

I. Dynasty 132

Chapter 132: King Wei Returns

“Chief Secretary Pang, there’s no need to look so gloomy. I’m just laughing bitterly. It’s clear now that Father won’t send a single soldier to Cangzhou. We have no choice but to rely on ourselves. At this point, all we can do is give it our best and leave the rest to fate. Since that’s the case, why not go all out? Not only will I demand money and grain from King Wei, but I’ll also demand them from Father. Those who want to watch me fail will have to pay for the show.”

Xiao Ming, who had been laughing heartily, suddenly stopped and spoke seriously.

Lu Fei cursed, “Your Highness is right! Those bastards want to sit back and reap the benefits? No way!”

“Ah...” Pang Yukun sighed deeply, feeling sorrow for the Great Yu Empire. This incident had revealed the true intentions of the non-imperial princes.

Even Xiao Wenxuan could no longer issue decrees entirely according to his own will.

Ignoring Pang Yukun, who he found too verbose, Lu Fei asked, “So, Your Highness, are you planning to go to Jinling City to find King Wei?”

“Why should I go to him? King Wei will come to me.”

Xiao Ming chuckled.

—

In Jinling City, at King Wei's mansion.

Just as Xiao Ming had predicted, King Wei was furious after receiving the imperial edict. The servants in the mansion were all trembling with fear.

"Third Brother, why are you so angry?"

Princess Pingyang, who was still staying in Jinling City, had been startled by King Wei's shouting and came to see what was happening. She soon learned that King Wei had received news from Chang'an, ordering him and Prince Qi to defend Cangzhou at all costs.

King Wei's face was red with anger. "Hmph! It's obvious that the court has been manipulated by the other princes. They want to deliberately weaken my forces and force me into direct conflict with the barbarians. And my brother, the Emperor, how could he fall for that Third Prince's poisonous scheme?"

"That Third Prince truly lives up to his nickname, 'Venomous Snake.' His plan is indeed ruthless. But it also hits the Emperor's weak spot. I know my brother well—he cares most about his throne. At his age, he just wants a few more years of peace and stability," Princess Pingyang said.

King Wei fumed, "He gets to enjoy peace, but what about me? If Cangzhou falls and the barbarians cross Qingzhou, where will I have left to stand? My brother has been blinded by these people. This plan harms two imperial princes and further weakens the royal family."

Princess Pingyang frowned. King Wei had hit the nail on the head. If Prince Qi and King Wei were destroyed, the only remaining imperial prince would be Prince Yong.

"I suppose my brother had no choice. Look at the ministers advocating for peace—almost all of them are aligned with Prince Zhao, Prince Liang, and Prince Yong. If my brother insisted on war, he risked these princes not only refusing to help the royal family but even aiding the barbarians. Besides, the barbarians invading Cangzhou is ultimately Prince Qi's problem. After all, when the barbarians invaded Prince Zhao's territory in the past, he had to handle it alone," Princess Pingyang explained.

King Wei slowly exhaled. Princess Pingyang's words left him speechless. When the barbarians had attacked Prince Zhao in the past, he too had stood by and watched.

However, back then, Xiao Wenxuan had provided money, grain, and equipment.

"Fine. It seems I have no way out this time. If Prince Qi can't hold Cangzhou, I may not be able to defend my own territory either."

Princess Pingyang smiled. "Actually, Brother, you don't need to worry too much. If Prince Qi can hold Cangzhou, the Great Yu Empire will remain stable."

"He can hold Cangzhou?" King Wei sneered. "Although Prince Qi has done some impressive things recently, it all seems a bit childish."

“Brother, while that may be true, if you want to minimize the losses in Wei, you’ll have to set aside your prejudices and help Prince Qi. Let him do the heavy fighting for you. That way, you’ll have fewer problems to deal with.”

King Wei nodded. “That’s a good point. It seems I’ll have to make another trip to Qingzhou to discuss this matter with Prince Qi.”

“Indeed. If that’s the case, I’ll have my people in the court stop causing trouble for Xiao Ming over the noble families,” Princess Pingyang said. “This Prince Qi really doesn’t know if he’s unlucky or fortunate.”

—

A few days later, a large fleet set sail from Jinling City, slowly making its way to Qingzhou. Three days later, the fleet arrived at the docks outside Qingzhou City.

At the docks, Xiao Ming was waiting on horseback. Just as he had expected, King Wei couldn’t wait to see him.

“Nephew! Nephew!”

King Wei disembarked from the ship and rushed toward Xiao Ming, embracing him tightly when he reached him.

Xiao Ming coughed. "Third Uncle, you're going to crush me."

King Wei laughed heartily and patted Xiao Ming's shoulder. "Nephew, you've gotten so thin. This time, your uncle has brought you many good things to help you regain your strength."

As he spoke, he glanced back at the crates being unloaded from the ship.

Xiao Ming clasped his hands in gratitude. "If that's the case, then I thank you, Uncle."

"No need for thanks. I'm sure you understand why I'm here this time. I may have to rely on you quite a bit," King Wei said.

Xiao Ming smiled. "So, Uncle, you've heard the news too. Those good-for-nothings in Chang'an are so scared of the barbarians they can't even keep their pants on. This time, they're making the two of us face the barbarians. It's outrageous."

King Wei was equally furious. "Exactly! If I had been in court, I would have drawn my sword and cut down those cowards."

As they walked and talked, it was now noon. Xiao Ming said, "Third Uncle, I've prepared a banquet by the lotus pond outside the city. Why don't we go there?"

King Wei was taken aback. He knew about Xiao Ming's execution of the local noble families by the lotus pond. By arranging the banquet there, Xiao Ming was likely reminding him that he wasn't someone to be trifled with.

Forcing an awkward laugh, King Wei pretended not to understand and said, "Let's go, let's go. It's good to be outside. Enjoying the scenery while eating is wonderful, just wonderful."

Surrounded by their guards, the two arrived at the lotus pond, where a banquet had already been set up. Servants were bustling about.

Xiao Ming invited King Wei to sit down and then said, "It's just a simple meal. I hope you don't mind, Uncle."

King Wei glanced at the many dishes he had never seen before and said, "Nephew, you're too modest. This visit isn't about the food but about discussing how to deal with the barbarians' southern invasion."

Xiao Ming pretended not to understand. "Didn't Father make it clear? The two of us are to defend Cangzhou together. Since you're older and your fiefdom is much wealthier than my Qingzhou, naturally, you'll be the main force in defending Cangzhou."

King Wei's expression tightened. He knew that even if Xiao Ming was foolish, he wouldn't be easily fooled on this matter.

He said, "That's true, but I'm afraid the battlefield is unpredictable. My troops have to travel a long distance and may not arrive in time. If we lose Cangzhou because of that, wouldn't it harm you, Nephew?"

