

I. Dynasty 353

Chapter 353: The Man Chasing the Balloon

Jizhou City, Prince Yong's Residence

Chen Xinran looked up at the strange object slowly drifting in from outside the city. Like him, the entire city of Jizhou was staring at the thing in the sky.

What was even stranger—it had dropped a stone tied with a piece of paper. After the city guards opened the note, they immediately went to find Chen Xinran.

“General Chen, His Highness is drunk again. You’d better come back tomorrow,” said the steward at the gate.

Since the siege began, Prince Yong had been drunk nearly every day. Though the other generals had complaints, no one dared speak out because of his violent temper.

Hearing the prince was drunk again, Chen Xinran was furious.

Last time, they gave grain to the barbarians in hopes they’d turn east and fight, but that only made the barbarians look down on them even more.

The barbarians had taken the grain, but mocked them as fools in return.

Chagatai had left, but Beishan and his barbarian army took over and continued the siege on Jizhou.

Only now did they realize they'd been tricked. Beishan didn't want grain—he wanted Jizhou City itself.

With the siege tightening and no reinforcements arriving, Prince Yong drank every day and often beat his servants.

Life inside the residence had become unbearable for the staff.

Looking at the whip marks on the steward's face, Chen Xinran stopped the door from closing with one hand.

He said loudly, "I must see His Highness today. The Qingzhou army and imperial guards are outside the city. To break the siege, we must coordinate from inside and out."

With that, he pushed the gate open and walked inside, ignoring the guards.

Chen Xinran was highly respected among the Jizhou army and was also the brother-in-law of Prince Yong's wife. Since he forced his way in, the guards didn't dare stop him.

Before he even reached the main hall, he heard singing along with bells and music.

Frowning, Chen Xinran entered and saw Prince Yong, red-faced and clearly drunk.

Two dancers were lying in his arms, laughing and singing.

“Your Highness!” Chen Xinran shouted from outside the hall.

The sudden voice made everything go quiet. Prince Yong looked at him with bleary eyes and laughed, “Why are you here? Have the barbarians broken through? Hahaha, I’ve been waiting for them! Someone get me my sword!”

With the city surrounded and no reinforcements, Prince Yong had given up. He shouted again, “What are you all waiting for? Go run for your lives!”

Chen Xinran’s frown deepened. He raised his voice and said, “Your Highness, the Qingzhou army and imperial guards are fighting the barbarians outside the city. This is a message from the Qingzhou army—they want us to observe the battle and join them in attacking the barbarians when the time is right.”

“Nonsense! You think I’m really that drunk? The city is surrounded—how would the Qingzhou army send a message in? Can they fly?” Prince Yong scoffed.

Chen Xinran thought to himself, ‘They actually did fly.’

He said, “Your Highness, it may sound strange, but this really is a message from the Qingzhou army. If you don’t believe me, come outside. That strange thing is still in the sky.”

Prince Yong laughed, “Fine, I’ll go see it with you. But if you’re lying, I’ll skin you alive!”

Swaying on his feet, Prince Yong followed Chen Xinran outside.

Since the balloon moved slowly, it had only just reached the sky above the prince’s residence.

Looking up, Prince Yong sobered up quickly.

He rubbed his eyes and stared at the strange object. “That thing dropped the message?”

“Exactly, Your Highness. And look—there seem to be people on it,” Chen Xinran said, pointing at the balloon.

Prince Yong took the letter from Chen and read it silently.

“How is that thing flying?” he muttered.

Chen Xinran looked just as confused and shook his head.

“If there are people on it... does that mean it can carry me out of Jizhou?” Prince Yong asked, suddenly excited. “Tell them to land and take me with them!”

Hearing this, Chen Xinran nearly pulled out his sword to strike the prince. With the enemy right outside, their leader only cared about escaping instead of saving the people.

He said, “Your servant doesn’t know how to make them land.”

Prince Yong had been living in fear these days. Ignoring Chen Xinran, he ordered his servants to prepare a horse and rode off alone after the balloon.

Soon, everyone in Jizhou saw their prince chasing something in the sky.

From the south gate to the north gate, Prince Yong shouted and cursed, but the flying object never came down.

Chen Xinran followed behind, watching the prince—clearly driven mad by the barbarian siege.

Then he asked again, “Your Highness, the Qingzhou and imperial armies are outside the city. What do we do now?”

Prince Yong stared hatefully at the disappearing object in the sky and said, "Sit back and watch the tigers fight. No one is to move!"

After chasing the balloon for so long, Prince Yong was completely sober.

He felt a bit calmer, but also began thinking only about his own gain and loss.

Thirty li away, on the main road...

The imperial guards' supply wagons finally arrived at their camp.

With the supplies secured, Luo Hong let out a long sigh. Casualties could be handled—but running out of food would have been a disaster.

"Is that General Luo Hong up ahead?"

Zhan Xingchang arrived with Qingzhou soldiers.

After the ceasefire last night, the support troops had worked through the night to set up a camp. It was now taking shape.

"I am. And you are...?" Luo Hong asked, bowing.

He was filled with joy. Barbarian cavalry had been attacking from both the front and rear, and if the Qingzhou army hadn't arrived in time, the food supply would've been in serious trouble.

So Luo Hong was deeply grateful.

And as a strong man himself, he admired other strong forces. He looked down on the weak soldiers of the Great Yu Empire—but he had great respect for the Qingzhou army.

And now that he saw their strength firsthand, he was even more impressed.

"I am Zhan Xingchang, governor of Qingzhou."

Luo Hong's eyes lit up. "Ah! So you're Governor Zhan. I've heard much about you. Thank you—without you, our supply line would've been ruined."

"No need for thanks, General Luo. The barbarians are a threat to us all. We should fight them together." Then he added, "What are your plans from here?"

Luo Hong paused. 'Qingzhou soldiers really don't waste time,' he thought.

He answered directly, "I had planned to head straight for Jizhou, but the barbarian cavalry blocked our path. Now that you're here, our strength has doubled. I suggest we strike now and push the barbarians back. Attacking Jizhou could also relieve the pressure on Fencheng."

Zhan Xingchang nodded. "But... is the general aware that the barbarians brought cannons this time?"