

I. Dynasty 141

Chapter 141: Fei Ji

Chang'an City, Qiushan District.

This was a well-known commoner district in Chang'an, for it was home to the illustrious Fei family—renowned for producing “three dukes in four generations,” with disciples and former subordinates spread across the empire.

On any given day, the Fei residence bustled with visitors—high-ranking officials, scholars, and even military generals.

The reason was simple: the Fei family's prestige was unparalleled. Unlike other powerful clans that dominated regions, the Fei family had maintained an unbroken presence in the imperial court through multiple dynasties, their cultural heritage far surpassing ordinary noble houses.

As a result, the noble families of the Great Yu Empire considered it an honor to marry a Fei daughter. Such a union elevated their status, allowing their descendants to hold their heads higher in official circles.

In a realm where aristocratic influence ran deep, bloodlines mattered immensely. Those from humble backgrounds who rose to become officials or generals often harbored deep insecurities among the nobility. But a marriage alliance with the Fei family could transform a “country bumpkin” into a “phoenix.”

Today was a rare day of rest for Fei Ji, the current head of the Fei family.

The Great Yu Empire mandated that officials could take one day off per month, known as xiumu (休沐). On such days, officials could travel, visit friends, or simply relax.

But for Fei Ji, these “rest days” were busier than court sessions. By mid-morning, a steady stream of officials arrived with gifts, eager to chat about the latest happenings in the capital.

“Chief Secretary Fei, have you heard of the newspaper causing a stir in Chang’an these past two days?” The visitor was none other than General Luo Quan.

Fei Ji feigned surprise. “Newspaper? What is that? I haven’t heard of it.”

Unlike others, Luo Quan and Fei Ji shared a genuine friendship. Their conversations revolved around court affairs, free from ulterior motives.

Thus, whenever Fei Ji wished to avoid other guests, he would simply say, “General Luo is here.”

Luo Quan’s fiery temper was legendary in Chang’an. Officials who learned of his presence would tactfully withdraw.

“This newspaper was created by the Prince of Qi. Initially, it circulated only in Qingzhou, but now it’s reached Chang’an. Do you know why?”

“The Prince of Qi?”

Fei Ji's expression shifted subtly. Some days ago, Emperor Xiao Wenxuan had summoned him privately. Instead of discussing state affairs, the emperor inquired about Fei Ji's youngest daughter, Fei Yue'er.

A veteran of decades in politics, Fei Ji immediately grasped the emperor's intent—a marriage proposal for one of his sons.

Among the princes, the crown prince had already married Fei Ji's eldest daughter, while the others had taken consorts. The emperor would never allow a Fei daughter to become a concubine.

That left only the Prince of Qi, who remained unmarried.

At the time, Fei Ji had sidestepped the issue, and the emperor hadn't pressed further.

But now, mention of the Prince of Qi put him on guard.

Fei Yue'er was his youngest and most beloved child. Frail since childhood yet extraordinarily gifted, she excelled in music, chess, calligraphy, and painting—and had inherited her mother's peerless beauty.

Every time he saw her, Fei Ji was reminded of his late wife, deepening his affection for the girl.

Naturally, he had never considered sending her far away to marry.

Unaware of Fei Ji's thoughts, Luo Quan continued, "Indeed. Some days ago, I sent my son Luo Xin to Qingzhou to assist the Prince of Qi. Who'd have thought the brat would cause trouble the moment he arrived?"

He produced a newspaper from his sleeve, grumbling, "These profiteering merchants deserve death—charging ten taels of silver for a single copy!"

Fei Ji's eyes lit up as he took the paper, immediately engrossed.

"I'd heard the Prince of Qi was unconventional, and this newspaper proves it. These policies are anything but ordinary."

Luo Quan said, "Perhaps it's Pang Yukun's doing. The man was stifled in Chang'an but had some talent."

"I know Pang Yukun. He's knowledgeable but rigid. He'd never propose such unorthodox policies to the Prince of Qi."

Reading further, Fei Ji chuckled at an anecdote about Luo Xin and the local garrison commander, Lu Fei.

"General Luo, as I predicted, Luo Xin might not last in Qingzhou. With most noble families gone, the Prince of Qi relies on men of humble origins. They won't tolerate Luo Xin's flaws."

Luo Quan scowled. "That wretched boy! I explicitly told him to be patient. This was for the greater good! Now the Prince of Qi will laugh at our Luo family!"

He pointed at the paper. "But keep reading. The Prince of Qi is impressive—a single poem changed my fool son's mind."

Fei Ji's smile faded as he read:

"The moon still shines on mountain passes as of old.

How many guardsmen of the Great Wall are dead and cold!

Were the flying general of Dragon City here,

The Tartar steeds would not dare to cross the frontier."

"Magnificent!"

Fei Ji clapped in admiration, visibly moved.

Luo Quan grinned. “When I read this, my blood boiled. I longed to charge into battle and slaughter those barbarians! For years, our Han people have suffered under foreign oppression. When will we regain the might of the Great Han, driving the barbarians beyond the frontier?”

During the court debate, Fei Ji had neither supported nor opposed the decision.

The Fei family’s longevity stemmed from their ability to navigate court intrigues—and their strict avoidance of factionalism.

This was why successive emperors had trusted them implicitly.

From the start, Fei Ji knew further arguments were futile. The imperial clan was weakening, relying on vassal kings to guard the northern borders. The barbarians’ threat loomed large, and fear was pervasive.

Like Luo Quan, he wished the Great Yu Empire could unite against the barbarians. But he understood the grim reality: it was no longer possible.

“Who’d have thought the once-notorious Prince of Qi possessed such literary talent? Remarkable. Let’s hope he can halt the barbarians’ advance. Otherwise, the Great Yu Empire’s decline is inevitable.”

Luo Quan frowned. “Why such pessimism? Even if the Prince of Qi fails, there’s still me and the imperial guard!”

Fei Ji shook his head. “You oversimplify matters. If the barbarians break through, the imperial clan will be left with only the Prince of Yong. The balance between the imperial and vassal kings will shatter—and that will herald the empire’s turmoil.”