instead of headaches, they brought something dangerously close to joy.

He picked up one memorial and read it slowly, his eyes narrowing at first, then widening as the numbers settled into his mind.

Tax revenue.

From a fertilizer factory.

Not a massive amount, not something that would shake the empire on its own, but it was real, structured, and more importantly, repeatable, which made it far more dangerous than a one-time windfall.

His mood rose instantly.

It was as if he had been strapped onto some invisible flying machine that launched him upward without warning, his thoughts soaring past caution and straight into optimism.

He grabbed the next memorial.

The Grand Secretary, He Fengsheng, had followed the same model, building another fertilizer factory, copying the policy structure, and paying value-added tax to the court with suspicious enthusiasm.

Another stream of income.

Another confirmation that this was not an accident.

The invisible machine accelerated.

Zhu Youjian felt like he was being carried higher and higher, his breathing slightly uneven, his fingers tightening around the paper as the idea began to form in his mind that perhaps, just perhaps, the empire had found a new way to sustain itself.

Then a eunuch rushed in.

"Your Majesty, the Grand Secretary submits another memorial."

"Bring it."

The document was placed into his hands, and he opened it immediately, scanning through lines that described something even stranger than tax revenue.

A company.

Not a traditional bureau, not a temporary labor draft, but an organized entity called the Yanjing Transportation Engineering Team, created jointly by the Shanxi Governor Wu Shen and the Grand Secretary.

Its purpose was simple on the surface and revolutionary underneath.

To build roads.

A wide official road stretching from Shanxi to the capital, funded not by the court, but by merchant donations.

Zhu Youjian paused.

Then he read it again.

Then a third time.

"Someone is paying to build roads for me," he said slowly, as if testing whether the sentence would collapse under its own absurdity.

It did not.

His mood surged again, rising to a level that felt almost physically unsustainable, as if he had climbed too high and the air itself was starting to thin.

Before he could stabilize himself, another eunuch rushed in, urgency written all over his face.

"Your Majesty, military report from Gao Qiqian regarding the Jurchen vanguard."

The word "military" snapped everything back into focus.

"Report."

"The eunuch commander Gao Qiqian led the capital garrison and encountered the cavalry of Dorgon near Shunyi. The enemy was fierce, but Gao Qiqian showed no fear and engaged them directly. The Jurchens were shaken by his momentum and were forced to withdraw."

Zhu Youjian leaned forward.

"They were stopped."

"They were stopped. Under Gao Qiqian's command, the forces have formed a defensive line. Yang Guozhu holds Shunyi, Wang Pu is stationed at the imperial estates of Shuntian, and Gao Qiqian positions himself between them. Together they have blocked the cavalry from advancing further. This time, the enemy will not even see the walls of the capital."

The Emperor exhaled slowly, tension dissolving into something close to relief.

Everything was working.

Industry was generating revenue.

Officials were adapting.

The military was holding the line.

This was what prosperity felt like, overwhelming, almost unreal, as if the world had suddenly decided to cooperate.

His thoughts rose again, dangerously high, his body struggling to keep up with the emotional surge.

And then, right on time, reality intervened.

Another eunuch stepped forward, voice cautious.

"Your Majesty, Gao Qiqian submits an impeachment. He accuses the newly appointed Minister of War, Lu Xiangsheng, of abandoning his post. While the Jurchen cavalry ravaged the northern region, the Minister led troops to Tianjin, entered the sea, and disappeared without clear orders. If not for Gao Qiqian's leadership, the enemy might have reached the capital."

The fall was immediate.

Zhu Youjian's expression darkened, the earlier momentum collapsing into suspicion.

"What is Lu Xiangsheng doing," he said, his tone low and dangerous, "I need an explanation."

Before the thought could fully settle, another voice cut in, this time confident, almost celebratory.

"Your Majesty, great news."

The speaker was Cao Huachun, his face lit with excitement that he did not even attempt to hide.

"The Liaodong situation has opened up."

Zhu Youjian blinked.

"What do you mean."

"Lu Xiangsheng, together with coastal commander Cao Wenzhao and Dongjiang commander Shen Shikui, launched a surprise assault on Jinzhou. They executed Zu Dashou for disobedience and have returned the city to court control."

Silence.

For a brief moment, the Emperor simply stared.

Jinzhou.

A place so critical that even when Zu Dashou defied the court, no one dared to force the issue, because pushing too hard might have driven him straight into the arms of the enemy.

And now it was back.

Just like that.

Zhu Youjian inhaled sharply, the emotional whiplash almost too much to process, his mind jumping from suspicion to triumph in the span of a single breath.

"This..."

He did not finish the sentence.

He did not need to.

His entire expression said everything.

The rise returned, stronger than before, carrying him beyond relief, beyond excitement, into something that felt dangerously close to losing control.

"I... cannot... breathe..."

His vision blurred.

Then he collapsed.

Chaos erupted instantly.

"Call the imperial physicians."

"Hurry."

News in the capital traveled faster than logic.

Within half an hour, the story of Lu Xiangsheng reclaiming Jinzhou had spread through streets, markets, and teahouses, evolving with every retelling.

Inside one teahouse, a storyteller slammed his fan against the table, his voice rising dramatically.

"Thus speaks the tale of the new Minister of War, Lu Xiangsheng, a man of both civil wisdom and martial power. With the Tianxiong Army under his command, he arrived before Jinzhou and shouted, 'Zu

Dashou, surrender at once.' Zu Dashou refused, and the two sides clashed beneath the city walls. With a single strike, Lu Xiangsheng took his head."

The audience gasped.

Outside, reality continued to distort itself quietly.

A few days later, Lu Xiangsheng returned.

As his forces approached the capital, they were met with a scene that looked less like a military arrival and more like a festival.

Officials.

Civilians.

Crowds lining the road, cheering loudly, their voices merging into a single overwhelming wave.

"Lu Xiangsheng."

"Lu Xiangsheng."

At the front, Cao Huachun personally stepped forward, his expression filled with admiration.

"Minister Lu, reclaiming Jinzhou has greatly strengthened the morale of the empire."

Lu Xiangsheng looked genuinely uncomfortable, his brows tightening slightly.

"This... I did not actually do much," he said honestly, his tone awkward, "it was the soldiers who performed well."

The crowd immediately reacted.

"Look at his humility."

"He does not claim credit."

"He shares it with his men."

Cao Huachun sighed, deeply moved.

"Minister Lu, your virtue is something we must all learn from."

Lu Xiangsheng hesitated, then tried again, his voice more serious this time.

"No, you do not understand. I truly did nothing. I stood there, gave no pre-battle speech, made no strategic arrangements, issued no commands. The soldiers simply fought on their own and took the city."

The reaction was immediate and completely wrong.

"That is the highest level of command."

"His strategy is beyond our comprehension."

"We are too ordinary to understand such genius."

Lu Xiangsheng stared at them.

For a moment, he considered explaining.

