

Longevity 257

Chapter 257: Ying Zheng's Joy, Xia Wuqie's Shock!

To become a sovereign who expanded his territory, Zhao Yan had prepared for a long time, mobilizing the full might of his nation. To destroy Yan, he had even rushed to Qin to sign a treaty with Ying Zheng. At the time, he arrogantly believed that Ying Zheng genuinely sought an alliance out of fear that Zhao would attack Qin.

But now, it seemed all of this had been a deception.

Ying Zheng's true intention was to trick him, letting him attack Yan without concern. Then, while Zhao's forces were divided, Qin would strike.

Thinking of this, the rage in Zhao Yan's heart was impossible to conceal.

Hate!

He hated Ying Zheng with a burning passion, wishing he could tear the man to pieces.

The incessant troubles in Yingchuan County, the request for an alliance—it was all a scheme. A trap to lure him in. This filled him, who had always considered himself superior to Ying Zheng, with fury and regret.

"Shangjiangjun (Senior General) Pang Xuan will surely annihilate the Qin Army," Guo Kai chimed in.

Regarding Pang Xuan's capabilities, the ministers in the court were not surprised. Since the death of Lian Po, Pang Xuan had become the most senior veteran general in Zhao. Not even Li Mu could compare. Therefore, as the Zhao Jun returned as reinforcements, Zhao Yi said little to refute Zhao Yan.

"How is the situation in Dai Territory?" Zhao Yan asked, his gaze falling upon Zhao Yi.

"Replying to the Great King," Zhao Yi stepped forward to report. "The great battle in Dai Territory is still at a stalemate. General Li Mu led his troops out of the city to attack, using his cavalry's advantage to assault the Qin Army. Zhao is renowned throughout the world for its mounted archery, but the Qin general, Meng Wu, has refused to engage General Li Mu, retreating continuously instead. Now, General Li Mu has already pushed to the borders of Qin."

"If Ying Zheng attacks Zhao, then Zhao can also attack Qin," Zhao Yan declared immediately, his mind clouded by hatred. "Relay my imperial edict. Order Li Mu to attack and breach the border cities of Qin's Northern Frontier."

"Great King," Zhao Yi spoke out at once. "You absolutely must not! Our Frontier Army in Dai Territory consists mostly of cavalry. They excel at mounted warfare but are not adept at storming fortified cities. Moreover, the Qin Army's goal is to tie down General Li Mu and our two hundred thousand-strong Frontier Army. If we truly invade Qin's territory, we will be deeply ensnared."

He was terrified that Zhao Yan, having lost all reason, would stubbornly order Li Mu to attack.

"Humph."

Zhao Yan snorted coldly but reigned in his impulse.

Just then, a messenger charged into the great hall. "Report! Urgent news from Wu'an!"

"What is it?" A sense of dread flashed through Zhao Yan's heart as he asked immediately.

"Wu'an City has fallen!" the messenger reported, kneeling on the ground. "Shangjiangjun (Senior General) Pang Xuan requests that the Great King immediately assemble a large army to defend Handan. The Senior General is currently fighting a retreating battle, doing everything in his power to delay the Qin Army while preserving his forces to defend Handan."

Upon hearing this, Zhao Yan's expression changed drastically. His body trembled as he shot up from the throne, his face turning deathly pale. "How could this be? How many days has it been? How can the Qin Army be so formidable? How could veteran General Pang be unable to stop them? The General fought incessantly in Yan without a single defeat. How could he fall so quickly to the Qin Army?"

Zhao Yan's voice began to tremble. However ignorant he was, he understood that Wu'an City was barely a hundred li from Handan. It was Handan's last defensive barrier.

"Three hundred thousand soldiers... The Qin Army only attacked yesterday. This means Old General Pang held the city for less than a day before they broke through," Zhao Yi said, equally shocked. No one had expected such an outcome.

"Great King," a minister immediately stood up and proclaimed loudly. "Wu'an City was the final bulwark protecting Handan. Now that Wu'an has fallen, Handan is in peril. We must retreat into Dai Territory while the Qin Army has yet to arrive, using it as our cornerstone of defense."

His suggestion found agreement among many other ministers.

"I concur."

"As the proverb says, 'So long as the green mountains remain, there will be no shortage of firewood.' Now that the Qin Army has breached Wu'an City, Handan has no defensive barriers left. Our only option is to retreat to Dai Territory. With the forces of Senior General Pang and General Li Mu, we can certainly defend Dai Territory and hold it. Only then can we preserve the foundation of Zhao."

Several more ministers from Zhao stepped forward to plead their case. For many of these aristocratic clans, their own interests were paramount. They cared little for lost lands or a fallen capital. As long as their families, power, and wealth remained secure, nothing else mattered. Such people have existed in every era.

At this moment, even Zhao Yi did not speak out against evacuating Handan.

The state of Zhao was comprised of the joined lands of Zhao Territory and Dai Territory. The latter was land conquered by the former King Wuling of Zhao, who annexed Dai State into Zhao. Dai Territory was comparable in size to Zhao Territory, encompassing nearly half the state's total land and boasting a population of almost ten million. Dai Territory was essentially half of Zhao.

However, the Zhao elite had never regarded Dai Territory with the same importance as their own Zhao Territory. They even ostracized officials who hailed from there, with Li Mu being the prime example. Despite his rank as a senior general of Zhao, he was never truly accepted into the state's core political circles.

"We absolutely cannot abandon Handan!" another minister argued. "Handan is the capital of Zhao! If we abandon our capital, what will become of the millions of people in Zhao Territory? Are we to hand over Zhao Territory to Qin on a silver platter? Senior General Pang Xuan has already stated that he will delay the Qin Army to allow the Great King to dispatch troops for Handan's defense. As long as Handan does not fall, Zhao Territory will not be lost. In the past, when Ying Ji of Qin was still alive, Zhao suffered grievous losses at Changping, and our national power was in steep decline. The Qin Army reached the very gates of Handan, but in the end, Zhao's military and its people united as one. They successfully defended Handan and forced the Qin Army to retreat."