

Longevity 265

Chapter 265: Beneath Handan City! Dunruo's Shock: Where Does This Force Come From? (Part 2)

But at this moment, a rational Zhao Yan raised his hand. "The Old General is right. This concerns the very survival of Zhao; we must proceed with caution."

"I have already stated that all military authority concerning Handan, as well as the fate of Zhao itself, will be given to the Old General. Our provisions will only be secure if a large army guards them."

"Prime Minister, from now on, you will be responsible for dispatching provisions from other cities. Once the provisions arrive in Handan, they are all to be handed over to the Old General for safekeeping," Zhao Yan ordered.

"I accept the decree," Guo Kai replied, seeing he had no other choice.

Pang Xuan was deeply moved by Zhao Yan's trust. He knelt immediately. "This old servant vows loyalty unto death to the Great King and will never disappoint you!"

"Prime Minister," Zhao Yan continued, his tone grave, "it is fortunate the Old General reminded me. Our provisions in Handan are only sufficient for the army for less than four months. You must hurry and gather more."

"Great King," Guo Kai said helplessly, "it is not that this servant has failed to gather them, but there are simply no more provisions to be found. Zhao is currently embroiled in war. We have been fighting Yan for months, consuming countless provisions. Now, with the Qin invasion, much of our remaining grain has fallen into the hands of the Qin Army. Furthermore, the autumn harvest has not yet arrived. So..."

"For the survival of the nation, every citizen of Zhao has a responsibility to protect it," Zhao Yan declared with an unquestionable tone. "Let my decree be known: we will levy more taxes. The money and grain collected will be used to purchase provisions."

"Great King," Zhao Yi couldn't help but interject, "the tax in Zhao is already at seventy percent! Any increase would bring it to at least eighty percent. The common people will not be able to survive."

Unlike Zhao Yan, Zhao Yi still possessed a conscience regarding the people of Zhao state.

"There is no need for me to elaborate on how utterly tyrannical Qin is, is there?" Zhao Yan retorted. "Remember the Battle of Changping? After 400,000 Zhao Jun soldiers laid down their weapons, Qin took up the butcher's knife and committed a massacre that shocked the world. If Qin breaches our capital, our nearly twenty million citizens will be enslaved. How many will die then?"

"For the survival of Zhao, this is a duty every citizen must fulfill. The tax is indeed high now, but once we repel Qin, I will naturally compensate them," Zhao Yan stated, his expression unchanging.

To Zhao Yan, the survival of the people was irrelevant. He only cared about his throne and his power. As long as he could repel Qin and secure his throne, as long as Zhao state still stood, any price was worth paying.

Furthermore, if Zhao state were to fall and truly be destroyed by Qin, then this mess would become Qin's problem. If they mishandled it, the people of Zhao would come to hate Qin with a vengeance.

"Great King, if this causes public outrage, it will hinder our resistance against Qin!" Zhao Yi tried to persuade him again.

"Lord Chunping," Guo Kai interjected loudly, "we face a national calamity! If the people have grievances, they should direct them at Qin, not the Great King! This is all Qin's fault."

"The Prime Minister is still the one who looks out for my interests," Zhao Yan said with a contented smile. "Alright, this matter is settled. Prime Minister, go and implement the policy. Court is dismissed."

Zhao Yan couldn't be bothered with another word and promptly left.

Even if we manage to defend Handan and repel Qin, with the state things are in, Zhao will not recover its strength for at least a decade. Zhao Yi sighed to himself.

「Inside the King of Zhao's Bedchambers.」

"Why has Li Mu not returned yet?" Zhao Yan asked, looking at Guo Kai.

"Great King," Guo Kai said gravely, "Li Mu refuses to relinquish his military authority."

Upon hearing this, Zhao Yan first froze, then snorted coldly. "Just as I expected."

"Rest assured, Great King," Guo Kai immediately replied. "I have already dealt with him. General Yan Ju has successfully seized control of the military, and the loyalist generals brought from Handan have replaced all of Li Mu's confidants. The entire Frontier Army is now under our control."

"You have done well," Zhao Yan said in a deep voice. "If Li Mu is dead, so be it."

The news of Li Mu's death caused no ripples in him. To Zhao Yan, Li Mu was merely a rival threatening his authority.

"Great King," Guo Kai suggested, "Li Mu is dead, but his reputation in Zhao rivals that of Lian Po. I propose we blame his death on Qin. This will incite the soldiers' hatred for the enemy."

"The Prime Minister speaks wisely," Zhao Yan nodded in approval. "This is a matter only you can handle."

「After leaving the Zhao Royal Palace.」

「Inside the Chancellor Mansion.」

"Lord Dunruo," Guo Kai said respectfully to Dunruo. "I have seized the military authority from Li Mu and Sima Shang. I also sent men to kill them, but the situation has changed. Li Mu and Sima Shang were

rescued en route. However, I still lied and reported them dead. The Great King did not question it. But as for who exactly rescued them, this subordinate truly does not know."

"Rescued Li Mu and Sima Shang?" Dunruo's brows furrowed slightly. "Could it be someone from Zhao state?"

"No," Guo Kai replied respectfully. "The assassination of Li Mu was a top-secret matter planned solely by me. It's impossible for anyone else to have known. Furthermore, their rescuers are by no means ordinary. Every one of them is a highly skilled fighter. They killed over five hundred of my Prefecture Soldiers and withdrew without a single casualty."

In front of Zhao Yan, he was full of lies, but facing Dunruo, who held his very life in his hands, Guo Kai was completely honest, not daring to tell a single lie. After all, he wanted to live and secure a future of wealth and glory.

Listening to Guo Kai's report, Dunruo's expression turned grave. "How many of them were there?"

"Based on observations at the scene, those people numbered no more than five hundred," Guo Kai replied.

"Five hundred men fought three thousand Zhao Prefecture Soldiers head-on, killed over five hundred of them, and then retreated unscathed?"