

Longevity 74

Chapter 74: Marriage Alliance? Eighteenth Son Hu Hai? Birthday?

The Meng Family!

Although its current Family Head, Shangjiangjun Meng Wu, was not as prestigious as Wang Jian, the Meng Family commanded immense respect within Qin. They were a military house utterly devoted to the throne, having served Qin loyally for three generations. This gave them a unique standing that rivaled even the more deeply-rooted Wang Family. Furthermore, the retired patriarch of the Meng Family, Meng Ao, had once been a Shangjiangjun of Qin and the right-hand man of the famed Lord Wu'an, Bai Qi.

As a house of the Old Nobility, the Meng Family had astutely avoided the power struggles with the New Nobility. For this reason, neither faction in the court dared to offend them.

The moment Meng Yi's name was mentioned, both Wang Wan and Li Si fell silent, daring not to contend further. Zheng Guo's recommendation was not born from self-interest but purely from a sense of public duty. He knew Meng Yi was a capable minister who, if put in charge, would govern without imposing harsh burdens on the people.

A faint smile touched Ying Zheng's lips upon hearing Zheng Guo's recommendation. This was exactly what he had wanted. A seemingly casual question had not only won over Zheng Guo and put his heart at ease but had also led his ministers to propose the very man Ying Zheng had in mind for the position of Prefectural Governor.

Perhaps this was the art of imperial statecraft: to have an idea but let a subordinate be the one to voice it.

"Since Minister Zheng has made the recommendation, how could I refuse?" Ying Zheng said with a slight smile, then turned his gaze to Meng Yi. "Minister Meng, you shall depart for the Han Land tomorrow to administer Yingchuan County. Once the region is firmly under Qin's control and the people's hearts are settled, I will personally reward you for your merits."

Meng Yi stepped forward and bowed deeply. "This official accepts the command to administer Yingchuan County. However, I have several concerns and beseech Your Majesty to resolve them."

"Speak," Ying Zheng said with a faint smile.

"Yingchuan has only just been pacified; there will undoubtedly be rebels and troublemakers. Should they be handled with harsh punishments or with lenient appeasement?"

"Furthermore, with Yingchuan now under the governance of Qin, how should its farmland be divided? Should it all be nationalized by the state, or should there be another arrangement?"

"As I take charge of Yingchuan's administration, will I have the authority to mobilize troops if I require the assistance of the garrisoning Sharp Warriors to maintain order?" Meng Yi asked, standing straight with a solemn expression.

"If there are rebels, deal with them harshly. Punish them all according to Qin Law," Ying Zheng stated directly. "Han has fallen. With the establishment of Yingchuan County, the land is now the territory of Qin. It is only right that all of Qin's laws are implemented there. If you need to mobilize troops, you may consult with Li Teng."

Hearing this, Meng Yi bowed once more. "This official accepts the edict."

"If you have any other concerns, you may voice them now," Ying Zheng continued in a deep voice. "As long as it pertains to maintaining order, I permit you to do whatever the law does not forbid."

The territory of Han, while not vast compared to the other states, had a considerable population of three to four million. Mismanaging such a large number of people could easily lead to chaos, which was why a capable minister was needed to govern it.

"Your Majesty has already granted me three provisions. This official has no other requests," Meng Yi replied. "If I truly encounter an unsolvable problem, I will submit a petition to Your Majesty." He then bowed deeply again.

"Very well," Ying Zheng nodded, saying no more.

"Your Majesty," Wang Wan spoke up, stepping forward with a smile. "The impending fall of Han is a joyous occasion for Qin. I have heard that Your Majesty intends to betroth Princess Liuyang to Wang Ben, the son of General Wang Jian. Why not make this a double celebration? General Wang Jian's daughter is fourteen years old, the same age as the Eldest Imperial Son. With the General holding the border and his subordinate Li Teng conquering Han, we could arrange the betrothal now, making it a triple blessing."

Ying Zheng smiled faintly at the suggestion, his expression calm. Rumors about this had already been circulating before Qin had even moved its armies against Han. Ying Zheng had done nothing to stop them, an intentional act of tacit approval. For the Wang Family, the proposal to wed a princess to Wang Ben was a sign of great favor, an unparalleled honor. In return, giving a daughter of the Wang Family to his own eldest son was, beneath the surface of honor, a measure of political balance—akin to taking a hostage.

Political marriages, arranged by royal decree, had been a tool of power since ancient times and would continue to be for generations to come. Having served in Qin for so many years, how could Wang Jian not understand the sovereign's intent? Even if he were reluctant, what could he do? Once a Royal Edict was issued, a subject had no choice but to obey.

"This matter," Ying Zheng began slowly, "we shall discuss it further when the Shangjiangjun returns in triumph."

Upon hearing this, Wang Wan's old face was wreathed in smiles. He understood Ying Zheng's meaning perfectly. By not objecting, the king was giving his consent to move the matter forward. As the Chancellor of Qin, Wang Wan's position was second only to the king. He balanced the court and wielded immense power. Having reached this peak, he could climb no higher, but for the sake of the Wang Family and his descendants, he had to plan for the future.

Clearly, the key to his family's future lay with the throne—by supporting the future king. And the Wang Family had chosen the natural heir, the Eldest Imperial Son, Fusu.

"Your Majesty is wise," Wang Wan said respectfully before stepping back.

"Alright," Ying Zheng announced. "Business is concluded. I have petitions to review. If there is anything else, it can be raised at the court session tomorrow."

"Your humble officials take their leave." The ministers dared not disobey. They bowed in respect and departed one by one.

Soon, the only person left in the grand hall was Zhao Gao, who remained attending at his side.

"Why have you not left?" Ying Zheng asked, looking up from his desk, his tone indifferent.

"Replying to Your Majesty," Zhao Gao said, kneeling humbly on the floor, "this servant was hoping to ask which palace Your Majesty will be gracing with your presence tonight?"

"You may decide," Ying Zheng said dismissively. He paid little attention to such things. The concubines in the harem were not the women he truly loved; they were merely there to continue his bloodline, to produce heirs. As the ruler of a nation—the mightiest nation in all of Shenzhou—Ying Zheng had fewer than ten concubines in his harem. Compared to the King of Han, who had dozens or even hundreds, it was clear where Ying Zheng's heart was not.

"A few days ago, Mrs. Hu mentioned that the Eighteenth Prince misses Your Majesty. Coincidentally, today is the Eighteenth Prince's eighth birthday. How about Your Majesty spends the night at Mrs. Hu's palace?" Zhao Gao suggested tentatively.

"It is Hu Hai's birthday?" A flicker of warmth crossed Ying Zheng's eyes as he remembered the clever, lively boy. He nodded. "Do as you suggest."

"This servant accepts the edict." Inwardly pleased, Zhao Gao immediately acknowledged the order. He slowly rose and exited Zhangtai Palace.

Ying Zheng, however, seemed lost in a daze. The word "birthday" had triggered a memory.

Birthday.

In eighteen days, it will be Efang's birthday.

How wonderful it would be if you were still by my side.

If only I had protected you back then, you would have always been with me. Our child might have been even older than Fusu.

Where... where are you?

Ying Zheng murmured to himself, his eyes filled with longing and remembrance. In that moment, he was not the majestic, domineering sovereign, but just an ordinary man.