

I. Dynasty 104

Chapter 104: Beating a Drowning Dog

The Qingzhou prison was dimly lit, and Princess Pingyang's final words extinguished Wang Chengchou's last glimmer of hope.

He laughed bitterly, "Your Highness, I, Wang Chengchou, swear to the heavens that this assassination attempt has nothing to do with the Wang family. It was all orchestrated by him—the Prince of Qi!"

Wang Chengchou pointed at Xiao Ming, his eyes filled with deep hatred. He regretted not acting on the hint from Prince Wei three years ago to kill Xiao Ming.

Unfortunately, it was too late now. He hadn't expected Xiao Ming to grow so quickly, nor had he anticipated that Xiao Ming would be so ruthless as to try to eliminate the Wang family while his own position was still unstable.

"Nonsense! Even at death's door, you still try to frame the Prince of Qi," Princess Pingyang said sharply. "Do you think I would believe your lies?"

At this moment, Ouyang Mu stepped forward. A flash of his blade, and Wang Shijie's head rolled to the ground, his face frozen in terror.

"Shijie!" Wang Chengchou cried out in anguish, staring at his son's lifeless, wide-open eyes.

Wang Chengchou's eyes turned bloodshot. "Xiao Ming, I've lost. Three years ago, I should have listened to Prince Wei and killed you. Hah, I thought you still had some use, that you could help our Wang family rise in Qingzhou. I never imagined I was nurturing a tiger that would one day devour me. But do you really think you can easily destroy the Wang family with just the Qingzhou army?"

As soon as Wang Chengchou said this, Princess Pingyang's expression changed drastically. "Ouyang Mu, what are you waiting for? Are you going to let him keep spouting nonsense?"

"Your Highness, why are you so nervous? I've heard that you're quite close to Prince Wei. Did you also know about his plans to harm the Prince of Qi?" Wang Chengchou laughed maniacally.

If the Wang family was going to be destroyed, he wasn't going to let Xiao Ming or the Great Yu imperial family off the hook.

Wang Chengchou's words caused Xiao Ming's expression to change. He looked at Princess Pingyang. "Auntie, is what Wang Chengchou said true?"

"Ming'er, this man is just trying to confuse the truth. Do you still believe him now? The Wang family is guilty of heinous crimes, and I will not let them go unpunished," Princess Pingyang said angrily.

"Nephew believes you," Xiao Ming said. As the saying goes, a dying man's words are often truthful. He believed Wang Chengchou wasn't lying, and it seemed that Prince Wei's plan to kill him was real. However, he couldn't be sure if his aunt was aware of it.

But Wang Chengchou was clearly trying to drag someone down with him in his final moments. This only made Princess Pingyang even less likely to spare him.

As Ouyang Mu raised his sword to strike again, Xiao Ming stopped him. "Auntie, let me handle Wang Chengchou and Wang Xuan. The Wang family has committed countless atrocities over the years in Qingzhou. Tomorrow, I will have these two executed in the eastern market to give the people justice."

"That's fine," Princess Pingyang said. "But don't listen to any more of his nonsense."

Xiao Ming nodded and said to Lu Fei, "Take them away and lock them up."

Wang Chengchou continued to laugh maniacally. After years of careful planning, everything had ultimately benefited someone else. He shouted, "Xiao Ming, Qingzhou doesn't belong to the Wang family, and it won't belong to you either. Just wait. The barbarian cavalry knows me, but they don't know you. Sooner or later, this place will be razed to the ground. I'll be waiting for you on the road to the underworld..."

Xiao Ming curled his lip and said calmly, "That day may never come."

As Wang Chengchou's voice faded into the distance, Xiao Ming and Princess Pingyang left the Qingzhou prison.

Princess Pingyang said, "Ming'er, for the time being, Ouyang Mu is at your disposal. The Wang family is despicable. Make sure to eradicate them completely."

"Auntie, don't worry. For the sake of the people, I will ensure the Wang family is completely dismantled," Xiao Ming said.

Princess Pingyang nodded and, escorted by her guards, headed to the Prince of Qi's residence.

Xiao Ming waited outside the prison for a while until Lu Fei emerged.

"Your Highness, the Qingzhou army has been assembled. Should we arrest all the Wang family members now?" Lu Fei asked.

Xiao Ming said, "The Wang family compound is just the residence of Wang Chengchou and his son. The true strength of the Wang family lies in their estates outside the city. Now that Wang Chengchou and his son have been captured, the rest of the Wang family has likely already received the news and are waiting for us in their fortified manor."

"Three years ago, during the barbarian invasion, the Wang family did the same. This time will likely be no different. Knowing they're doomed, they'll resist fiercely. This will be difficult, as the Wang family has many retainers, with around five thousand trained fighters. If we attack head-on, the Qingzhou army will suffer heavy losses."

Xiao Ming said, "That's why we can't use the punishment of exterminating the nine clans. Wang Chengchou's greatest wish now is for me and the Wang family to fight to the death. I won't give him that satisfaction. You and General Ouyang should surround the Wang family estates and inform the people inside that only Wang Chengchou and his son are guilty of the assassination attempt. Innocent parties will not be implicated, and only the assets of Wang Chengchou and his son will be confiscated. The others can keep their land."

Lu Fei nodded. "What if they still refuse?"

“Then tell them that if the manor is breached, everyone inside—men, women, and children—will be killed without exception,” Xiao Ming said sternly.

Lu Fei acknowledged the order and immediately headed to the Qingzhou military camp.

Ouyang Mu said, “Your Highness has a clever plan. This way, you might dismantle the Wang family without shedding blood. However, the crime of assassinating a princess is grave. How can you arbitrarily change the punishment?”

It seemed that nobles from other regions always felt a sense of superiority when they came to his fiefdom. Ouyang Mu was no exception.

“I will discuss this with my aunt. General Ouyang, you need not worry. If you insist, you can lead the golden-armored guards to attack the manor. I won’t object.”

“You...” Ouyang Mu was speechless. He could see that Princess Pingyang still hoped for a mutual destruction between Xiao Ming and the Wang family, which was why he had spoken up.

But he hadn’t expected Xiao Ming to turn the tables on him.

Ouyang Mu left in a huff, and Xiao Ming sneered. He then said to Zhao Long, “Go to the Qin family and inform them about the Wang family’s assassination attempt. Also, tell Qin Chuanyun that I hope he can provide a detailed list of the Wang family’s crimes over the years and cooperate with me in eradicating the remnants of the Wang family across the six states.”

Zhao Long nodded and rode off.

News of the Wang family's assassination attempt quickly spread throughout Qingzhou. Those who had close ties with the Wang family were thrown into a state of panic.

However, their fears were unfounded. Soon, a notice was posted at the city gates stating that innocent parties would not be punished, and those who provided evidence of the Wang family's crimes would be rewarded.

In no time, many people seized the opportunity to kick the Wang family while they were down, reporting their numerous crimes to the authorities.

Xiao Ming and Fan Zeng quickly compiled this evidence and printed it in the next day's newspaper, exposing the Wang family's atrocities.

The newspapers reached every county, town, and village in the six states the following day. When the people learned that the Wang family had been brought to justice, they erupted in cheers.