Then he stopped.

Because he suddenly realized that explaining would only make it worse.

He rolled his eyes slightly, exhaling under his breath.

Fine.

Let them think whatever they wanted.

Some battles, it seemed, were impossible to clarify.

Chapter 1325 We Generate Our Own Electricity

The cheers in the capital had not even fully settled when Lu Xiangsheng was already moving again, because unlike everyone else, he still remembered something that the entire court had conveniently forgotten.

Dorgon was still out there.

Still alive.

Still inside North Zhili.

And more importantly, now trapped.

"I left Cao Wenzhao in Jinzhou," Lu Xiangsheng said while walking, his pace fast, his tone steady, already shifting into command mode, "which means Dorgon no longer has access to the Mongolian route. His only path of retreat is east, through Jinzhou."

He paused briefly, letting the logic settle.

"If we crush him here, we can drive him back step by step, force him toward Jinzhou, and then close the trap from both sides."

This was not just a battle plan.

This was containment.

This was execution.

Beside him, Cao Huachun nodded repeatedly, although his expression made it very clear that he understood approximately half of what was being said and was pretending the rest.

"I will leave everything to Minister Lu," he said, then leaned in slightly, lowering his voice just enough to make it feel like something important was being revealed.

"Be careful of Gao Qiqian. That man is narrow-minded, and he is currently the one dealing with Dorgon."

Lu Xiangsheng did not even slow down.

"I am not interested in him," he replied, his tone flat, as if dismissing something that did not qualify as a problem.

And he meant it.

Because compared to what he had just experienced at Jinzhou, where reality itself had decided to stop following logic, dealing with a petty eunuch felt almost refreshingly straightforward.

He immediately sent messengers.

"To Yang Guozhu and Wang Pu," he ordered, "the Jurchens cannot launch a large-scale invasion anymore. Even if reinforcements come, they will be stopped at Jinzhou, assuming they come at all, which they likely will not. Begin coordinating immediately. We close the net on Dorgon."

The net was tightening.

Whether Dorgon knew it or not was a separate question.

And knowing the current state of reality, there was a non-zero chance that even if he did know, it would not help him.

Far away.

Sichuan. Chengdu.

If the north was tightening into a battlefield, then the southwest was expanding into something entirely different, something that did not look like war, yet carried consequences just as decisive.

The Xicheng railway was fully operational now.

Not just for vehicles.

For trains.

The once legendary Shu roads, said to be harder than climbing to heaven, had been turned into something almost casual, something that people could cross while sitting comfortably, watching mountains pass by like scenery instead of obstacles.

The Mingyue Gorge section had become a spectacle.

A destination.

People came not because they needed to travel, but because they wanted to see it.

Merchants from Shaanxi.

Wealthy families from Sichuan.

All of them boarding trains just to witness what they called a miracle.

A mountain cut open.

A path where none should exist.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun used immortal magic to open the mountain," someone would say, half joking, half believing.

They did not understand it.

That was the point.

Understanding was optional.

Awe was mandatory.

And with the railway came something else.

People.

A lot of people.

From Gao Village, the blue hats began to arrive in waves, bringing with them not just labor, but systems, methods, and an entirely different way of thinking about production.

Factories rose rapidly.

Fertilizer plants.

Textile mills.

Steel works.

Steam engine workshops.

What had once been a region defined by geography was now being redefined by industry.

At Dujiangyan, a group had gathered.

At the front stood Song Yingxing, the chief scientist of Gao Village, his expression calm, almost pleased, as he looked at the flowing water with the eyes of someone who was not seeing a river, but potential.

Behind him stood a group of researchers, along with two familiar figures.

Ji Menghan.

Mo Li.

Factory managers.

Electric light.

Electric fan.

Both of them specialists in using electricity.

Which was currently a problem.

Song Yingxing turned slightly, smiling.

"Your factories cannot scale here," he said, his tone relaxed but precise, "because Dao Xuan Tianzun has not provided solar panels in this region."

Ji Menghan nodded, a hint of regret in her expression.

Mo Li crossed his arms, equally dissatisfied.

They both understood the issue.

No power.

No production.

Simple.

"But that problem," Song Yingxing continued, his smile widening slightly, "is about to be solved."

Both of them looked up.

"How," Ji Menghan asked immediately, interest overriding everything else.

Song Yingxing pointed at the river.

"We generate our own electricity."

There was a brief silence.

Then Mo Li leaned forward slightly.

"You have figured out the method."

Song Yingxing shook his head.

"Not the celestial version," he said calmly, "I still do not understand those solar panels. But we do not need to copy everything perfectly to move forward."

He gestured to the researchers behind him.

"We already had electric motors, which convert electrical energy into motion. So the question was simple. Can we reverse it."

The researchers grinned.

"We found the answer in the texts left by Tianzun," one of them said, unable to hide his excitement, "and after testing, we confirmed that mechanical energy can indeed be converted into electrical energy."

Ji Menghan's eyes widened.

"So the steam engines..."

"Can generate electricity," Song Yingxing finished, nodding, "but not enough, and at the cost of burning large amounts of coal, which is inefficient at scale."

He turned back to the river.

"But this," he said softly, "this is continuous force."

Water flowed endlessly.

Reliable.

Unstoppable.

"If we use water flow to drive the system," he continued, "we can generate far more stable and larger amounts of energy, enough to support an entire city."

Understanding spread quickly.

"If this works," Mo Li said slowly, "then every major river becomes a power source."

Song Yingxing smiled.

"Exactly."

There was no hesitation after that.

Plans turned into action almost immediately.

Factories were constructed near Dujiangyan.

Generators.

Water control gates.

Systems designed to convert flow into motion, and motion into power.

At the same time, thermal power systems were also being developed as support.

Across multiple cities, generator factories began construction.

Everything moved smoothly.

Too smoothly.

Which was exactly why the problem, when it appeared, felt almost inevitable.

Early morning.

Outside Chengdu.

Inside the generator factory dormitory.

Ji Menghan and Mo Li were still asleep when the noise began.

At first it was distant.

Then louder.

Voices.

Shouting.

The unmistakable sound of conflict.

They both sat up almost at the same time, exchanging a quick glance.

Mo Li frowned.

"Someone is causing trouble," he said, confusion mixing with irritation, "it has been years since anyone dared to do that in a Gao Village factory."

Ji Menghan was already getting up.

"Let us see."

They moved quickly, heading toward the entrance.

What they saw made both of them stop.

Two groups.

Facing each other.

On one side, factory workers wearing yellow hats, tools in their hands, wrenches and screwdrivers held like improvised weapons, their expressions tense but unyielding.

On the other side, Ming soldiers in full armor.

Disciplined.

Armed.

And at the front.

A eunuch.

His posture carried authority, but his tone carried something else entirely.

Arrogance.

He pointed at the factory, his voice sharp, unnatural, as if he was used to being obeyed without question.

