

Longevity 136

Chapter 136: King of Qin's Wrath! Zhao Feng's Rise! (Part 4)

"Death would be too good for you. If it weren't for my concerns about Zheng'er, I would have ordered your execution long ago."

Empress Dowager Huayang felt a surge of anger. As the grandmother of the current king, Ying Zheng, and the former Empress Dowager of Qin, she was undoubtedly a clever and powerful woman. She had remained in Yong City for two reasons. First, her emotional ties to the place were gone. Second, she wanted to do one last thing for her grandson: keep an eye on Zhao Ji.

「Outside Yong City, in a hidden grove.」

"My lord, the mission is complete," a commander reported to Guo Kai. He was in charge of the Royal Guard, an elite unit of Zhao's Dark Guards. "We have successfully captured the Empress Dowager of Qin."

They immediately brought forth the unconscious Zhao Ji. Guo Kai lifted a lantern to get a better look. In its faint glow, Zhao Ji's stunning beauty was plain to see.

"No wonder she's famed for her beauty. She's quite a looker," Guo Kai said with a laugh. "Once we get her back to Handan, the Great King will be immensely pleased. You've all performed a great service."

This task had been completed with such ease, capturing the Empress Dowager of the mighty Qin just like that. Guo Kai was overjoyed. As long as he brought Zhao Ji back to Handan, it would be a major achievement, and the Great King would favor him even more.

"Prime Minister," the Royal Guard Commander said gravely, "we are still in Yong City, deep within Qin territory. We are a thousand miles from Zhao. I fear it will be difficult to get Zhao Ji out."

"Don't worry. I have arranged everything," Guo Kai said, stroking his beard smugly. "The five hundred Royal Guards will be split into five groups. Four will act as decoys, while one will be the main force, which I will lead myself. Moreover, we won't travel by land. We'll take the waterways via the Wei River and the Luoshui, entering the state of Wei. From Wei, we'll take the land route back to Zhao."

To abduct Zhao Ji, Guo Kai had racked his brains for months. He was a man who cherished his own life above all else. While not skilled in many things, he was an expert at planning escapes.

"We will follow the Prime Minister's orders," the Royal Guard Commander immediately responded.

Guo Kai sneered with immense pride. Ying Zheng... heheh. Just as the Great King said, you were once trampled under our feet, and today is no different.

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「Outside Xianyang City!」

"Make way! Make way!" a rider shouted. "Urgent report from Yong City!"

A swift horse galloped furiously, charging toward the royal palace.

「In the Qin Royal Palace, the Morning Discussion Hall.」

"What?!" Ying Zheng roared. "The Empress Dowager was abducted from the Yong City Royal Palace? And she still hasn't been recovered? What are the Yong City Guards paid for? Incompetent fools!"

Since taking full control of the government, Ying Zheng had rarely let his emotions show, but today, he could no longer restrain himself.

So many years had passed, and while he certainly harbored resentment toward Zhao Ji, how could he forget the past affection between mother and son? Now, within his own domain, in another capital of Qin, his own mother had been abducted? What a monstrous slap in the face!

"Please calm your anger, Your Majesty," Yu Liao stepped forward to report. "Empress Dowager Huayang has already sent a letter. The culprits had an inside man in the Yong City Royal Palace who knew the guards' patrol schedules. They used this insider to infiltrate. Furthermore, these were not common criminals, but well-trained elites."

"According to the report from the Yong City Commander, tokens were found on them. They appear to be from the Zhao Country Royal Guard, Zhao's most elite Dark Guards."

Ying Zheng's face was grim, filled with thunderous fury. The Zhao state... their Royal Guard. Zhao Yan... well played. What a move.

"I don't care where they come from or who they are! Make sure they never return!" Ying Zheng declared icily. "My mother must not leave the borders of Qin! If these culprits succeed, there will be severe punishment without mercy."

Once the morning assembly dispersed, Ying Zheng returned alone to Zhangtai Palace. With such a major incident, Dunruo was already waiting for him inside.

"With an incident of this magnitude, why did the Heibing Platform receive no word?" Ying Zheng asked, suppressing his rage.

"Your Majesty," Dunruo replied respectfully, "the Zhao Country Royal Guard, much like our Heibing Platform, is a clandestine force that answers directly to the King of Zhao. The order for this operation was not issued through the open court, which is why the Heibing Platform did not detect it."

Although the Heibing Platform's network spread throughout the known world, it was impossible to completely penetrate the clandestine organizations of the various states. These secret groups selected and trained their members from childhood, molding them into Dead Soldiers, making them impossible to infiltrate.

"The Heibing Platform is to use all its resources for the pursuit," Ying Zheng ordered directly, not blaming Dunruo. "Leave not a single member of that Zhao Country Royal Guard alive. And the Empress Dowager of Qin must be recovered, unharmed."

Dunruo bowed. "This servant receives the decree."

He then immediately withdrew.

Ying Zheng sighed, his face etched with regret. Zhao Yan... what clever tactics. To dare infiltrate my Qin and abduct my own mother. In the end, I was the one who grew complacent. If I had strengthened Yong City's defenses and paid more attention to her, perhaps this never would have happened. I should have listened to my father-in-law that day.

If only he had listened to Xia Wuqie and visited Zhao Ji, or even brought her back to Xianyang, this kidnapping would never have happened. Of course, what Ying Zheng truly considered was the future of Qin. If Zhao Yan succeeded, he would be at a severe disadvantage. If the Empress Dowager of Qin were captured and taken to another state, not only would Qin's dignity suffer, but the entire world would view it as a joke. If the state of Zhao paraded Zhao Ji on the battlefield one day, would the Qin Sharp Soldiers attack or hold back? The implications... were far too great.

「Wei City Territory.」

Deep within the Ghost Miasma Forest was the hidden training ground for the organization founded by Zhao Feng.

"Kill!"

At the low shout, boys and girls in identical black uniforms brandished their swords and attacked each other with lethal intent. A variety of combat techniques and cunning assassination methods unfolded before Zhao Feng's eyes.

Three months ago, these children had been raw and inexperienced, but now, their entire demeanor had changed. The original three hundred had been whittled down to two hundred and seventy-eight. The twenty-two who were missing were, of course, dead.

"Not bad, Han Shuang," Zhao Feng said with praise as he watched the trainees. "To think this is the result of just three months of training. You've truly surprised me."

"Thank you for the praise, my lord. Given more time, they can become even stronger," Han Shuang replied respectfully.

"I will give you more time, but it's clear we still need more people," Zhao Feng said, then turned to his other subordinate. "Han Xi, how has recruitment gone for the past three months?"

"Reporting to my lord," Han Xi replied immediately. "In another location within Wei City, we have recruited another five hundred Dead Soldiers. Like the first group, none are older than eleven, and their training has already begun."

"Continue recruiting," Zhao Feng said with a nod.

"My lord," Han Xi began, "recruiting people isn't the problem. It's the cost. The expenses are immense. In just three months, we've already used nearly forty percent of the gold and silver you left..."