

I. Dynasty 158

Chapter 158: Execution by Cannon

“You’ve got quite the backbone, but I, Lu Fei, love breaking hard bones like yours.”

Liu Chuang’s defiant attitude infuriated Lu Fei.

Lu Fei knew Liu Chuang’s reputation all too well. Though the Liu family wasn’t as powerful as the Wang clan among Qingzhou’s nobility, their notoriety surpassed the other four great families.

Rumors said the Lius’ ancestors were bandits who turned to farming after amassing enough wealth, eventually becoming the so-called “nobility” of today.

Yet even now, the Liu family retained their bandit ways, bullying the weak and drawing endless complaints from nearby villagers.

What’s more, because of this bastard, Lu Fei had lost his prized tiger pelt to Xiao Ming. His hatred for Liu Chuang burned even hotter.

After Xiao Ming’s sudden purge of the nobility, Liu Chuang had led many escaped clansmen into banditry, committing countless murders and robberies. Now that he was caught, he knew there was no way out.

So he hardened his heart, putting on a fearless front—even in death, he would set an example for other nobles, inspiring them to keep rebelling.

As Lu Fei rolled up his sleeves, ready to beat Liu Chuang senseless, Xiao Ming stopped him.

“Wait. Dying like that would be too merciful. Since Squire Liu is so brave and righteous, this prince must grant him a more dignified death.”

Throughout the purge, Xiao Ming had encountered many fearless nobles, which surprised him at first.

But after some thought, he understood.

The conflict between him and the nobility was now a life-or-death struggle—a battle for the survival of their entire class. Of course, these nobles would fight tooth and nail to defend their interests.

For over a thousand years, aristocratic families had controlled the court, proclaiming themselves the rightful rulers while consolidating their power.

To them, Xiao Ming’s actions were nothing short of heresy. In their eyes, he was the villain.

Realizing this, Xiao Ming smiled bitterly. The hard road ahead had only just begun.

In the hearts of the Great Yu’s nobility, he was likely the first candidate to be eliminated from the imperial succession. After all, no pig would willingly choose a butcher as its leader.

From now on, he would face endless schemes and deadly traps from the nobility.

But he already had a plan. To break a rigid class system, the most effective method was to nurture a new class to oppose it.

“Spare me your hypocritical mercy! Just you wait, Xiao Ming—the nobles of the six prefectures won’t let this go! The nobility of the entire empire will rise against you!”

Liu Chuang’s curses flew like spit.

“Bastard! I’ll cut out your dog tongue right now!” Lu Fei roared.

Xiao Ming remained calm. For him, reform was the only path to survival. Playing by the rules, no matter how talented he was, would only make him a sacrificial pawn in the imperial power struggle.

The previous assassination attempt had been a wake-up call. He’d bet his life that nobles were behind it—though tracking down the exact culprits was now impossible.

But this matter was far from over.

Watching the furious Liu Chuang, Xiao Ming said coolly, “Rejecting your execution method before even seeing it? What a waste of this prince’s kindness. Every one of you rebels has innocent blood on your hands. Chopping your heads off ten thousand times wouldn’t be enough.”

He turned to Chen Qi. “How many cannonballs do we have left?”

“Thirty-two, Your Highness.”

Xiao Ming nodded, a cold smile forming. “Then let this fearless Squire Liu experience what ‘execution by cannon’ means before he dies.”

This method of execution originated in the Mughal Empire of ancient India—founded by descendants of the Mongols—and was reportedly used to crush rebellions with terrifying effect. In modern times, a certain leader had perfected it.

Xiao Ming wasn’t considering this out of sadism. He wanted to break Liu Chuang psychologically—to force him to reveal the source of the gunpowder.

In his current state, torture alone might not work.

He never underestimated ancient people. With the prevalence of loyalty and honor in this era, some truly had unbreakable wills. Compared to lingchi (death by a thousand cuts), this was cleaner and more efficient.

“Execution by cannon?”

Putting together Xiao Ming’s question about cannonballs, Lu Fei suddenly realized what was coming. A chill ran down his spine.

Luo Xin’s expression also twisted strangely.

Only Niu Ben remained unfazed. To him, this was a relatively quick death. The Great Yu’s dungeons had entire rooms dedicated to far worse tools for dealing with rebels.

Liu Chuang, of course, had no idea what “execution by cannon” meant. But when he and his remaining men were dragged before the weapon that had breached the manor walls, his face changed.

Qingzhou soldiers bound the remaining bandits and lined them up against the manor’s outer wall.

Meanwhile, the craftsmen adjusted the strange device, its dark muzzle now aimed at Liu Chuang’s followers.

Noticing Liu Chuang’s expression, Xiao Ming asked, “Where did the gunpowder used to collapse the tunnel come from?”

“Go to hell!” Liu Chuang spat.

Xiao Ming had expected this. He stopped questioning and stepped back with Niu Ben and the others.

Lu Fei arranged the prisoners in order and returned to report. “Your Highness, let’s start with the first one—Liu Wei, Liu Chuang’s most trusted henchman. This monster has at least thirty lives on his hands. He raped wives and daughters, poisoned husbands, and even smashed a baby boy to death.”

Though born into nobility, Luo Xin had a strong sense of justice—hence his past clashes with Xiao Ming. Hearing this, he growled, “A quick death is too good for him. He deserves lingchi!”

“Silence!” Niu Ben snapped. “His Highness has his reasons. Hold your tongue.” He understood Xiao Ming’s plan perfectly.

Xiao Ming gave a slight nod. “Begin.”

Lu Fei’s words had already stoked Chen Qi’s fury. He adjusted the cannon’s angle, positioning it within sixty meters for better accuracy.

Liu Chuang was forced to stand directly in front of the cannon’s muzzle—a psychological tactic to shatter his resolve.

Everything ready, Chen Qi lit the fuse.

BOOM!

A deafening blast.

Flames and smoke erupted as the cannonball shot straight toward the wall—

THUD!

It struck the stone with a force that left a half-meter crater, missing Liu Wei by mere inches.

Though the shot didn't hit him, Liu Wei collapsed in a heap, trembling.

Standing by the cannon's mouth, Liu Chuang staggered, ears ringing, his face as pale as paper.