

## I. Dynasty 313

### Chapter 313: The Locust-Eating Prince of Qingzhou

Zhu Wuliu was leading the village men in paving the concrete road in Qingzhou's western market.

Suddenly, a young man appeared beside him.

Zhu looked up from where he was leveling the cement and broke into a smile.

"Reporter Jiang, what brings you here?"

The man was none other than the newspaper reporter who often visited Zhu's village to read the news with the villagers.

"Still smiling?!" Jiang said.

"Today's newspaper warns of signs of drought and a possible locust plague across the six prefectures. His Highness himself published methods to prevent it. You should be thinking about which of those you can actually do!"

"What?! A locust plague?"

Zhu was stunned.

“What’s going on?”

Jiang explained what was printed in the paper.

Zhu slowly realized that spring planting had only just started, and, according to the article, there was still time to take precautions.

“I’m going to buy ducks!”

Zhu dropped everything and took off running.

The other young men followed him—heading straight for the eastern market, where ducks were often sold.

Jiang watched them leave and sighed.

With so many people in Qingzhou, how could the ducks in one market possibly be enough?

Meanwhile, under the government’s direction, the news of preventing the locust plague spread rapidly among the people.

Soon, ducks were in such high demand that none could be found anywhere.

Out-of-town merchants noticed this and quickly tried to make a profit.

But a new law banning price gouging on poultry stopped them from inflating prices tenfold.

Still, there was some allowed profit margin, so many merchants chose to bring in ducks from other regions to sell in Qingzhou.

“Your Highness, even if Li Kaiyuan buys a lot of chickens and ducks, there are just too many people across the six prefectures. Why not let people eat the locusts themselves?” Pang Yukun suggested.

“Catching and eating locust nymphs would be much faster than waiting for poultry to grow.”

After Xiao Ming mentioned that locusts were edible, Pang had already ordered officials to catch some young locusts from the fields.

Now, staring at the pot of boiled locusts, Xiao Ming felt a chill run down his back.

“How do you all feel?” he asked.

“It’s been two hours since we ate them. We’re fine—just tasted a little strange,” Pang Yukun said, licking his lips thoughtfully.

Xiao Ming sighed.

“They’re better deep-fried—crispy, like chicken.”

“Fried?!”

Pang’s face turned green.

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?”

Xiao Ming nodded. The newspaper had just gone out.

This was only the first step—to help people get used to the idea.

“Yes, fried is the best. Here’s the plan: go catch more locusts. The more the better. I’ll set up a frying station in the eastern market. I promise they’ll taste better than meat!”

Pang didn't argue. He sighed and went to organize another round of locust gathering.

Xiao Ming got busy too.

This was no joke—a locust plague could be deadly.

He couldn't control what happened in Jizhou, but he would do everything to protect his own land.

He ordered the palace chefs to bring out all the iron pots to the eastern market, along with oil and salt.

He was going to teach the people of Qingzhou a lesson they'd never forget:

Locusts are edible—and delicious. Eat more locusts, eat less rice. Save the crops.

The commotion attracted a crowd.

By afternoon, Pang returned with a whole sack of locusts—still muddy from the fields.

“Your Highness, the locusts are here.”

Xiao Ming patted the dust off his clothes.

“Well done. I’ll fry them myself.”

“Then I’ll be waiting.” Pang grinned.

Xiao Ming opened the sack, poured the live locusts into water to drown them, then cleaned and drained them.

Next, he heated oil in the pot.

Once the oil was hot, he tossed in the locusts.

Sizzling sounds filled the air, and the aroma of roasted meat spread through the market. He added a pinch of salt.

When the locusts turned crisp and golden, he scooped them out.

“Lord Pang, try this again.”

Xiao Ming handed him a plate.

The rich aroma filled the air. Pang swallowed hard, picked one up, and took a bite.

His eyes lit up.

“Your Highness, this is amazing!”

Xiao Ming tasted one too. It was even better than the ones he had eaten as a child.

These were purely natural, with no pollution at all.

The crowd was stunned.

They couldn't believe Prince Qi and his chief advisor were eating locusts right in front of them.

“Your Highness, I'll take this plate!”

Pang was hooked. He grabbed the rest and kept eating.

“This will be perfect with wine tonight!” he said.

Xiao Ming burst into laughter.

Then he turned to the people and said loudly:

“The newspaper already says locusts can be eaten. Many of you may not believe it, so I’m here with Lord Pang to prove it. Try for yourselves!”

The moment he finished speaking, people in the front row rushed forward to grab some.

Even out-of-town merchants joined in.

“Wow! So good!”

“Tastes better than chicken—I’m bringing the whole family out to catch more!”

“Never had anything this tasty!”

The crowd was in a frenzy of joy.

Fan Zeng stood at the edge of the crowd, sketching the entire scene.

He was going to publish it in the newspaper: Prince Qi and Pang Yukun leading the people to fight the locust plague.

By the end of the afternoon, the entire bag of locusts had been eaten.

The people were thrilled. When they returned to their villages, they spread the word about how delicious the locusts were.

To motivate people even more, Xiao Ming ordered Li Kaiyuan to buy locusts directly at the eastern market, and serve them as bonus meals for Qingzhou soldiers.

He was confident the six prefectures had enough appetite to “devour” the problem.

Even while tackling the locust crisis, flintlock rifle production continued at full speed.

After 500 craftsmen joined the Machinery Department, weapon production increased rapidly.

200 drill presses were soon equipped with bits, and with hydraulic-powered drills running at full speed, the first batch of 500 flintlocks arrived from the military workshop just two weeks later.