"Shut this place down," he said, each word deliberate, "immediately."

The air froze.

For a brief moment, no one spoke.

Ji Menghan stepped forward slowly, her gaze steady, her mind already racing through possibilities, because this was not random, and it was definitely not a misunderstanding.

Mo Li stood beside her, his expression darkening.

Because this.

This was not just interference.

This was power.

And it had just walked into their factory and demanded that reality stop working.

Chapter 1326 Utter Garbage

Mo Li stood there for a moment, still trying to process what he was looking at, his brows slowly knitting together as confusion crept across his face like fog rolling in over a river.

"A eunuch, and Ming soldiers?" he muttered under his breath, genuinely baffled. "Where did these strange people even come from?"

Ji Menghan, who had stepped into the real world far earlier than Mo Li ever bothered to, cast a quick glance at the formation ahead before lowering his voice, his tone carrying that quiet certainty that only came from dealing with too many complicated humans.

"In Chengdu, anyone who can casually command eunuchs and troops like this only points to one person," he said, pausing just enough for the weight of the answer to settle. "The Shu Prince, Zhu Zhishu."

Mo Li blinked, and then the realization hit him a second later.

"Oh... a prince?"

Ji Menghan gave a small nod, the corner of his mouth twitching as if amused by the gap between academic brilliance and real world awareness.

"You didn't do your homework before coming here, did you?" he said lightly. "The court enfeoffed Zhu Zhishu here in Chengdu, and he's the single most powerful man in this region. His assets stretch across most of the Chengdu Plain, and the richest land in Sichuan is practically all under his control."

Mo Li scratched his head, looking a little embarrassed, as if someone had just pointed out that he had spent years mastering equations but somehow forgot how society actually worked.

"My homework went into electric fans and flying balloons," he admitted. "I'm not exactly as well rounded as you, Senior Ji."

Ji Menghan laughed softly, though there was a trace of something genuine beneath it.

"I almost wish I could be like you instead."

The two of them squeezed their way to the front, pushing past workers who instinctively made room once they realized the people in charge had arrived.

Ji Menghan didn't hesitate, stepping forward with a relaxed confidence that felt almost out of place in front of armed soldiers, yet somehow made the soldiers themselves hesitate.

He smiled politely at the eunuch and gave a small nod.

"I'm the person in charge here, Ji Menghan," he said. "May I ask for your name, sir, and where you serve?"

The eunuch lifted his chin slightly, his expression carrying that familiar mix of arrogance and thinly veiled impatience.

"This humble one is surnamed Xia," he replied with a nasal tone. "You may call me Eunuch Xia. I serve as an external steward of the Shu Prince's residence."

"Eunuch Xia," Ji Menghan repeated, his smile widening just enough to signal courtesy without surrender. "An honor."

He gestured lightly toward the factory behind him, the half-built structures still echoing with the faint memory of hammering and machinery.

"I wonder what offense our factory has committed to warrant such a visit, especially one that brings along the Shu Prince's guard. This land wasn't taken from the Prince's estate. It was wasteland, personally approved for our use by Governor Wang Weizhang."

Eunuch Xia rolled his eyes so dramatically it almost felt like a performance.

"Wang Weizhang?" he scoffed. "What kind of nobody is that? Don't bring up his name in front of me."

He waved his hand dismissively, as if swatting away an annoying insect.

"This land happens to be right next to our Prince's summer retreat. His Highness has been staying there these past few days, trying to enjoy himself, and all he hears from your side is constant clanging and banging. Tell me, how is he supposed to relax like that?"

His tone sharpened as he pointed toward the factory.

"Shut it down. Immediately."

Mo Li froze for a moment, his mind short circuiting in the face of what sounded like a perfectly reasonable complaint, at least on the surface.

"Ah...?" he said, already half ready to apologize like a well meaning student who had accidentally disturbed a classroom.

Ji Menghan, however, did not look convinced.

He turned his head slightly and glanced toward the distance, where the faint outline of the Shu Prince's summer villa could be seen hugging the edge of the mountains, so far away that it looked like part of the horizon itself.

There was an old saying about mountains that looked close but could run a horse to death before you reached them, and right now that saying felt particularly relevant.

At that distance, even firing a cannon might not carry sound all the way over.

And yet, hammering noise from a construction site was somehow causing headaches?

Ji Menghan let out a short laugh, reached out, and casually pulled Mo Li a step behind him.

"The Prince has remarkable hearing," he said, his tone shifting just enough to carry a hint of mockery. "Perhaps he's the reincarnation of some legendary long ear spirit. At this distance, I could fire artillery all day and he might not hear a thing, so how exactly are we disturbing him?"

Eunuch Xia smirked, clearly enjoying himself.

"You said it yourself," he replied. "His Highness simply has excellent hearing. The sound of you breaking stones is enough to give him headaches, so stop the factory."

Ji Menghan let out another soft chuckle, and then, without warning, changed his tone entirely.

"If we wanted the Prince to not hear anything," he asked casually, "how much silver would that take?"

Eunuch Xia's face immediately shifted into a look of satisfaction, the kind of expression that appeared when someone finally stopped pretending and got to the point.

"Now you're talking," he said with a grin. "Five hundred taels."

Ji Menghan nodded slowly, as if everything had suddenly fallen into place.

"I see."

Only then did Mo Li finally catch up, the realization hitting him like a delayed explosion.

So this wasn't about noise at all.

This was extortion.

He felt his face heat up, embarrassment and anger mixing together in an awkward mess.

He had almost apologized.

He had almost believed it.

He clenched his fists.

Eunuch Xia, clearly not done, continued as if reading from a shopping list.

"And that electric motor factory over there is also too noisy, so that's another five hundred," he said.
"And that one over there, I don't even know what it does, but it's noisy too. Honestly, everything around Chengdu is noisy these days."

He spread his hands with exaggerated generosity.

"Our Prince is merciful, so he won't overcharge you. Just five thousand taels in total, and you can keep building all your factories."

Mo Li almost exploded on the spot.

Ji Menghan, however, simply reached out and lightly grabbed his arm, the gesture subtle but firm, anchoring him in place before he could do something stupid.

"Eunuch Xia," Ji Menghan said with a calm smile, "these factories are being built under the direction of Governor Wang Weizhang."

"You're bringing him up again?" Xia sneered. "I already told you, he's nothing. In front of our Prince, he doesn't even count as air. Don't think his name carries any weight here."

Ji Menghan nodded, as if conceding the point without actually conceding anything.

"Very well, then let's not mention him," he said. "These factories are being built under the guidance of Dao Xuan Tianzun."

Eunuch Xia let out a sharp laugh, the kind that carried both contempt and amusement.

"What nonsense are you spouting?" he said. "Some so called Tianzun, building a giant statue on a mountain and pretending to be divine? You might fool commoners, but you won't fool our Prince."

His expression turned cold.

