

## I. Dynasty 130

### Chapter 130: A Poisonous Plan

The glaring sunlight extended into the court, illuminating the fine dust particles floating in the air.

The heated arguments between civil and military officials, as well as the princes, filled Xiao Wenxuan's heart with irritation.

Like everyone else, he knew that the Great Yu Empire was no match for the barbarians. When Prince Zhao had visited the capital recently, his words had been filled with apprehension about the barbarians.

Although Prince Zhao's underlying message was a plea for more money and supplies from Xiao Wenxuan, it was clear that the once-mighty Zhao family, known as the "Iron Curtain of the North," was showing signs of strain.

Meanwhile, Prince Liang and Prince Yong were barely holding their own against the barbarians' constant raids. Over the years, the treasury's funds and the equipment from the Artillery Bureau had been funneled to these three northern princes.

Coupled with the annual tribute payments, the Great Yu Empire's treasury was now empty, leaving no resources to support Xiao Ming. This was precisely why the imperial guards couldn't be deployed lightly—they were the last line of defense for Chang'an.

Thus, the Second Prince's words resonated deeply with Xiao Wenxuan, while the Fourth Prince's remarks displeased him. The Crown Prince's retort to the Fourth Prince was exactly what Xiao Wenxuan himself wanted to say.

"Enough! Stop arguing. I have made my decision. We cannot increase the tribute this time. The treasury is already in deficit, and we have no money left to give to the barbarians. Moreover, constant concessions will only make the barbarians despise the Great Yu Empire even more. This time, we do not seek to defeat the barbarians, but to make them understand that the Great Yu Empire cannot be pushed around."

"Your Majesty is wise!" Luo Quan and other military officials shouted in unison.

Meanwhile, many civil officials looked as if they were mourning a great loss, their faces pale with fear. They dreaded the possibility of the barbarians reaching Chang'an, where they would lose their wealth and the comforts of their luxurious lives.

"Your Majesty, we cannot fight!" Cui Hao suddenly knelt on the ground, kowtowing repeatedly.

Following him, half of the civil officials also knelt, shouting, "Your Majesty, we cannot fight! Once the conflict begins, the Great Yu Empire will never know peace again. The nation will be destroyed..."

"Your Majesty, we cannot fight." At this point, even some military officials knelt down.

"You!"

A surge of anger rose in Xiao Wenxuan's heart. In the past, only civil officials had been like this, but now even military officials were cowering in fear of the barbarians.

He suddenly felt a deep sense of sorrow. When had the Great Yu Empire become filled with cowards and those who sought only to survive?

“Father, I have a plan that can both stop the barbarians from advancing south and prevent them from blaming the court.”

The Third Prince suddenly spoke up.

Xiao Wenxuan’s eyes lit up. “Speak quickly.”

“Father, this plan is not suitable to discuss in open court,” the Third Prince hesitated.

Xiao Wenxuan waved his hand and said to the ministers, “Court is dismissed. We will discuss this matter again tomorrow.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!”

The ministers rose and left the Chengqing Hall in an orderly manner.

Once the ministers had left, only the Third Prince remained in the hall.

Xiao Wenxuan then asked, "What is your plan?"

"It's quite simple. This time, the barbarians are advancing south merely to demand more tribute, using the threat of attacking Cangzhou and the heart of the Central Plains as leverage. Cangzhou is Prince Qi's fiefdom, and further south is King Wei's territory. To protect their own lands, Prince Qi and King Wei will naturally fight the barbarians with all their might. If they can hold Cangzhou, the barbarians will retreat in disgrace."

"If Prince Qi and King Wei cannot hold Cangzhou, we can still negotiate peace with the barbarians before the city falls. After all, if even Prince Qi and King Wei combined cannot stop the barbarians, the imperial guards and the armies of other princes, rushing from thousands of miles away, will be of little use. By then, the Great Yu Empire will be in grave danger. At that point, we can publicly declare that Prince Qi and King Wei acted without imperial orders and punish them to appease the barbarians, securing peace for the Great Yu Empire," the Third Prince explained slowly.

After presenting his plan, the Third Prince looked somewhat pleased with himself. In his view, this was the most sensible course of action.

"Scoundrel! How could I have such a venomous son?" Xiao Wenxuan suddenly erupted, grabbing a memorial and hurling it at the Third Prince. "You are asking me to betray my brothers, my son, and the entire empire! I, Xiao Wenxuan, may not be as wise as the founding emperor, but I would never stoop to such despicable acts."

The Third Prince remained calm, as if he had anticipated Xiao Wenxuan's reaction.

He said, "Father, didn't you see it clearly in court today? The peace faction is backed by Prince Zhao, Prince Liang, and Prince Yong. They are the ones who fear the barbarians. If you insist on going to war, the northern princes and the Great Yu Empire will become estranged."

Xiao Wenxuan's expression changed. Over the years, the relationship between the imperial family and the various princes had grown increasingly distant, no longer as close as it had been during the founding emperor's reign.

This was especially true for the non-imperial princes. After several generations, their ties to the imperial family had weakened, and they no longer fully obeyed the emperor's commands.

This was why, since the founding emperor's time, the emperors of the Great Yu Empire had maintained relationships with the princes through marriages.

The Third Prince's words were not impossible.

Everyone in the Great Yu Empire knew that Xiao Wenxuan and Prince Zhao were as close as brothers, but in reality, the more they acted this way, the more their relationship was a facade.

Prince Zhao was the northern shield of the empire. If he secretly colluded with the barbarians, the barbarian army could march straight to Chang'an. This was precisely why Xiao Wenxuan was so wary of Prince Zhao.

Making Empress Zhao the empress and her nephew the Crown Prince were both attempts to placate Prince Zhao.

After all, among the various princes, Prince Zhao's army was the most formidable. Used correctly, he was a valuable asset. Used incorrectly, he was a deadly weapon.

The same was true for Prince Liang and Prince Yong. Over the years, the treasury had given these three princes a great deal of silver to defend against the barbarians. If they were to turn against the empire now...

At this thought, Xiao Wenxuan couldn't bear to imagine the consequences. His earlier determination began to cool.

Now in his fifties, he no longer had the fiery passion of his youth. As he calmed down, he suddenly felt a sense of dread. He didn't want to lose the throne or the wealth and luxury before him.

The Third Prince observed Xiao Wenxuan's expression and sneered inwardly. He knew his father too well.

Xiao Wenxuan loved the throne more than anything else.

"Father, the barbarians have repeatedly harassed us. This time, we cannot let them go unpunished. But if we engage in a full-scale war with the barbarians, the Great Yu Empire risks falling apart. After all, the princes each have their own agendas. That's why I proposed this plan. It is all for the sake of the Great Yu Empire and for you, Father. Besides, at that time, it would only be a pretense of punishment to appease the barbarians," the Third Prince said again.

Xiao Wenxuan felt a wave of exhaustion. He waved his hand. "Let me think about it carefully. You may leave now."

The Third Prince bowed and left.

Outside the imperial palace, Li Zhong was waiting for the Third Prince, Xiao Zhen. Seeing him emerge from the palace, Li Zhong stepped forward and asked, "Your Highness, how did it go?"