

## I. Dynasty 107

### Chapter 107: The Fall of the Wang Family, Xiao Ming's Feast

“Traitors! Traitors! You are all traitors!”

On the earthen fortress walls, Wang Chengheng looked around, meeting cold, unfeeling gazes. His eyes bloodshot, he glared at Wang Chengping and swung his steel sword down with all his might.

At that moment, the soldiers behind Wang Chengheng immediately grabbed Wang Chengping and pinned him to the ground.

A faint smile appeared on Wang Chengping’s lips as he stepped forward and shouted to Xiao Ming below, “Your Highness, I am Wang Chengping. We have captured Wang Chengheng. This entire incident was the fault of Wang Chengchou and his brothers. I beg Your Highness to spare the others.”

Everything that had happened on the fortress walls was witnessed by those below. Lu Fei burst into laughter, while Ouyang Mu’s face turned ashen.

“A wise man knows when to yield. I will honor my promise,” Xiao Ming said, his heart swelling with satisfaction. In warfare, the best victory is one achieved without bloodshed.

Although Xiao Ming was not afraid of a prolonged battle with the Wang family, Qingzhou was still in the process of rebuilding. Such a conflict would only weaken the region further.

Moreover, the information Wang Chengchou had revealed was shocking. If true, Xiao Ming would need to station heavy troops both to the north and south—one to defend against the barbarians and the other to guard against Prince Wei.

“Open the gates!” Wang Chengping shouted. With a creak, the gates of the fortress slowly swung open.

“Advance!” Xiao Ming said excitedly.

This was his first experience with a cold-weapon battle, and the fact that he had resolved the Wang family’s threat without shedding blood gave him a small sense of accomplishment.

Just as he was about to ride into the fortress, Lu Fei suddenly stopped him, saying gravely, “Your Highness, be cautious. There may be a trap. For safety’s sake, let me first disarm them.”

Xiao Ming felt a pang of embarrassment. He was still inexperienced, and Lu Fei’s concern was valid. If Wang Chengping was feigning surrender, Xiao Ming could be walking into a deadly trap.

Staying put, he watched as Lu Fei led a thousand soldiers into the fortress.

After half an hour, a line of Qingzhou soldiers took control of the walls, and one of them shouted, “Your Highness, the fortress is secure.”

Relieved, Xiao Ming entered the fortress with Ouyang Mu.

The fortress was essentially a miniature city, self-sufficient but heavily focused on military purposes.

The Wang family's fortress was three hundred meters long and wide, roughly the size of a modern middle school. It contained granaries, armories, and housing, allowing it to sustain itself for three months, or even half a year, if cut off from the outside world.

Inside the fortress, Xiao Ming saw Wang Chengheng, bound tightly, with Lu Fei and Wang Chengping standing on either side of him.

"Wang Chengping pays his respects to Your Highness," Wang Chengping said, stepping forward to bow as Xiao Ming approached.

Xiao Ming nodded at Wang Chengping and said calmly, "The Wang family should be grateful to you. You saved their lives."

"I merely trusted in Your Highness's wisdom and integrity to keep your word," Wang Chengping replied, though his heart was heavy with worry. With the Wang family's private soldiers disarmed, they would be defenseless if Xiao Ming decided to go back on his promise.

Xiao Ming smiled. "I always keep my word. I will not kill you."

"Thank you, Your Highness," Wang Chengping said, letting out a slight sigh of relief. He hesitated for a moment before asking, "Your Highness, what about the Wang family's assets..."

Lu Fei snorted coldly. “You’re quite greedy. Her Highness the Princess originally intended to execute your entire clan. It was only at His Highness’s request that she spared your lives. And now you have the audacity to covet the Wang family’s wealth?”

Wang Chengping immediately apologized, a cold sweat breaking out on his back. “Captain Lu is absolutely right. This commoner was being greedy.”

“However,” Xiao Ming interjected, “I can allow you to reclaim the lands registered under your names—on the condition that you help me dismantle the fortresses in the other states.”

As soon as Lu Fei finished speaking, Xiao Ming added his own terms.

Wang Chengping’s eyes lit up. He understood Xiao Ming’s intention: to have him organize the Wang family’s assets while disbanding the private soldiers in the fortresses of the other states.

Over the years, Wang Chengchou and his sons had monopolized most of the Wang family’s wealth, leaving little for the rest of the family. Even so, with the assets they could reclaim, they would be able to live comfortably for the rest of their lives.

Having grown accustomed to a life of luxury, being left with nothing would be a fate worse than death. This was an opportunity he couldn’t pass up, and he readily agreed.

“In that case, go and handle this matter. I will send people to accompany you,” Xiao Ming said.

Wang Chengping left with the other Wang family members, and the fortress was officially taken over by the Qingzhou army. Xiao Ming had to admit that, despite his disdain for the earthen walls, the fortress was otherwise well-constructed.

With some modifications, it could serve as another military camp.

After successfully taking the Wang family's fortress, Pang Yukun arrived upon hearing the news. He would handle the task of inventorying the remaining supplies.

"Your Highness, achieving victory without bloodshed is truly remarkable," Pang Yukun said, impressed after learning the details.

Lu Fei finally mustered the courage to ask, "Your Highness, what was in those bottles you had us throw? They were terrifying."

"That's sulfuric acid. You wouldn't understand even if I explained it. Go ask Lu Tong if you're curious," Xiao Ming replied.

He then turned to Pang Yukun and said, "The Wang family's assets are extensive. Follow Wang Chengping to take inventory and make sure he doesn't tamper with anything, especially the Wang family's mines."

"Yes, Your Highness. But aren't you worried about Wang Chengping helping the Wang family rise again?" Pang Yukun asked.

“By the time the Wang family could rise again, I could probably crush them with a single finger,” Xiao Ming said with a laugh. “Besides, I’ve spoken to Wang Xuan. Wang Chengping and the others are nothing like Wang Chengchou and Wang Chengheng. They have little loyalty to the family, and the assets under their names are minimal. At most, they’ll live as wealthy commoners, incapable of causing any major trouble. On the other hand, if I killed them, anyone with blood ties to the Wang family would fight to the death.”

Pang Yukun nodded, feeling reassured. Xiao Ming had truly grown a lot recently, learning to consider the bigger picture.

The Wang family’s lands and businesses were one thing, but there was also the matter of their private soldiers.

These soldiers were slaves and servants purchased by the Wang family, previously led by Wang family members. With the Wang family’s downfall, these people were left without a purpose.

After some thought, Xiao Ming decided to hand them over to Lu Fei to be incorporated into the army, as they had already received some training.

“Thank you, Your Highness. I’ll take these men with me,” Lu Fei said with a grin.

Since these people were still slaves and had no freedom, they had previously relied on the Wang family for survival. Now, without the Wang family, they had no idea how to fend for themselves.

Being drafted into the army was a relief for them, as it at least guaranteed them food and shelter.

The Wang family's private soldiers in the fortress numbered over two thousand. In peacetime, they were laborers, but in war, they became soldiers—a system not unlike a construction corps.

However, their loyalty might still be questionable. But with political officers in the army, that issue could be addressed.