

I. Dynasty 186

Chapter 186: Return in Triumph

A hoarse voice echoed across the empty Cangzhou camp.

Xiao Ming's blood burned with passion. This song was the unyielding will of a nation facing foreign invaders. This song was the soul of an army daring to draw its sword.

At this moment, the Cangzhou camp fell silent, leaving only the crackling of the bonfire.

The soldiers stared at Xiao Ming, who stood before the flames. Suddenly, one soldier began singing along: "If our homeland is invaded..."

"Hot-blooded men must rise...." Another voice joined in.

Soon, the soldiers slowly rose to their feet, learning the lyrics from Xiao Ming line by line. By the end, they stood together, singing loudly.

The fierce and heroic song, carried by the soldiers' roars, surged like hot blood into every heart.

This scene perfectly captured the emotions they had struggled to express. Their pent-up feelings burst forth at this moment.

Some soldiers suddenly shed tears when singing the line: “A hero never returns alive”

This victory was bought with the lives of their comrades. How could they forget those who had fallen, their eyes forever closed, even in this moment of celebration?

Niu Ben slowly stood up and began repeating the song.

This song carried too much emotion. Remembering his decades of battles, he couldn’t help but sing along.

Lu Fei and Luo Xin also stood. Xiao Ming wasn’t just singing a song—he was voicing the fiery passion buried in all their hearts.

Then, as if by unspoken agreement, the singing suddenly stopped.

Xiao Ming raised his wine cup and shouted, “To our fallen brothers—cheers!”

“Cheers!” The soldiers raised their bowls of rice wine.

“Clang!” After downing his drink, Xiao Ming smashed his cup to the ground.

The soldiers followed suit, smashing their cups in a release of emotion. Tonight, they saw a different side of Prince Qi—a flesh-and-blood leader who shared their feelings.

At this moment, they had never felt closer to him.

Niu Ben's eyes burned with admiration. He had to admit—this army was Xiao Ming's, and it would always be Xiao Ming's.

The lively celebration lasted late into the night. Eventually, the soldiers returned to their tents to rest. After two more days of recuperation, they would march back to Qingzhou.

Many Qingzhou soldiers couldn't wait to return.

Meanwhile, news of the great victory at Cangzhou reached Qingzhou. Upon receiving the report, Fan Zeng immediately organized the newspaper office to print the news. By the time the army returned, he wanted everyone to hear the good news.

The next day, newspapers spread across Qingzhou, while reporters carried copies to their assigned regions.

"Extra! Extra! Great victory at Cangzhou! Our army slaughtered 100,000 barbarians!"

"Extra! Extra! Major news!"

Even in the early morning, the streets of Qingzhou were filled with the voices of children, no older than seven or eight.

Since the newspaper office stopped using professional newsboys, this task had returned to ordinary children. With the spread of newspapers in Qingzhou, more literate people began accepting them.

Selling newspapers had become a new trade, with many poor children picking up copies early in the morning to sell on the streets.

“What? A victory at Cangzhou?!”

A scholar rushed out of his house, still unwashed.

“Do you want a paper?” a newsboy asked. “The news of Cangzhou’s victory is right here.”

Without hesitation, the scholar handed over a few copper coins and began reading on the spot. The more he read, the more excited he became. He ran back inside, shouting, “Father! Cangzhou held! The barbarians lost 100,000 men and retreated to Shanhaiguan! We don’t have to flee!”

“Really? Let me see!” An excited voice called from inside, followed by cheers.

At the Machinery Department, Chen Wenlong and Chen Qi exchanged smiles.

“His Highness is truly His Highness. With this victory, the barbarians will never break through Cangzhou again,” Chen Wenlong said.

Chen Qi let out a deep sigh of relief. “Luckily, we sent the canister shots in time. Otherwise, His Highness would’ve had my head. Hey, Father, do you think he’ll promote me again when he returns?”

“Promote you?” Chen Wenlong’s face darkened. “The next rank is Chief of Military Affairs. What, you want to replace me?”

Cold sweat dripped down Chen Qi’s forehead. “Father, I’d never dare! I was just joking!”

Meanwhile, the news spread rapidly across Qingzhou.

Every citizen rejoiced.

Three years ago, barbarian cavalry had pillaged and slaughtered here. Now, they no longer had to fear the enemy reaching their gates again.

“Long live Prince Qi!” A scholar suddenly shouted in the streets, waving the newspaper excitedly. The report had stirred his blood.

Like many educated men, it wasn’t that he didn’t care for his country—it was that the endless humiliating defeats had shamed them into silence, especially after the barbarians breached Cangzhou three years ago.

They had desperately needed a victory.

And now, Xiao Ming had given them one—like rain after a long drought.

“Long live Prince Qi!” Another voice rose, followed by a chorus across the streets.

In the following days, nearby towns became seas of celebration.

On the fifth day, news arrived—the Qingzhou army was returning.

The citizens prepared food and drink to welcome them. Soon, crowds gathered outside Qingzhou, lining the roads to greet the victorious soldiers.

“Lu Fei, how do I look?”

Luo Xin adjusted his armor on horseback, afraid that dirt might ruin his image.

“Perfect. Dashing and heroic,” Lu Fei said, secretly wiping his nose on Luo Xin’s back while using the few fancy words he knew.

Luo Xin grinned, lifting his chin higher.

Back in Chang’an, they had fought barbarians before, but never had citizens welcomed them with food and drink.

After all, the people knew they lost more than they won.

But this time, with 100,000 enemy heads taken and the defeat of Beishan Taiji, it was an unprecedented feat for the Great Yu Empire.

This victory meant safety for the people, so their joy was natural. With the recent harvest leaving them with plenty of food, their gratitude toward Prince Qi grew even stronger.

They were still far from Qingzhou, but scouts reported crowds waiting outside the city, ready to reward the returning soldiers.