

## Longevity 288

Chapter 288: Zhao Feng Returns, Ying Zheng Is Slightly Surprised!

When they were brought before him, Zhao Feng waved a hand. "Kneel."

A trusted aide immediately lashed out with a kick.

THUD!

"Ah!" Zhao Yan cried out in pain as he was kicked to the ground.

"Zhao Yan," Ying Zheng said, looking down at him with mockery in his eyes. "We meet again. Have you missed me?"

Over a year ago, Zhao Yan himself had traveled to Xianyang to sign a treaty with Ying Zheng. But that treaty had been Ying Zheng's scheme from the very beginning. It was designed to make Zhao Yan let his guard down against Qin and attack Yan, thereby giving Qin the perfect opportunity to strike and conquer Zhao.

Now, the great feat of destroying a nation had been accomplished. Zhao Yan, who had been a lofty monarch just over a year ago, was now a prisoner at his feet. His former power and prestige were gone, leaving him only with his disgrace.

Hearing Ying Zheng's words, Zhao Yan trembled inside, but he knew begging for mercy was futile. Therefore, he raised his head fearlessly and spoke with venomous hatred, "Zhao Zheng, if you have the guts, then kill me! I am not afraid to die."

"I hate that I ever believed you! I hate that I was deceived into signing that so-called treaty!" he continued. "I hate that I didn't annihilate you back then! Killing Shen Yue wasn't enough. I should have killed you, that girl, and that old fool!"

Listening to Zhao Yan's words, Ying Zheng laughed, a sound devoid of humor. "Zhao Yan, after all these years, you are still so naive. Do you truly believe I would let our grudge end with an easy death for you? As for your so-called hatred? It's laughable to me. You are an incompetent man and an incompetent king. Your Zhao state deserved to be destroyed by my hand, and you will witness it all. You fancied yourself a great conqueror, so I will make you the reviled king of a fallen nation, a name to be cursed for millennia. Our score will be settled, step by step."

Feeling the crazed fury in Ying Zheng's eyes, a chill shot through Zhao Yan's heart, but he still held his ground. "I don't fear you. Kill me if you want, but you will never hear me beg for mercy."

"And I'll tell you this," he spat, "don't be happy for too long. My Zhao may be finished, but your Qin will fall sooner or later. I don't believe your luck will last forever."

Ying Zheng just sneered, dismissing Zhao Yan's powerless threats. He slowly crouched down, meeting the captive's gaze. "Do you know why you lost? In terms of national power, your Zhao state was only slightly inferior to my great Qin. In military strength, you were not outmatched. In terms of generals, you had three commanders who could have rivaled my own three Senior Generals. Yet, with all that strength, you still lost. Utterly defeated."

"In the end, it's because you were too foolish. You discarded the strength of Lian Po and the brilliance of Li Mu, even hounding them to their deaths. My Daqin Elite Soldiers breached your capital with ease and now stand in your royal palace, and it is all thanks to you, Zhao Yan. If you hadn't forced Lian Po to his death, if you hadn't disposed of Li Mu, it would not have been so easy for me."

"Zhao Yan," Ying Zheng's voice dripped with scorn, "you are not just the king who lost his nation; you are the most inept and useless king in the entire history of Zhao. After you die, I look forward to seeing how you explain yourself to your ancestors in the underworld."

Every word was a calculated barb. Clearly, Ying Zheng wanted to not only kill Zhao Yan's body but also crush his spirit, to make him suffer to the very end.

Listening to this, Zhao Yan's face turned deathly pale. He had no words with which to retort.

Just then, the sound of rapid footsteps approached. Guo Kai, having already shed his official Zhao robes for a set of fine but plain clothes, was hurrying toward Ying Zheng. As he drew near, the Imperial Guard Army stopped him. "Halt!"

"Great King!" Guo Kai called out, his voice filled with an urgent, fawning tone. "Your servant requests an audience!"

"Prime Minister?" Zhao Yan looked up, his face a mask of utter disbelief, as if seeing something impossible.

A faint smile touched Ying Zheng's lips. He waved a hand, and the Imperial Guards blocking Guo Kai immediately stepped aside.

Guo Kai scrambled forward and fell to his knees before Ying Zheng, bowing with the utmost respect. "Your servant, Guo Kai, greets the Great King! May Qin prosper for ten thousand years! May the Great King live for ten thousand years! Your servant has longed for this day, the day Your Majesty would preside over Handan, for so very long. Congratulations, Great King!"

