

I. Dynasty 298

Chapter 298: Public Reaction

Zhujia Village

The news about the Qingzhou road construction had spread to Zhujia Village as well.

After the morning paper had been read, confirming the announcement, Zhu Wuliu returned home from the threshing floor. "Father, I want to bid for a section of the Qingzhou road construction. What do you think? It's the off-season for farming, and there's nothing much to do at home."

"Ha!" Before his father could respond, Zhu Liushi suddenly laughed. "Husband, looks like Wuliu has grown up and learned to make money."

Zhu Wuliu's face lit up. "Mother, you agree?"

"Agree my foot. Where would we get the silver to be tossing around?" Zhu Liushi rolled her eyes, and Zhu Wuliu's father laughed heartily.

Zhu Wuliu sulked. "You both have such shallow views. This is a money-making opportunity, how could it lose money?"

"Do you have any business sense?" Zhu Liushi asked, continuing to wash clothes.

Zhu Wuliu immediately drooped his head, unsure of what to say.

“What are you two talking about?” Just then, Zhu Sansi’s voice rang out from outside the yard.

Zhu Wuliu was overjoyed upon hearing the voice and turned around to see his elder brother, Zhu Sansi, standing in the doorway, looking tall and handsome in his dark green long robe. Behind him, a crowd of villagers gathered, pointing at Zhu Sansi’s clothing.

“Brother!” Zhu Wuliu exclaimed. “Why is your outfit so nice? Even Zhang Xiucai in the village can’t compare to you now.”

Zhu Liushi’s eyes sparkled. If it weren’t for the familiar face, she wouldn’t even recognize her own son. She wiped her hands and quickly walked over to Zhu Sansi. “Sansi, didn’t you say you would only come back once every three months? Why are you back so soon today?”

Zhu Sansi raised his hand to stop Zhu Wuliu from touching his military uniform. “The prince has granted an additional day for family visits.”

“Wonderful, wonderful!” Zhu Liushi said happily. She was thrilled to see her son return.

Zhu Wuliu, not willing to miss a chance, quickly asked, “Brother, where did you get this outfit? I want to buy one too.”

Zhu Sansi smiled and said, “You want to buy one, but you can’t. This is the uniform of the Qingzhou Army, and outsiders can’t wear it.”

“Ah, then I’ll join the army!” Zhu Wuliu cried out.

“Ridiculous! Didn’t you just say you wanted to bid for the cement road? Now you’re talking about joining the army?” Zhu Wuliu’s father looked at Zhu Sansi with pride. This was his son—the pride of Zhujia Village.

Looking at the villagers outside who were still watching and murmuring, Zhu Wuliu’s father couldn’t help but feel even more proud. He walked up to the door and coughed lightly. “Sorry, it’s not easy for Wuliu to come back. Let’s have a private chat.”

“Old Zhu, your Wuliu is a real source of pride for the family. If I had known, I would have had my son join the army too. Just look at Wuliu now, so enviable. That uniform is so handsome.”

Many of the younger men outside looked on enviously, quietly wishing they could join the army too. Imagine how they’d be looked up to when they visited their families in military uniforms.

Zhu Wuliu’s father nodded modestly. Once the crowd outside had dispersed, he closed the door slowly and said, “Liushi, go and kill the old rooster. Let Wuliu replenish his strength.”

Zhu Wuliu’s mouth watered. “You’re so biased! You never kill a chicken for me!”

Zhu Liushi laughed and scolded, "If you had half your brother's success, I'd kill a chicken for you."

Zhu Wuliu squinted. "Then give me some money to bid for the cement road."

While this was happening, Zhu Sansi, who had learned about the road construction project in the army, said, "Father, Mother, let Wuliu try it."

"This is what the reporters mentioned, but bidding for the cement road requires money to hire workers and buy materials. Though we saved twenty taels of silver last year, it's still not enough for such a big project," Zhu Liushi said.

Zhu Sansi stood up and said, "I have more than twenty taels of silver saved up from my army pay. I'll give it to you. I don't need it in the army—I'm provided for."

Then he added, "Also, while I was in the army, I heard about the bank. You can borrow silver from the government, but you need to pledge equivalent collateral. If that doesn't work, we could use our land deed."

"You've gone mad serving in the army?" Zhu Liushi immediately became angry. "We've only just managed to make ends meet, and now you're talking about taking risks."

Zhu Sansi explained, "Mother, you don't understand. The prince is establishing the bank to encourage more merchants in Qingzhou. If Wuliu succeeds, he might even join the merchant guild and become a wealthy businessman."

Zhu Wuliu became excited by his brother's words. "Father, Mother, let me try. If it doesn't work, I'll pledge my land."

Both parents exchanged a look. Zhu Liushi nodded, "Sansi, is this truly the prince's plan?"

"It's true. I heard it directly from General Niu," Zhu Sansi assured them.

Zhu Liushi glanced at her husband and then nodded. "Well, let Wuliu try then."

At the Qingzhou Government Office

Pang Yukun had been working tirelessly as the bidding for the road project had begun. Many merchants had already submitted bids for the sections they wanted to take on.

At the same time, a temporary bank had been set up within the government office.

Although Xiao Ming had tasked Pang Yukun with establishing a bank, the site selection and personnel appointments required time. Since the policy to support the people couldn't be delayed, they decided to set up a temporary bank in the government office in the meantime.

"Any citizens come to borrow money?" Xiao Ming asked.

Pang Yukun shook his head. “No, the people are cautious with their savings. They won’t be so bold, especially since Your Highness’ offer is somewhat like usury.”

Xiao Ming wasn’t surprised. He had anticipated this reaction.

But it didn’t matter—once even one person benefitted from the system, it would become a natural course of action.

As they spoke, a Qingzhou soldier in uniform entered the government office. Xiao Ming turned to look and was surprised. “Zhu Sansi, what brings you here?”

“Greetings, Your Highness. I’ve come to borrow money for my younger brother. He wants to bid on the Qingzhou cement road construction,” Zhu Sansi said, somewhat awkwardly.

Xiao Ming smiled. “Nice, nice. Pang Changshi, here’s our first case!”

Pang Yukun chuckled. “Your Highness, it seems the soldiers of Qingzhou have a good mindset.”