

## I. Dynasty 129

### Chapter 129: Court Debate

In the Bishui Pavilion, Xiao Wenxuan continued to admire the glass goblets for a while longer.

Seeing that Consort Zhen still looked worried, he comforted her, “But you don’t need to worry too much. The barbarians’ southern invasion is a matter of national importance. I won’t treat it lightly. If Prince Qi can’t hold out, I will order King Wei to send reinforcements. To the west is Prince Yong, and to the south is King Wei. If even that isn’t enough, there are still my imperial guards.”

Consort Zhen wanted to say that King Wei might not be reliable, but she swallowed her words. This was just Empress Zhao’s one-sided claim.

Bringing it up now, without solid evidence, would only anger Xiao Wenxuan, especially since he had always trusted King Wei.

“If that’s the case, I can rest easy. The rest will depend on fate. I only hope Your Majesty will support Ming’er as much as possible,” Consort Zhen said softly.

Xiao Wenxuan nodded, seemingly unwilling to continue the topic. Instead, he pointed at the goblets and asked, “By the way, did Prince Qi say what these cups are for? Are they just decorative?”

“Ming’er said they are for drinking wine. He claimed that only glass goblets can truly showcase the clarity of ‘Drunken Qingzhou,’” Consort Zhen replied.

Xiao Wenxuan seemed to like the glass goblets very much, almost reluctant to put them down. “Hmm, that’s a good point. They are indeed perfect for drinking wine. But there seem to be too few of them.”

“What’s the difficulty in that?” Consort Zhen smiled. “I’ll just ask him to send more.”

“That wouldn’t be appropriate. Qingzhou is facing such a crisis, and I’m taking his things for free,” Xiao Wenxuan said.

Consort Zhen chuckled. “Your Majesty’s words today are worth countless glass goblets. How could it be considered taking for free?”

Xiao Wenxuan laughed heartily. Consort Zhen had always been clever, and her words were always pleasing.

After spending some time in the Bishui Pavilion, Xiao Wenxuan left with the glass goblets.

Even so, he still wanted to help Xiao Ming. After all, the barbarians’ southern invasion wasn’t just Xiao Ming’s problem; it concerned the safety of the entire Great Yu Empire.

However, just three days later, a memorial made it clear what Xiao Ming needed now.

“My esteemed ministers, you have all read Prince Qi’s memorial. The evidence is clear: the barbarians have colluded with the noble families of Qingzhou to attack Cangzhou this autumn. What should we do about this?”

In the Chengqing Hall, Xiao Wenxuan sat on the throne, with ministers lined up on both sides of the steps.

On the left were civil officials, and on the right were military officials. The Crown Prince and other princes stood at the front.

“Your Majesty, the barbarians’ annual tribute demands have been increasing year by year. We have already ceded territories like Youzhou to them, yet they remain unsatisfied. Their greed knows no bounds, and their desire to destroy our Great Yu Empire remains unquenched. This time, we must not yield. Only by fighting can we deter these savages.”

A minister in a purple robe stepped forward, his voice impassioned.

As soon as he finished speaking, another minister stepped forward. “General Luo Quan, you are mistaken. The barbarians are merely preparing to demand more tribute, as they have done in previous years. A little silver will suffice to appease them. Going to war would only waste resources and harm the people. I urge Your Majesty to reconsider.”

“Minister Cui, how much more tribute must we give? Over the years, we have given enough. The barbarians fear strength, not kindness. The more tribute we give, the stronger their armies become. Their horses grow stronger, their supplies more abundant, and their weapons sharper. If this continues, the Great Yu Empire will fall, and you, Cui Hao, will be remembered as a traitor for all eternity!” Luo Quan glared, his voice filled with anger.

Cui Hao's face turned red with rage. "General Luo, you have no idea how expensive it is to run a household. Have you calculated how much silver a war would cost? How many soldiers would die? Most importantly, can we even win? Even Prince Zhao, with his formidable forces, struggles against the barbarians. Who can stand against them in Cangzhou?"

"Exactly! If not for the annual tribute, would the barbarians have withdrawn when Prince Zhao's Liangzhou was besieged?"

"A bunch of cowards! It's because of you that the barbarians have grown so powerful. You fools!"

"Stupid warmongers!"

"..."

As the two argued, the court descended into chaos, with ministers hurling accusations at each other.

"Enough!" Xiao Wenxuan roared. As always, whenever the barbarians were mentioned, the ministers split into two factions: those advocating for war and those advocating for peace.

Since his ascension to the throne, the barbarians had grown increasingly powerful. At that time, his reign was still unstable, and the barbarians took advantage of the situation, capturing territories like Youzhou.

Losing the strategic pass of Shanhaiguan, he had no choice but to negotiate a truce with the barbarians, ceding cities like Youzhou in exchange for time to stabilize his rule.

At the same time, he rebuilt Cangzhou to block further barbarian incursions. He understood that even if he didn't cede these cities, he couldn't hold them. Moreover, he risked losing Qingzhou and even the regions north of the Yangtze River.

Adding to this, King Wei had pleaded with him at the time, and Xiao Wenxuan himself feared the barbarians. In the end, he agreed to pay annual tribute under the advice of the peace faction.

For a while, this arrangement maintained peace. However, the barbarians' greed knew no bounds. Even after receiving tribute, they continued to harass the borders, repeatedly demanding more. The tribute gradually became a heavy burden on the Great Yu Empire.

By the time his rule was secure, the barbarians, enriched by the tribute, had grown even stronger, while the Great Yu Empire grew weaker. The voices of the peace faction in the court grew louder.

Xiao Wenxuan understood the fear in his ministers' hearts—it was the same fear he felt. After all, spending silver was better than losing wealth and status.

But now, with the barbarians invading again, he had no way out. He could only fight to stop the war.

The ministers fell silent at Xiao Wenxuan's shout.

Then Xiao Wenxuan said, "Prince Qi's memorial makes it clear. This time, the barbarians have colluded with the noble families of Qingzhou to attack Cangzhou from within. This shows that the barbarians have been planning this for a long time. Their goal is not tribute but to capture Cangzhou and threaten the heart of the Central Plains. The fertile lands of Jiangnan are the source of the Great Yu Empire's food and wealth. If we lose them, the empire will be in grave danger."

"Your Majesty is wise. The fertile lands of Jiangnan must not be lost," a minister shouted.

"Your Majesty is wise," Luo Quan said, clasping his fists.

At this point, the Second Prince spoke up. "Father, we must be cautious. The barbarians are known for their feints. Perhaps this attack on Cangzhou is just a diversion, and their true target lies elsewhere. Even if we must fight, we shouldn't commit all our forces to Qingzhou. Instead, we should let Prince Qi defend Cangzhou while we wait and observe."

"Let Prince Qi defend Cangzhou? Have you forgotten how he fled back to Chang'an three years ago?" the Fourth Prince suddenly interjected with a sneer.

As soon as these words were spoken, the ministers in the hall erupted in mocking laughter.

"So, Fourth Brother, are you volunteering to defend Cangzhou?" the Crown Prince asked, glancing sideways at the Fourth Prince.

The Fourth Prince's face turned pale. "I never said that. Qingzhou is Prince Qi's fiefdom after all. Outsiders shouldn't interfere."

