

I. Dynasty 127

Chapter 127: Xiao Wenxuan's Thoughts

“Your Majesty has already made arrangements?”

Empress Zhao was genuinely surprised, her expression one of astonishment. Consort Zhen was equally taken aback, as she had never heard Xiao Wenxuan mention this before.

Xiao Wenxuan nodded. “The marriages of the princes of the Great Yu Empire are no trivial matter. They must be considered with the stability of the empire in mind.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

Empress Zhao bowed, her expression tinged with disappointment. Her plan to further win over Xiao Ming had failed.

Seemingly unwilling to dwell on the matter, Xiao Wenxuan turned to Consort Zhen with a smile. “Consort Zhen, I hear that Xiao Ming has created something called ‘glass’ in Qingzhou. Princess Pingyang was so intrigued that she went there to see it. I, too, am curious. What exactly is this glass?”

“Your Majesty has been busy with state affairs these days, and I dared not disturb you. The treasures Prince Qi sent have been kept with me,” Consort Zhen replied, her face showing a hint of guilt.

Xiao Wenxuan chuckled. "Perfect. Since I have some free time today, let's go and see what this glass is."

Then he turned to Empress Zhao. "Empress, please continue your stroll. Don't let my presence spoil your enjoyment."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Empress Zhao replied, understanding that Xiao Wenxuan wanted to be alone with Consort Zhen.

As they walked to the Bishui Pavilion together, Xiao Wenxuan's expression darkened, and he said sternly, "Consort Zhen, do you know your crime?"

"I... I know my crime," Consort Zhen replied. Xiao Wenxuan was a man who had weathered many storms, and it was impossible for him not to have guessed the general situation.

Xiao Wenxuan's anger flared. "Isn't the struggle among the princes chaotic enough? Now you've dragged Xiao Ming into it. Do you realize you're harming him?"

Tears welled up in Consort Zhen's eyes. "How could I not know Empress Zhao's intentions? But Ming'er is far away in Qingzhou, and so many ministers in court are slandering him. I am powerless to defend him. What else can I do?"

Xiao Wenxuan sighed. "Do you really think I've grown senile? Do you think I can't discern the truth from the ministers' words? I have indeed been harsh with Ming'er, but that's because I was frustrated with his lack of ambition. If I truly hated him to the core, would he still be alive three years ago?"

"Your Majesty..." Consort Zhen was stunned. "But..."

“But why did I send him to Qingzhou, right?” Xiao Wenxuan shook his head. “You often say that parents who love their children plan for their future. If a powerless prince were given a prosperous fiefdom, it would only harm him. Now that he’s far from Chang’an, which prince would see him as a threat?”

“Your Majesty’s coldness and harshness toward him were to prevent Ming’er from becoming the target of other princes’ jealousy?” Consort Zhen asked, puzzled.

Xiao Wenxuan smiled with satisfaction. “If I hadn’t been harsh and strict with him, would he have curbed his unruly behavior? Now, his actions in Qingzhou are like night and day, proving that my decision back then was correct. He has finally turned over a new leaf.”

Consort Zhen wiped away her tears and smiled. “It was my and Ming’er misunderstanding of Your Majesty. It turns out Your Majesty truly had his best interests at heart.”

Xiao Wenxuan helped Consort Zhen sit down. “That’s why I don’t want Ming’er to be dragged into the struggle for the throne. I will ignore the rumors and slander in court.”

“If that’s the case, I thank Your Majesty on behalf of Ming’er,” Consort Zhen said joyfully.

Compared to Empress Zhao, the Emperor was the true pillar of support for the Great Yu Empire. With Xiao Wenxuan’s promise, she no longer needed to worry.

However, if not for today’s events, Xiao Wenxuan might never have revealed his true thoughts.

Having been married for over a decade, Consort Zhen knew Xiao Wenxuan well. He was a man who kept his thoughts hidden deep within. Without this ability to endure, he would never have attained his current position of supreme power.

“We are husband and wife. There’s no need for thanks. But now, Xiao Ming has finally proven himself useful,” Xiao Wenxuan said with a smile.

The reason for his good mood today was not unrelated to the ministers’ impeachment of Xiao Ming for massacring the noble families in his fiefdom.

As the ruler of the empire, Xiao Wenxuan was well aware of the deep-seated issues plaguing the Great Yu Empire. After nearly two hundred years of rule, some problems had become too entrenched to resolve, like a disease that had spread too far.

The most serious of these issues was the six major families carving out their own territories, while local noble clans dominated the counties.

Having ascended the throne with the support of Prince Zhao, Xiao Wenxuan understood better than anyone the dangers posed by these non-imperial princes.

The current struggle for the throne might appear to be a conflict among the princes, but in reality, it was a power struggle among the non-imperial princes. As their influence grew, they were no longer content with merely manipulating the princes. Their ambitions were becoming increasingly apparent.

Thus, when Xiao Wenxuan learned that Xiao Ming had eradicated the noble families in his fiefdom, his initial reaction was shock, followed by excitement. It was as if the frustration he had long harbored toward the non-imperial princes had found an outlet in Xiao Ming.

Consort Zhen smiled. "I wouldn't say he's proven himself useful, but as long as he doesn't cause trouble for Your Majesty, that's enough."

Xiao Wenxuan chuckled. "This time, he has truly impressed me."

In front of the other concubines, Xiao Wenxuan rarely spoke so candidly, as his words would quickly reach the ears of the princes behind them.

Only in front of Consort Zhen did he feel at ease, free from the need to overthink his words.

Though the harem was filled with beauties, how many of them had he truly chosen himself? Most had been accepted to consolidate his power, women he did not truly care for.

Only Consort Zhen had caught his eye during the selection process, as she was a woman whose thoughts he did not need to constantly decipher.

It was precisely because of this that his love for Xiao Ming was deep, but so was his frustration. Being a man who disliked explanations, this had led to a situation where father and son did not understand each other.

Consort Zhen smiled faintly, recalling Xiao Wenxuan's mention of selecting a consort for Xiao Ming. "Your Majesty, earlier you mentioned selecting a consort for Ming'er. Was that truly your intention?"

At this, Xiao Wenxuan frowned. "The consort I have in mind for him is not from a noble family, but from the Fei family. This way, his safety in the latter half of his life will be assured. After all, no matter what, he will only ever be a feudal lord. Do you understand?"

Consort Zhen nodded. She understood Xiao Wenxuan's meaning. While he was not as cold toward Xiao Ming as he appeared, among all the princes, Xiao Ming was not his favorite.

This was simply a father's love for his son. In the end, Xiao Wenxuan's primary concern was the stability of the empire, and at this point, Xiao Ming was not particularly significant, as he held little weight.

"The Fei family?" Consort Zhen exclaimed in delight. "The Fei family, known for producing three generations of high-ranking officials and having disciples and former subordinates all over the empire?"

"Exactly. Although the Fei family is not a local power or a prince, their reputation is unmatched. If Ming'er marries into the Fei family, no matter who becomes emperor in the future, they will have to consider the Fei family's influence. Of course, this is assuming Ming'er has no intentions of rebellion," Xiao Wenxuan explained.

Consort Zhen's heart swelled with joy. The Fei family was a prestigious clan that many princes had sought to marry into but failed.