"You're nothing more than a cult, just like the White Lotus, stirring trouble and deceiving the masses. Pay the five thousand taels, and our Prince might overlook your little tricks. Refuse, and he'll send a memorial to the court. When the imperial army marches into Sichuan, your entire group will be wiped out."

Mo Li's patience finally snapped.

He raised his fist, ready to swing, though the motion lacked any real threat, more academic frustration than actual violence.

Ji Menghan immediately grabbed his arm and forced it down, his voice dropping to a low whisper.

"A smart man doesn't take a loss right in front of him," he murmured. "Dao Xuan Tianzun is dealing with Liaodong right now, and Sichuan isn't under direct watch. We have workers here, not soldiers. If we clash with the Prince's guard, we lose, and people die for nothing."

Mo Li froze, the logic cutting through his anger like cold water.

Ji Menghan straightened, his smile returning as if nothing had happened.

"Five thousand taels, right?" he said cheerfully. "Give me a few days to prepare. I can't produce that much cash on the spot."

Eunuch Xia looked satisfied, nodding as though granting a generous favor.

"Three days," he said. "You have three days."

With that, he turned and left, humming to himself as he led the Shu Prince's guards away, clearly pleased with how things had gone.

Ji Menghan watched him go, the smile slowly fading from his face until only a cold, calculated expression remained.

"Notify all factories," he said quietly. "We're holding a workers' assembly."

That night, on the outskirts of Chengdu, the half completed generator factory stood under dim light, its construction temporarily halted, its wide training ground now filled with rows of seated worker representatives.

Ji Menghan stood at the front, Mo Li beside him, along with several blue hat graduate students, Governor Wang Weizhang, and a chieftain from the nearest Jiarong Tibetan tribe, the only one close enough to make the trip within a day.

He looked out over the crowd, letting the silence settle before speaking.

"Everyone," he began, his voice steady, "we're here today to discuss one man."

He paused, just long enough for anticipation to tighten across the field.

"The Shu Prince."

Before he could continue, a local worker from Sichuan suddenly shouted from the crowd, his voice loud and unrestrained.

"That bastard prince is nothing but trash!"

The words echoed across the field, and for a brief moment, the entire gathering felt like a pot just beginning to boil.

Chapter 1327 I'll Be the One Negotiating

The discussion did not begin with chaos, but it did not take long before the mood shifted into something far heavier, because once certain truths were spoken out loud, they refused to go back into silence.

Ji Menghan stood at the front, his posture relaxed yet deliberate, as if he had already calculated where this conversation would lead, and all that remained was to let everyone arrive there together.

"Oh, this worker brother," he said, gesturing lightly, his tone calm but clearly guiding the flow, "you seem to understand the Shu Prince quite well, so why don't you introduce him to everyone here."

The worker stepped forward without hesitation, his voice rising immediately, sharp and filled with long-suppressed anger that now had a stage.

"The Shu Prince is a bastard," he declared without restraint, his words landing heavily across the crowd, "greedy to the bone, squeezing tenants dry, draining them to the marrow, there is not a single filthy thing he has not done."

A wave of reaction spread instantly, not explosive, but dense, as murmurs and sharp intakes of breath overlapped into a growing sense of shared outrage.

At that moment, Sichuan Governor Wang Weizhang stepped forward, his expression weary, as if he had carried this frustration for far too long and no longer saw any reason to hide it.

"It is true," he said, his tone firm, carrying authority not from position but from experience, "and the money he takes never comes back out."

He paused briefly, allowing the weight of his next words to settle before he continued.

"When the rebel forces entered Sichuan and pressed all the way to the outskirts of Chengdu, I once urged him to release funds to recruit fighters and resist the enemy."

The crowd grew quiet, because everyone could already sense what was coming.

"He refused," Wang Weizhang said, his voice tightening, "he claimed his treasury had limits, and suggested that we dismantle his Chengyun Hall and sell it to cover military expenses."

A ripple of disbelief spread, quickly turning into bitter laughter that carried more anger than amusement.

"I was furious at the time," Wang Weizhang continued, his expression darkening, "so I told him directly that no one in the world could afford such a hall, except Li Zicheng himself when he came to take the city."

He exhaled slowly, as if reliving the absurdity.

"Even after hearing that, he still did not understand, choosing money over survival, narrow-minded to the point of stupidity."

The atmosphere thickened.

Mo Li could not hold himself back any longer, his voice filled with disbelief.

"How can someone like that even exist in this world," he said, his frustration barely contained as it pushed into anger.

A graduate researcher nearby spoke up, his tone sharper, more analytical but no less critical.

"If someone like him were asked to pay taxes in the future, he would never agree, because people like that do not see themselves as part of the system at all."

"That is obvious," another voice cut in immediately.

"When have these princes ever paid taxes," someone else added, the sarcasm clear.

"They think they are above it."

Then another worker spoke, his tone carrying a different kind of certainty.

"Look at Zhu Cunji, the Qin Prince's heir in the Liberated Zone, he already pays taxes voluntarily, and even the famously stingy Hanzhong Rui Prince has started paying properly."

"They learned from the Tianzun Texts," he continued, his voice steady, "they understand that if the state's finances collapse, the entire world follows, and once chaos begins, their wealth will not survive either."

A brief silence followed.

Then someone spoke again, more sharply than before.

"And this Shu Prince," he said, each word deliberate, "not only refuses to learn from his own relatives, but goes against the trend and comes to extort factories that are actually producing value."

That was the moment everything aligned.

Not anger alone.

But agreement.

"This kind of person must be dealt with."

"Absolutely."

"No more tolerance."

The voices overlapped, then merged, until hesitation disappeared completely.

Ji Menghan watched the shift with quiet satisfaction, because this was the exact outcome he had been guiding them toward from the beginning.

"Good," he said finally, his tone steady but carrying undeniable authority, "since everyone has reached the same conclusion, then let us show the Shu Prince what it truly means when the working class has power."

No one cheered.

No one needed to.

The decision had already been made.

Three days later, the Shu Prince Zhu Zhishu was enjoying himself thoroughly in his summer estate, surrounded by music, tea, and comfort, completely insulated from the storm that had already begun moving toward him.

The factory had stopped operating, and the five thousand taels of silver were expected to be delivered today, which left him in an exceptionally good mood.

"Eunuch Xia," he said lazily, not even bothering to look up, "why are you still standing there, take two hundred guards out and collect the silver."

Eunuch Xia bowed with a smile, his voice dripping with obedience.

"As you command, Your Highness, I will go at once."

He had barely taken a step when the noise began outside the estate, faint at first but rapidly growing louder, until a voice rang out clearly even across multiple courtyards.

"Zhu Zhishu, come out."

Then again.

"Zhu Zhishu, come out."

The Shu Prince's expression darkened instantly as anger surged up.

"Who dares to shout my name like that," he snapped, his authority reacting before his mind fully processed the situation.

A guard rushed in, panic evident in his movements.

