

## **I. Dynasty 169**

### Chapter 169: Capture

“Father, I want to join the militia!”

Zhu Wuliu held a hoe in his hand, his face brimming with excitement.

“You cowardly brat, join the militia my ass. I’ll go for our family,” Zhu Da snapped back.

In the Zhu family courtyard, Zhu Wuliu was protesting to his father. The latest newspaper had just come in, announcing that each village would organize a hundred-man militia to patrol, maintain order, and catch barbarian spies.

And apparently, militiamen would even be given their own uniforms.

“Why not me? I want to catch barbarian spies too! Those bastards dared to harm our Prince Qi. I’m gonna smash their skulls with my hoe!” Zhu Wuliu declared.

“Why not you? Because I’m your father, that’s why. And I’m the squad leader. This squad listens to me. Now scram!” Zhu Da glared fiercely at his son.

At that moment, Zhu Wuliu's mother walked over and said, "Your father's right. When you've married a wife and had a child, then we'll stop interfering. For now, just behave and stay home. Tomorrow you still need to thresh wheat at the drying yard."

Zhu Wuliu squatted down in frustration. "Then hurry up and find me a wife already."

"Once we sell some of our wheat, we'll prepare the betrothal gifts," his mother laughed. Then she turned to her husband and asked, "Is it true the county office is buying grain this year? How much per dan?"

"Of course it's true. When our village head went to the yamen, the magistrate himself said it. The six prefectures are all purchasing grain. Fifty wen per dan."

"That much?" Zhu's wife grinned from ear to ear.

Zhu Da was also very pleased. With fifty mu of land, they'd harvest at least 150 dan of grain. Keeping 20 dan for themselves, selling the remaining 130 dan would earn them over six taels of silver.

There would be another harvest this year too. Ten-plus taels of silver annually was no small sum. Just thinking about it made Zhu Da laugh in his dreams. When had he ever had this much silver in hand?

"But the county said once they have enough, they'll stop buying. So we better thresh quickly," Zhu Da instructed.

Saying this, he headed out.

Since the founding of the farmers' cooperatives, village elders like the lizheng had gradually lost their influence. Nobody listened to them anymore. Instead, the co-op became the new authority in the village, with a dozen squad leaders managing everything.

Now that new orders were printed in the paper, he had to meet the other squad leaders to discuss how to implement them.

Many villagers, once long-term laborers under the aristocracy, now owned their own land and saw a better future ahead. Grateful to Prince Qi, they never dared to delay implementing orders from the paper.

Today's matter is organizing the militia.

Someone had tried to assassinate Prince Qi — that was a matter of grave concern. The villagers feared that if something happened to him, and a new prince replaced him, their hard-won peace and prosperity would vanish.

So when the village reader read the newspaper aloud, the entire village became outraged. Every household demanded the militia be organized immediately.

Or else, the squad leaders would be replaced with someone more capable.

'In your dreams! I, Zhu Da, am more than capable,' he thought, striding toward the co-op.

At the same time, the militia edict spread like spring wind beyond Qingzhou into surrounding counties. Militias began to appear on roads around every village.

They maintained local security, questioned suspicious passersby, and escorted any dubious figures to the authorities. Everywhere, militia could be seen patrolling with all manner of farming tools in hand.

Deep in a forest in Yizhou—

Dozens of silhouettes moved through the trees. Exhaustion weighed heavy on them. Their clothes were torn and muddy, shredded by brambles.

Qin Chuanyun looked down at the wound on his arm. Untreated for too long, it had become inflamed and festering.

After plotting the assassination of Xiao Ming, he had fled south along the Tuo River by boat, trying to escape the prince's lands.

But Prince Qi's response had been swift. Every dock along the Tuo was soon under inspection, checking all ships.

With no other choice, they abandoned their boats and took to the footpaths.

Soon after, even country lanes swarmed with villagers conducting patrols.

These villagers questioned every traveler, inspecting arms for injuries. Qin's party was forced to flee into the mountains.

A month passed. They had eaten through all their rations and were utterly worn out.

"Father, I can't walk anymore," Qin Mu collapsed to the ground.

He was a scholar, even weaker than Qin Chuanyun.

Qin glanced at his seventy-year-old mother, his wife, and younger brother. All of them looked utterly exhausted.

For the first time, he felt true regret. One moment of recklessness had ruined everything.

Prince Qi hadn't died. Only he could have pulled off such a countermeasure.

"We can't stop. If we're caught, none of us will survive!" Qin Chuanyun roared. His voice echoed through the forest, disturbing a flock of birds.

Outside the woods, a young shepherd boy napping in the shade jolted awake. He looked toward the sound, then ran off shouting, “Father! There’s someone in the woods!”

A fisherman nearby heard and immediately abandoned his net and cattle, rushing home with the boy.

He had to alert the militia — something suspicious was going on.

Qin Chuanyun was alarmed. The boy had been hiding in the brush. He hadn’t seen him at all.

Qin Mu scrambled to his feet, the rest of the group panicking.

“Run! Deeper into the forest!” Qin Chuanyun shouted.

Everyone obeyed, vanishing into the trees.

Not long after, hundreds of villagers arrived at the edge of the forest. A leader turned to the boy and asked, “You’re sure one of them had an arm injury and was wearing silk?”

“Yes! Hurry! If another village catches them first, we won’t get the reward!” the boy cried.

The militiamen nodded. They spread out into the forest. These villagers were strong and agile, used to climbing and trekking through the hills — far fitter than Qin Chuanyun and his pampered companions.

Among them were experienced hunters skilled in tracking. It wasn't long before they spotted Qin's group.

Hundreds of villagers closed in, surrounding them from all sides.

Back in Qingzhou City, Wang Xuan had returned from the steppe with urgent news.

"The Huyan Tuo tribe is on the move toward Cangzhou?"

Xiao Ming asked. The recent explosion had left him only minor injuries, nothing serious. For the past month, he'd been focused on four things: boosting production at the Machinery Department, organizing militias, harvesting wheat, and weeding out spies.

Sixteen more cannons had just been completed and sent to Cangzhou, along with fifty catapults and two thousand powder bombs.

They were producing at full speed.

Wang Xuan's face was weathered and tanned. Clearly, he'd endured much during his travels.

“It’s likely Huyan Tuo plans to probe Cangzhou’s defenses,” he reported.

Xiao Ming nodded. The barbarian assault was imminent. It was time for him to head to Cangzhou himself.

Just then, Pang Yukun entered, laughing heartily.

“Congratulations, Your Highness! That old fox Qin Chuanyun has been caught!”