

I. Dynasty 112

Chapter 112: Preparations

“Exactly. With peach blossom petals stuck to his shoes, he must have lingered outside the main hall. That’s why I suspected he would go out to report tonight. I didn’t expect to be right,” Li San said, glaring fiercely at Kui Zi.

“Commander, you’re truly wise. It’s no wonder His Highness chose you from among all the servants. Unlike this guy, who can only do sneaky, underhanded things,” one of the men flattered.

Li San’s face showed a hint of pride, and he gave the man an appreciative look. “If we’re talking about wisdom and valor, that would be our His Highness. Now I finally understand. His Highness endured humiliation in Qingzhou all these years just so he could wipe out these powerful families in one fell swoop today.”

“Exactly. He endured for five years, only revealing his brilliance now. His Highness’s patience is truly remarkable,” another man said.

Then someone else added, “With a prince like this, who knows? Maybe His Highness has a chance in the struggle for the throne...”

The man didn’t finish his sentence, as everyone, including Li San, turned to look at him.

Li San said sternly, "Don't speak carelessly. His Highness is currently biding his time and doesn't want to get involved in such matters. You're my men, so it's fine to say such things in front of me. But if I hear you gossiping outside, don't blame me for cutting out your tongues."

The four men immediately fell silent and nodded.

After glancing around, Li San said, "You two, take him away first. The other two, follow me out of the city under cover of night. His Highness has his plans, and these powerful families must have their own schemes. Tonight, we'll scout out their arrangements."

"Yes," the four men replied. Two of them took Kui Zi away, while the other two followed Li San out of the city.

At the city gate, they showed their tokens and exited, heading toward the lotus pond outside the city.

This lotus pond was one of Qingzhou's scenic spots. A tributary of the Xiaoqing River flowed here, forming a clear lake several hundred meters long and wide, surrounded by trees and lush grass.

Li San and his men were heading to this location.

Under the moonlight, the faint light allowed them to see. The three of them didn't take the main road but instead moved through the trees on either side.

After traveling about twenty li, they saw the lotus pond shimmering silver in the moonlight. They also noticed many shadowy figures moving about.

The three of them continued to advance stealthily, eventually crouching on the ground to observe.

At Bowen Academy, Xiao Ming had taught Li San many reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance techniques.

On the way to the lotus pond, Li San didn't take a direct route. In areas without tree cover, he moved in an S-shaped pattern. If they were being followed, this would make it harder for the pursuers to determine their destination.

Moreover, the three of them didn't move together. Instead, they spread out, with significant distances between them, often stopping to listen for any unusual sounds.

"Commander, there are at least a thousand people here," one of the men whispered.

Li San frowned deeply. "This is trouble. Can His Highness's five hundred men handle so many?"

"Should we go back and inform His Highness?" another man asked.

"Not yet. Let's wait a little longer. We need the most accurate information," Li San said.

The three of them continued to lie low. By midnight, all the people around the lotus pond had gathered in the grove to the south. There were about thirteen hundred of them.

At this point, Li San led the two men back to Qingzhou City.

Tomorrow was the day of the spring outing. The thought of this trap kept Xiao Ming awake all night.

Not long ago, he had been just a lab assistant, a homebody. Now, he had to face a brutal test like a true prince.

This was the first time he would confront such a dangerous situation.

It would be a lie to say he wasn't scared, but he knew he had no choice. This was a trial that a prince had to endure.

His status now didn't allow him to be cowardly or retreat. Throughout history, those who survived the rise and fall of dynasties were men of great talent, broad vision, and immense courage.

He could easily create an industrial empire, but the art of ruling a fiefdom was what he truly needed to learn. Otherwise, everything he created would only become someone else's prize.

By voluntarily attending this banquet, he aimed to lure out the snakes while also establishing his image in Qingzhou—a prince who dared to take risks and feared nothing.

Only then would officials and commoners truly admire him from the bottom of their hearts. They would see a Prince of Qi worth pledging their loyalty to.

After all, who would pledge loyalty to a cowardly, despicable person? But a man who fought to eliminate powerful families for the greater good was a different story.

Moreover, in his view, the founding prince of the Great Yu Empire, Xiao Yuanzhi, had established the feudal system precisely to select the most capable successor. He didn't care if his descendants fought each other, as the victor would be king, and the loser would be a bandit. A prince who couldn't even win the struggle for the throne had no right to rule a vast empire.

Thus, among his siblings, there were many cunning and talented individuals. To compete with them, he needed to temper himself and experience major events.

Otherwise, if he wet himself at the sight of swords, he would become a laughingstock.

As he pondered this, footsteps sounded outside, followed by Li San's voice.

"Your Highness, Sun Yuanzhi has ambushed over a thousand private soldiers in the grove by the lotus pond," Li San reported.

Xiao Ming, who had been waiting for Li San's news, opened the door and let him in.

“Over a thousand?” Xiao Ming asked again.

“Exactly. It shouldn’t be more than fifteen hundred,” Li San said.

“Hmm, it seems Sun Yuanzhi has gone all out this time. He must have mobilized all his private soldiers,” Xiao Ming said with a cold laugh.

Li San looked worried. “Your Highness, please reconsider. This is no trivial matter.”

“The arrow is already on the bowstring; it must be fired,” Xiao Ming said, though he was also concerned. But at this point, he had no choice but to press on. “Go quickly and summon Captain Lu and Minister Pang to discuss our strategy.”

Li San acknowledged the order and left. Soon, Lu Fei and Pang Yukun arrived at the Prince of Qi’s residence.

After hearing Li San’s report, Lu Fei said, “Your Highness, if that’s the case, during the banquet, we can ambush the Qingzhou army to the north. Li San said no one entered the grove on the north side.”

“But the grassland in front of the southern grove is where the banquet will likely be held. The northern grove is separated from the lotus pond by several hundred meters. I’m afraid reinforcements might not arrive in time,” Pang Yukun said.

Lu Fei said casually, "This time, I'll bring thirty elite soldiers to protect Your Highness. We can hold out for a while."

Pang Yukun fell silent and looked at Lu Fei.

Xiao Ming sighed. "Captain Lu, my life is in your hands."