"Your Highness, this is bad, a large group of workers has gathered at the estate gates and they are causing a disturbance."

"A group of workers," the Shu Prince repeated, his tone dismissive, as if the very idea was laughable, "and you are frightened by that."

His expression hardened.

"Mobilize the guards immediately and beat them back."

This time, he did not leave it to others.

He stood up himself.

Out of his five hundred personal guards, only two hundred had accompanied him to the summer estate, but in his mind, that was more than enough.

The guards assembled quickly and moved out with him at the center, forming a protective formation as they exited the estate.

When the gates opened, they saw only a few dozen workers standing outside, shouting loudly toward the estate.

The Shu Prince glanced at them and let out a cold laugh, because to him, this looked like nothing more than a minor nuisance.

"You ignorant fools," he shouted, his voice filled with unquestioned authority, "have you all grown tired of living."

The workers did not back down.

Instead, one of them stepped forward, his voice steady despite the pressure.

"Zhu Zhishu, you extort the factory, force it to shut down, and destroy our livelihoods, we demand that you stop immediately, allow production to resume, and from now on your estates must pay taxes like ordinary people."

For a moment, the Shu Prince simply stared, his mind struggling to process what he had just heard.

Taxes.

From him.

"This empire belongs to my family," he said slowly, disbelief turning into anger, "why would I pay taxes to myself, what kind of ridiculous logic is that."

Then he waved his hand sharply.

"Beat them."

The two hundred guards advanced immediately, pressing forward with overwhelming force.

The workers turned and ran, clearly unwilling to engage head-on.

The guards shouted loudly as they gave chase, making sure their actions were visible, as if performing for their master.

"Stop running."

"Stand still."

The chase continued as both sides moved around a hill, disappearing briefly from the Shu Prince's view.

He snorted coldly, his tone filled with contempt.

"A bunch of useless trash, running here to make noise without any real purpose."

Eunuch Xia nodded along, smiling.

"Once they are beaten, they will behave."

But before his words could settle, the guards came running back.

Not in formation.

Not in control.

They were fleeing.

"Run."

"Too many."

"Impossible."

The Shu Prince froze, confusion flashing across his face.

Then, in the next moment, the hillside erupted with movement as a massive wave of workers surged into view, their numbers stretching endlessly, filling the landscape like a flood that had broken its banks.

It was not dozens.

It was not hundreds.

It was an ocean.

The two hundred guards were swallowed instantly, their earlier confidence shattered as they ran for their lives.

The Shu Prince sucked in a sharp breath, shock finally breaking through his arrogance.

"This..."

Eunuch Xia's face turned pale, his voice trembling.

"This is bad, this is a mass uprising, Your Highness, we must retreat immediately."

They tried to escape toward the back of the estate, but the moment they turned, they saw the same thing behind them, another endless tide of workers closing in, leaving no space, no path, no possibility of retreat.

The Shu Prince's voice faltered.

"Even the back..."

There was no time left to react.

The guards rushed back instinctively and formed a protective circle around him, but it no longer mattered, because the crowd had already surrounded them completely.

"What are you trying to do," the Shu Prince shouted, panic finally breaking through his voice, "are you rebelling."

The workers did not answer immediately.

Instead, the crowd slowly parted, creating a path.

Ji Menghan stepped forward from within the sea of people, his expression calm, almost curious, as if he was observing a specimen rather than confronting a prince.

Eunuch Xia recognized him instantly, anger and fear mixing together.

"You," he snapped, "you promised five thousand taels, what is the meaning of this."

Ji Menghan did not even look at him.

His gaze remained fixed on the Shu Prince.

"Hello," he said, a faint smile forming, "feudal landlord."

The Shu Prince felt a strange sense of disorientation, because no one had ever addressed him like that before.

Ji Menghan gestured lightly toward himself.

"I am a people's entrepreneur of the new era," he said calmly, his tone carrying quiet confidence, "and I represent the emerging class, here to have a sincere and in-depth discussion with you, who represent the old class."

Then his smile widened slightly.

"You stand for outdated productive forces, while I stand for advanced ones, and right now, your side has begun dragging ours down."

The air grew heavier with every word.

"Throughout history," Ji Menghan continued, his voice steady, almost conversational, "whenever this situation appears, it leads to revolution, war, and regime change."

He paused just long enough for the meaning to sink in.

"And in most cases, the outdated side loses, while the advanced side wins, although there are rare moments when the outdated side manages to win temporarily, but even then, it will eventually be crushed beneath the wheels of history."

Chapter 1328 The Sky Is About to Change

Ji Menghan finished speaking, then paused for a brief moment as if considering whether what he had just said had actually landed, before letting out a small breath and slightly shifting his tone into something more grounded.

"I know you probably do not understand most of that," he said, his voice losing some of its abstract edge and becoming more practical, "to be honest, even I do not fully understand every layer of it myself, so there is no need for you to overthink it."

He looked straight at the Shu Prince, his gaze steady.

"You only need to understand one thing," he continued, his tone calm but firm, "if you choose to surrender and compromise now, you will lose part of your interests, but a camel that starves is still larger than a horse, which means you will still live better than most people."

He took a step forward, closing the distance just slightly, increasing the pressure without raising his voice.

"That advantage comes from your ancestors," he added, his expression turning faintly serious, "they fought to drive out invaders, they bled, they suffered, they rebuilt this land, so as their descendant, enjoying some degree of benefit is not unreasonable."

Then his tone shifted again.

"But do not take too much," he said slowly, each word landing with increasing weight, "do not treat this world as your personal toy, and do not treat the people living in it as your private slaves."

The words hung in the air.

Heavy.

But also...

Confusing.

The Shu Prince stared blankly, clearly unable to follow the deeper logic, while even many of the workers behind Ji Menghan exchanged uncertain glances, because the level of abstraction had gone slightly beyond what they were used to.

Even among the educated group, only the graduate researchers nodded along with confidence, their expressions saying that they could follow the framework, even if they did not agree with every detail.

Ji Menghan noticed it immediately.

He coughed lightly, a rare hint of awkwardness slipping through his otherwise controlled demeanor.

"Alright," he said, waving a hand slightly, "let me put it in simpler terms."

His voice sharpened.

"The sky is about to change."

That one sentence landed perfectly.

Everyone understood.

"This world will soon no longer belong to the Zhu family," he continued, his tone steady and direct, leaving no room for misinterpretation, "and as a member of that family, you now have two choices."

He raised two fingers.

"First, give up part of your existing benefits and embrace the new world."

Then he lowered one finger.

"Second, resist to the very end, and then we crush you."

He smiled faintly.

"You choose."

Behind him, the workers immediately understood this version, their confusion disappearing as clarity replaced it.

This was simple.

This was direct.

This was something they could stand behind.

"You choose," the crowd echoed, their voices merging into a unified demand that pressed down like a physical force.

The Shu Prince began to tremble.

Not from anger.

From fear.