This stream of flattery was a skill the sycophant had perfected.

"You... Guo Kai... you betrayed me," Zhao Yan stammered, realizing what had happened. "You bastard!"

The man he had trusted most had turned against him.

Hearing Zhao Yan's accusation, Guo Kai simply turned his head, not daring to rise from his kneeling position before Ying Zheng.

"Zhao Yan," Ying Zheng said with a cold smile, "this is another reason you lost. Guo Kai has been my man since the day you sent him to Qin. After the battle at the Wei River, he was already in my hands."

"Guo Kai!" Zhao Yan shrieked. "How dare you betray me? How dare you?! I treated you so well! I made you Prime Minister, a position above all others! How could you be so heartless and treacherous?"

The sight of Guo Kai serving Ying Zheng was a betrayal so profound it left Zhao Yan speechless. He truly couldn't believe it. And now, it all made sense. He finally understood why he hadn't heard of the Qin army's advance until they were at the palace gates. Guo Kai must have suppressed all the reports. It was

all Guo Kai's doing. He had locked down all information, leaving Zhao Yan trapped and ignorant in the royal palace. After all, all matters outside the palace had been entrusted to Guo Kai, and no other court official had been allowed to leave.

"Your Majesty," Guo Kai said, addressing Zhao Yan without getting up. "It's true you treated me well in the past. And though I, Guo Kai, may be a scoundrel, I am not incapable of gratitude. But from the beginning, we were both just using each other. Every task you gave me was a deadly one, wasn't it? Intercepting and killing Mao Sui, seizing the throne... I thought that would be enough. But then you ordered me to go to Qin and kidnap the King of Qin's mother! Is that what you call treating me with great kindness?"

"If not for the benevolence of King Zheng of Qin, I would have died in Qin long ago. All your so-called favors were a joke!" Guo Kai's voice was tinged with his own resentment. He was, indeed, a scoundrel. But if he had never been sent to Qin, as foolish as he was, he wouldn't have intercepted the messages; he would have created a chance for Zhao Feng to escape. It was Zhao Yan's own heartlessness that had driven Guo Kai to complete betrayal.

"Bastard!" Zhao Yan roared, his eyes burning with hatred for Guo Kai. "You treacherous, disloyal villain! You will not die a good death! Even if you did Ying Zheng's bidding, he will never spare you! You humiliated him in the past, too! Getting rid of the donkey when the grinding is done—that is the way of the People of Qin!"

At these words, Guo Kai's heart trembled. He was terrified of death. Now that Zhao was finished, he was naturally afraid that King Zheng of Qin would discard him now that he was no longer useful.

"Zhao Yan," Ying Zheng spoke slowly, his gaze falling upon Guo Kai. "Do you think I am as narrow-minded as you?"

"Guo Kai."

"Your servant is here."

"I made you a promise. I said that if you helped me conquer Zhao, I would grant you a lifetime of wealth and honor. I am a man of my word; I do not break my promises. In a few days, you may go wherever you wish within the territory of Qin. As long as you do not engage in corruption or oppress the people, I guarantee you a life of wealth and security."

"After today," Ying Zheng declared with an air of finality, "Guo Kai, the Prime Minister of Zhao, is dead to the world."

Hearing this, Guo Kai bowed his head to the floor again, tears of gratitude streaming down his face. "Your servant thanks His Majesty for his immense grace!"

For Ying Zheng, this was simple logic. Guo Kai had rendered a great service to Qin and to him, and his contributions were significant. Without him, dealing with Lian Po and Li Mu would not have been so simple, nor would capturing Zhao Yan have been so effortless. If Zhao Yan had been alerted, he would have fled to Dai Territory or another state. For that reason alone, Ying Zheng would not kill him. To Qin, he was a meritorious official.

Guo Kai turned his head to face the king on the floor. "King of Zhao," he said coldly, "This is the difference between the Great King and you. I did so much for you, yet you always treated me like a dog—to be used when convenient and discarded when not."

"Guo Kai... Ying Zheng..." Zhao Yan could only rage helplessly now. "I will haunt you as a ghost! I won't let either of you go!"

Ying Zheng had no desire to listen to any more. Seeing Zhao Yan so humbled and powerless was deeply satisfying.

"Take him away," Ying Zheng ordered coldly. "Keep him under strict guard."

"As you command," Ren Xiao acknowledged immediately.

Two Imperial Guards stepped forward, seized Zhao Yan, and dragged him away.