

Longevity 113

Chapter 113: Annual Salary Arrives at Sha Village! The Anticipation of Zhao Ying and Her Mother!

Hearing Zhao Yan's words, even Guo Kai, who wasn't very bright, was stunned.

"Great King," he began, "even if Ying Zheng hates his mother, she is still the one who gave birth to him, and nominally the Empress Dowager of Qin. How could it possibly be done, kidnapping Concubine Zhao from Qin?"

"Yong City is one of Qin's most vital strongholds!" Guo Kai added.

"Prime Minister, are you willing to do anything for me?" Zhao Yan turned his head, his gaze intensely serious as he looked at Guo Kai.

Under this stare, Guo Kai grew anxious. But his entire position as Prime Minister was a gift from Zhao Yan. If his answer wasn't satisfactory, Zhao Yan could dispose of him at any moment. He knew that in the court, Lian Po, Li Mu, and even Zhao Yi all despised him and couldn't wait to see him gone!

"Everything I have was given to me by the Great King. I am willing to go through fire and water for the Great King, without a moment's hesitation," Guo Kai immediately knelt to express his loyalty.

At these words, Zhao Yan stood up excitedly. Deeply moved, he walked over to Guo Kai, patted him heavily on the shoulder, and laughed loudly. "Good, good, good! Guo Kai, you truly are my confidant. Having you is far better than having both Lian Po and Li Mu."

"Thank you for the praise, Great King," Guo Kai replied obsequiously.

"Signing a treaty with Qin isn't the hard part," Zhao Yan explained. "The difficulty is that even if Ying Zheng truly agrees to a treaty with me, we have to worry if he's sincere. What if, after the treaty is signed, I move my troops against Yan, and Ying Zheng tears it up and sends his army to attack Zhao? That would be a disaster."

"Therefore, we must get our hands on Concubine Zhao. As long as we have her, Ying Zheng won't dare to act rashly."

"If Ying Zheng dares to break the treaty, I dare to execute his mother," Zhao Yan said with a cold smirk. He could already see his plan succeeding, capturing Concubine Zhao, and holding a threat over Ying Zheng for a lifetime, once again trampling him underfoot.

"The Great King is wise." Looking at the ecstatic Zhao Yan, Guo Kai naturally agreed loudly.

"So, I need you, Prime Minister, to personally see this matter through for me."

But this sentence from Zhao Yan left Guo Kai dumbfounded.

"Ah?"

Guo Kai looked at Zhao Yan in utter astonishment, then dropped to his knees in terror. "Great King, I... I am but a humble scholar. How could I possibly accomplish such a thing? Please, Great King, find someone else for this task."

Zhao Yan didn't get angry. Instead, he smiled. "Prime Minister, when did I say you had to do it yourself? I am only asking you to lead the elite force I am entrusting to you."

"Zhao's most elite royal guards."

"I will give you five hundred men. In addition, the spies and Dark Guards lurking in Yong City will be at your disposal."

"You will personally go to Qin, devise the plan, and you must capture Concubine Zhao and bring her back for me," Zhao Yan said with a smile, his eyes filled with complete confidence in Guo Kai's ability to succeed.

But this trust left a bitter taste in Guo Kai's mouth.

"Great King... I... I'm afraid I can't do it," Guo Kai said, his voice trembling.

Infiltrating Qin to kidnap Concubine Zhao... how was that even possible? If he were discovered by Qin, he'd be dead with no place for a burial. Guo Kai was terrified of death.

Seeing Guo Kai's fearful expression, Zhao Yan's brow furrowed. "I trust you this much, and you are unwilling?"

"I... I am willing!"

Fear gripped Guo Kai's heart, but as he met Zhao Yan's cold gaze, he understood. If he refused, he wouldn't just lose his position as Prime Minister—he would lose his life.

"Very good," Zhao Yan said, his pleasure evident. "As expected of my most trusted minister. I believe you will undoubtedly succeed in bringing Concubine Zhao back. This matter must remain between you and me. It cannot be leaked. Qin's espionage network is not weak. If word of this gets out, Prime Minister, you will be in great danger."

Zhao Yan laughed heartily, thoroughly pleased, while Guo Kai could only suppress his inner turmoil, his heart filled with dread.

「Time passed!」

「Sha Village!」

BANG BANG BANG.

The sound of a copper gong being struck rang through the village, accompanied by the Village Chief's loud shouts. "All military service households, come to the village entrance! The people from the Government Office are here to distribute the Annual Salary!"

"Military service households, hurry to the village entrance!"

Wu Lizheng's loud shouts reverberated through the village.

Hearing the calls and the sound of the gong, families from all over the village quickly began to gather at the entrance. Most were households with sons serving in the army, joined by some curious onlookers. After all, in an era with few forms of amusement besides brothels and gambling, watching a public event was a major source of entertainment.

The people of Sha Village swarmed toward the entrance, where an entire five-hundred-man battalion was personally escorting chariots laden with the Annual Salary. Clearly, Sha Village had sent a significant number of its young men to serve in the army.

In Zhao Feng's courtyard, Zhao Ying heard the commotion and looked curiously toward the outside. "Mother, what's happening with the gong? Should I go have a look?"

Wu Lizheng was shouting at the village entrance, so his voice couldn't carry this far, but the sound of the gong was clearly audible.

"Could it be the officials have come to distribute the Annual Salary?" Mrs. Zhao asked, her face filled with anticipation.

Of course, it wasn't the Annual Salary she looked forward to, but the chance to get news of her son.

"It's possible," Zhao Ying nodded.

"Then I'll go take a look too," Mrs. Zhao said, preparing to stand up.

But Zhao Ying gently pressed her back down onto her cushion.

"Mother, you just wait here at home. I'll go see. There's no telling how long the line will be, since so many from our village are serving in the army."

"You just wait here, okay? I'll come right back and tell you the moment I have any news about Brother," Zhao Ying said with a cheerful smile.

Then, without waiting for her mother to object, she turned and walked out of the courtyard, closing the gate behind her.

Seeing this, Mrs. Zhao, though her heart was filled with anticipation, said nothing more.