"What do you mean the sky is changing," he said, his voice shaking as he struggled to grasp the situation, "you... what you are saying is outright rebellion, you are traitors, are you working with the rebel bandits."

Even now, he still could not see it clearly.

Because standing in front of him was not a band of wandering rebels.

It was something far more structured.

A coalition.

Workers.

Entrepreneurs.

Local power.

All aligned.

Eunuch Xia quickly leaned closer, lowering his voice so only the Shu Prince could hear.

"Your Highness, a wise man does not fight when the odds are against him," he whispered urgently, "if you refuse now, they will kill us all in an instant, so you must agree for now, delay them, then contact Wang Weizhang and gather official troops and tribal forces to eliminate them afterward."

The Shu Prince's eyes flickered.

That made sense.

He nodded slightly.

Then immediately changed his expression, forcing a smile that looked stiff and unnatural.

"Alright, alright," he said quickly, raising his voice so everyone could hear, "I agree to all your demands, I will no longer interfere with your factory, and I will ensure production continues smoothly."

He swallowed.

"As for taxes, all my lands and workshops will pay taxes just like ordinary people."

He forced a laugh.

"That should satisfy you, right."

The crowd did not immediately respond.

Then a worker suddenly shouted.

"He is lying."

Another voice followed.

"He is just stalling, once we leave, he will bring in troops to suppress us."

A third voice rose.

"Better to kill him now and end it."

The Shu Prince panicked immediately, his composure collapsing.

"No, no, no," he said quickly, his voice trembling, "I am not lying, I will pay, I will pay immediately when I return."

Ji Menghan watched him quietly for a moment, then smiled, that same calm, almost playful smile that made it impossible to tell what he was really thinking.

"Alright," he said lightly, "since you said so, we will believe you."

He tilted his head slightly.

"But do not disappoint us," he added, his tone still gentle, but carrying an unmistakable warning, "because if you lie to us, the consequences will be very serious."

"I will not lie," the Shu Prince said quickly, nodding repeatedly, "I am a man of status, my word counts."

"Good," Ji Menghan said, turning slightly toward the crowd, "everyone, return to work, the Prince has agreed not to interfere anymore."

The workers chuckled softly, their expressions strange, but they began to disperse anyway, the massive crowd gradually dissolving as if nothing had happened.

Only after everyone left did the Shu Prince finally let out a long breath, his body relaxing as relief flooded in.

"These uneducated brutes are so easy to fool," he muttered, unable to hide his contempt.

Eunuch Xia leaned in immediately.

"Your Highness, we should return and notify Wang Weizhang at once, then gather troops."

"Of course," the Shu Prince replied, his confidence quickly returning now that the immediate danger had passed.

He did not even remain at the summer estate.

The location was too exposed.

Too dangerous.

He rushed back to the city, seeking the protection of Chengdu's high and sturdy walls, because as long as he had the city, he believed he could hold out long enough for reinforcements.

As soon as he returned, he summoned Wang Weizhang and recounted everything that had happened, his tone filled with urgency.

"Gather the troops immediately," he ordered, "this rebel force is massive, tens of thousands strong."

Wang Weizhang listened with a strange expression, then nodded and left to assemble the forces.

Several days passed in a blur.

Then, one day, while the Shu Prince was casually eating fruit in his residence, the sound of noise erupted outside once again, far louder than before, filled with voices that overlapped into a roaring wave.

Eunuch Xia rushed in, his face full of excitement.

"Your Highness, Wang Weizhang has assembled the official troops, and several nearby tribal leaders have also sent their forces."

The Shu Prince's face lit up immediately.

"Excellent," he said, slamming his hand on the table with renewed confidence, "I was worried those tribal forces would refuse to come, but it seems they still understand the situation."

With troops on his side, his fear vanished.

"I will wipe those rebels out completely," he declared, his voice filled with regained arrogance.

But before his words could settle, another voice cut through the air.

Amplified.

Loud.

So loud that it seemed to echo through the entire residence.

"Shu Prince Zhu Zhishu," Ji Menghan's voice rang out clearly, carried by some unknown device that magnified it far beyond normal human limits, "you have no credibility, you agreed to our terms and then immediately broke your word, even gathering troops to suppress us."

The voice paused briefly.

"We have lost all patience with your behavior," it continued, cold and sharp, "and now, on behalf of the people, I declare you an enemy of the people."

The entire residence fell silent for a split second.

"Are you ready to face the anger of the people?"

The Shu Prince's face turned pale instantly.

"They are here again," he shouted, panic returning even faster than before, "hold them off, hold them off for a while, Wang Weizhang and the tribal forces will arrive soon."

A guard rushed in, his expression filled with terror.

"Your Highness, this is bad," he said, barely able to speak clearly, "Wang Weizhang is with them, and the tribal forces have also joined their side."

The Shu Prince froze.

"The rebel army," the guard continued, his voice shaking, "is being led by the current Sichuan commander."

"What," the Shu Prince shouted, his mind unable to process the collapse happening around him, "how is that possible?"

More loyal subordinates rushed in, their panic even more obvious.

"Your Highness, most of the guards have defected," one of them said urgently, "seeing the overwhelming force outside, they have either surrendered or switched sides."

The Shu Prince felt his legs go weak.

This was no longer a negotiation.

This was the end of his control.

He rushed up to the highest tower in his residence and looked out.

What he saw made his entire body go cold.

Outside, the area was completely filled.

Workers.

Civilians.

Farmers.

Official troops.

Tribal forces.

All gathered together, surrounding the residence from every direction, their voices rising in unison.

"Why do we have to pay taxes while the Prince does not."

"We refuse to accept this."

"He lies and betrays his promises, and even tries to suppress us with force."

"The army belongs to the people."

"I no longer believe in this Prince."

The Shu Prince could not hold it anymore.

"I was wrong," he shouted desperately, his voice cracking, "I was wrong."

But this time, it was too late.

"Now you admit your mistake," Ji Menghan's voice echoed again, calm but completely devoid of mercy, "but your previous words were like air, and your current words carry no weight either."

There was a brief pause.

Then came the command.

"Militia, move in."

The official troops under Wang Weizhang, now reorganized as the new people's militia of Sichuan, surged into the residence without hesitation.

Chapter 1329 I Want to Apply for a Document

Keeping the common folk from charging in was not mercy.

It was precaution.

They had seen this story before.

Back during the Baishui uprising of Wang Er, things had started with righteous anger too. But once untrained crowds got swept up in numbers, reason snapped like a rotten rope. Discipline vanished. Order collapsed. People who were supposed to be fighting for justice turned into something worse than bandits.

Gao Family Village had no intention of letting history repeat itself.

Mass movements were allowed.

But they had to stay rational.

Workers and farmers without military training, once packed together in huge numbers, could easily spiral out of control the moment fists started flying. Chaos would follow. And from chaos came decay.

They refused to let the people become beasts.

They refused to let them become roving bandits.

That kind of rot would poison the nation itself.

So this time, the ones who moved forward were not the crowd.

It was the Sichuan People's Militia.

They advanced in formation.

At the front charged Jiang Daliang.

He sprinted ahead, full of momentum, and delivered a heroic kick straight into the gates of the Prince of Shu's residence.

The gate did not move.

Instead, the recoil sent him flying backward. He landed flat on his backside with a thud that echoed with dignity lost.

Behind him, the rest of the militia rushed up.

Boom.

This time, the gates shattered into splinters.

In the chaos, Jiang Daliang scrambled back to his feet as if nothing had happened. He grabbed a squad and sprinted straight toward the inner courtyard. Within moments, they secured the entrance to the women's quarters.

"No one goes in," he barked.

That area was off limits.

As for everything else...

Well, not exactly a free for all.

Ji Menghan stood with a loudspeaker in hand, his voice blasting across the compound.

"No hitting! No smashing! No looting!"

"You are the People's Militia, not bandits!"

"All seized property goes to public accounts!"

"Say it with me, you are not bandits!"

The human tide surged through the Prince's residence like a flood, but it was a controlled flood.

Most of the Prince of Shu's wealth was confiscated.

A small portion was deliberately left behind, just enough for his family to survive.

As for the Prince himself, along with Eunuch Xia and the rest of the leadership...

Charges were clear.

Wealth without conscience. Oppression of the people.

Sentence.

Fifty years of labor reform at Longquan Mountain Camp in Chengdu.

Whether they would live long enough to see the outside world again...

That was another question.

Back in Gao Family Village.

Zhu Yujian, the former Prince of Tang, sat quietly with a book in his hands.

Forms of Government and Structures of Power.

He was completely absorbed.

Ever since the chaos at the Chang'an factory, he had moved here and thrown himself into study at the highest institution, Thirty-Two Middle School. The so called heavenly texts.

He had always been like this.

Even when he was imprisoned, starving, on the brink of death, he never stopped reading.

Focus was his greatest weapon.

Where others finished one book, he finished a row.

Where others finished a shelf, he finished a section.

By the time someone worked through a bookcase, he was already halfway through the library.

He avoided science texts.

Not because they were unimportant, but because he understood their depth. Each one could consume a lifetime. That was not where his strength lay.

Instead, he read politics. Economics. Governance. History.

The more he read, the clearer one truth became.

The Ming Dynasty was rotten to its core.

Covered in sores. Diseased beyond simple cure.

No amount of patching would fix it.

It might have to be torn down and rebuilt from nothing.

Every time that thought surfaced, it sent a chill through him.

If even he, a prince of the imperial clan, could think like this...

Then what hope did the dynasty have?

He was still lost in thought when movement in the distance caught his eye.

Crowds were gathering in the main square outside the central fortress.

Zhu Yujian blinked.

"The news broadcast is starting."

For someone of his status, news mattered even more than it did to common folk.

He quickly set his book aside and hurried to the square.

After a few advertisements, the broadcast began.

The screen lit up.

What appeared made his heart jump.

The People's Militia storming the Prince of Shu's residence.

The Prince being dragged out.

Sent to a labor reform camp.

Zhu Yujian sucked in a sharp breath.

He forced himself to keep watching, listening as the reporter explained everything from beginning to end.

When it was over, he let out a long sigh.

"I see..."

He was royalty.

And yet, he could not deny it.

The militia had done the right thing.

The princes across the land represented outdated productive forces. Relics clinging to a dead system. Worse, they actively tried to sabotage the new one.

Their downfall was deserved.

Still...

That was his family.

Seeing the Prince of Shu dragged away like that left a bitter taste in his mouth.

He stood there in silence for a long moment.

Then his eyes sharpened.

Decision made.

He turned and walked straight to the main hall of Gao Family Village, stopping before Gao Yiye.

"Saintess," he said, bowing slightly. "I wish to submit a request to Dao Xuan Tianzun."

Gao Yiye tilted her head, curious.

"A request? For what?"

Zhu Yujian exhaled softly.

"The Book of Life and Death, held by King Yama."

Gao Yiye blinked.

Zhu Yujian continued, voice steady but heavy.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun surely knows the fate awaiting this decaying dynasty. When it falls, the end of the Zhu imperial clan will not be kind."

"I want to see it."

"I want to know when, where, and how each of us meets our end."

"With that knowledge, I can persuade my relatives to surrender their privileges willingly."

"So they do not follow the same path as the Prince of Shu."

Gao Yiye listened, then nodded slowly.

"I see. That is... a reasonable request."

Before she could say more, the embroidered image of Dao Xuan Tianzun on her chest suddenly came to life, smiling.

"Interesting."

"Very well, Zhu Yujian. I grant your request."

"At sunrise tomorrow, you will receive the Book of Life and Death."

"But your clan is too large. I am not going to look up every single name."

"I will give you a few examples. The rest is up to you."

Zhu Yujian's eyes lit up.

"Thank you, Tianzun!"

Jinan.

Prince of De's residence.

Zhu Youshu was under immense pressure.

Not the kind you could see.

The kind you could feel in the air.

Jinan was changing.

Even though the rebel forces that once tried to attack the city had been repelled, most of Chuang Wang's hundred thousand troops were still here.

Alive.

Intact.

Working.

Some were building roads.

Some were laying bricks.

Some worked as carpenters.

Others as blacksmiths.

An entire army of former rebels had transformed into laborers, wandering the city like ordinary citizens.

It felt... wrong.

Or maybe not wrong.

Just unfamiliar.

More unsettling was this.

They no longer seemed to listen to the government.

The magistrate of Jinan had been placed under house arrest.

Zhu Youshu had not seen him in days.

In his place, governance was now handled by a man named Liu Maopao, along with a group of strange scholars.

They dressed like traditional literati.

Long robes. Scholar caps.

But when they spoke, something was off.

No flowery nonsense.

No empty phrases.

No endless quoting of classics.

Their words were sharp. Direct. Efficient.

They got things done.

And those former rebels?

They thrived under this system.

Inside Jinan, Zhu Youshu could feel the transformation day by day.

Buildings were changing.

People were changing.

Fewer talked about the imperial court.

Fewer mentioned the Emperor.

Instead, new words echoed through the streets.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun."

"Village Committee."

A new force was rising.

It was dragging the city forward at full speed.

And it had no intention of bringing him along.

If anything, it seemed... annoyed by his presence.

Zhu Youshu stood in his residence, hands clasped behind his back.

His heart pounded.

This...

This was bad.

Very bad.

He was starting to panic.

Chapter 1330 We're Here to Save You

Zhu Youshu tried to send a messenger to the capital for help.

The result came back faster than expected.

The messenger had barely stepped out of the residence before he was politely escorted back by a few Jinyiwei. Their faces carried faint, strange smiles.

"The capital is dealing with the Jianzhou problem," one of them said casually. "People from the Prince's residence should not wander around."

Zhu Youshu understood immediately.

He was under house arrest.

Just like the magistrate of Jinan.

No message was getting out.

Not unless his five hundred personal guards could somehow fight their way through the hundred thousand rebels outside.

Even a child would know the answer to that.

Impossible.

Even if those hundred thousand rebels had no weapons, no armor, and came barehanded, they could drown his guards in spit alone.

Zhu Youshu's scalp went numb.

He was panicking.

Right then, his trusted eunuch hurried in.

"Your Highness, several men wearing bamboo hats have come to visit."

"Bamboo hats?" Zhu Youshu frowned. "What kind of description is that?"

"Men wearing bamboo hats," the eunuch repeated weakly.

"I am not an idiot," Zhu Youshu snapped. "I am asking who they are. If they want to see me, they should state their names. What kind of nonsense is 'bamboo hat men'?"

The eunuch's face twisted.

"I asked... but they refused to say. They also said that if they revealed their identities to me, I would have to be silenced."

Zhu Youshu froze.

That was not just strange.

That was terrifying.

He understood now.

These people were not ordinary visitors. They were key figures among Liu Maopao's faction. High level rebel leaders.

If he refused to meet them, he might not live to regret it.

"Let them in."

A few minutes later, a small group entered the room.

They sat down in a row before him.

The man in the lead spoke first, deliberately roughening his voice.

"Dismiss everyone. No one is allowed near this room."

Zhu Youshu's heart tightened.

Was that a joke?

If he sent everyone away and these men suddenly decided to kill him, he would not even have time to scream.

The leader chuckled softly, as if reading his thoughts.

"Relax. If we wanted you dead, the hundred thousand outside would have stormed in already."

Zhu Youshu exhaled slowly.

That... made sense.

He waved his hand.

"Everyone leave. I will speak with these gentlemen alone."

Guards. Eunuchs. Servants.

All of them withdrew.

The room fell silent.

Only Zhu Youshu and the bamboo hat men remained.

Then the leader reached up and removed his hat.

A face in his fifties appeared.

Old, but not dignified.

There was something unmistakably frivolous about him, the kind of expression that spoke of a lifetime spent indulging rather than restraining.

Zhu Youshu stared.

Something felt familiar.

Too familiar.

Then it hit him.

A member of the Zhu clan.

The man smiled.

"My name is Zhu Cunji."

Zhu Youshu jolted upright.

"The heir of the Qin Prince. The number one feudal house under heaven."

Another man removed his hat.

"I am the Prince of Tang. Zhu Yujian."

Another.

"I am the Prince of Rui. Zhu Changhao."

Another.

"I am the Prince of Chu. Zhu Huadie."

One after another, they revealed themselves.

Zhu Youshu was completely stunned.

"You... all of you left your fiefs and came here to see me... I mean... to see your junior?"

He corrected himself quickly.

These men were all senior to him in generation.

He could not put on airs in front of them.

Zhu Cunji leaned back, completely at ease.

"We came to save you."

Zhu Youshu blinked.

"Save me? You have a way to wipe out the rebels outside and get me out of here?"

"No," Zhu Cunji said calmly. "Not that kind of saving."

He reached into his sleeve and pulled out a sheet of paper, slapping it down on the table.

"This is a page from King Yama's Book of Life and Death."

"Dao Xuan Tianzun retrieved it from the underworld and revealed it to us."

"Take a look."

Zhu Youshu hesitated, then picked it up.

His eyes scanned the text.

"Zhu Youshu, sixth generation Prince of De. In the first month of the twelfth year of Chongzhen, Jinan falls to Qing forces. Zhu Youshu is captured. In the second month of the fifteenth year of Chongzhen, he dies beyond the frontier."

His hands trembled.

Every hair on his body stood on end.

"What... what is this nonsense?"

"It is not even the twelfth year yet. How can it already record what happens years later?"

"And dying beyond the frontier? Who would believe something like this?"

Zhu Cunji folded his hands, completely calm.

"I told you. This is the Book of Life and Death."

"If Dao Xuan Tianzun does nothing, this is your fate."

"King Yama has already written it down. When the time comes, the underworld will collect your soul accordingly."

Zhu Youshu snapped.

"Are you serious? You actually believe this?"

"Yes," all of them answered at once.

Zhu Youshu froze again.

If one person said it, he could dismiss it.

If everyone said it...

That was different.

Zhu Changhao stepped forward and handed him another sheet.

"Look at mine."

Zhu Youshu took it.

"Prince of Rui, Zhu Changhao. Fifth son of the Wanli Emperor. In the sixteenth year of Chongzhen, Chuang Wang Li Zicheng captures Xi'an. Zhu Changhao flees south under protection. In the seventeenth year, Zhang Xianzhong captures Chongqing. Zhu Changhao is captured and executed."

Zhu Youshu frowned hard.

"This is impossible. Chuang Wang is already dead."

Zhu Changhao nodded.

"Because Dao Xuan Tianzun intervened."

"If you imagine this world without his intervention, the outcome becomes much easier to believe."

Zhu Youshu went silent.

Zhu Yujian then took out another page and handed it over.

"Look at mine."

Zhu Youshu read it.

And instantly felt his scalp explode.

It described the fall of the Ming.

The rise of a new regime.

The Qing entering the Central Plains.

Then the Southern Ming.

Then Zhu Yujian himself ascending the throne.

And what followed after that...

He did not even dare finish reading.

"This is madness," Zhu Youshu muttered. "How can you believe something like this? It is clearly fabricated."

"Fabricated?" Zhu Cunji laughed.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun does not fabricate things."

"He is not a fraud. He is a true immortal."

"Why would he lie to a group of mortals like us?"

"On the contrary, it is because he already knows how the world would have unfolded that he chose to intervene."

"That is why things look the way they do now."

Zhu Youshu stood there, speechless.

Zhu Cunji leaned forward slightly.

"We are here to save you."

Zhu Youshu forced himself to think.

"If Dao Xuan Tianzun has already dealt with Chuang Wang and blocked the Qing, then our recorded fates should no longer apply."

"So what exactly do I need saving from?"

Zhu Cunji sighed.

"The times have changed."

"Not long ago, the Prince of Shu resisted the people and refused to adapt."

"The People's Militia stormed his residence."

"All his property was confiscated."

"He has been sentenced to fifty years of labor reform."

Zhu Youshu's face went pale.

"What?"

Zhu Cunji continued.

"After seeing that, Zhu Yujian came to me."

"If we do not act, most members of the Zhu clan will end up the same way."

Zhu Youshu inhaled sharply.

Zhu Cunji's gaze turned serious.

"Give up your land."

"Return ownership to the state."

"This is inevitable."

"If you refuse, there is only one outcome."

Zhu Youshu's voice dropped.

"And my family? How are we supposed to live?"

Zhu Cunji smiled.

"Come with me."

"I will teach you how to become a private entrepreneur."

"Do something that actually benefits the world."