

I. Dynasty 161

Chapter 161: Humiliation

“And also bring some beautiful women, or else be careful with your worthless life.”

The silent envoy glanced at Zhao Xing indifferently and spoke.

Zhao Xing turned pale with fright, hurriedly apologized multiple times, and only then slowly retreated.

Seeing Zhao Xing’s submissive demeanor, one of the guards said, “Taiji, now that we’ve come to Chang’an, we should enjoy ourselves before going back. It’s said that not only is there fine wine here, but the women of Chang’an are also exceptionally beautiful.”

“That’s right. These southerners are scared to death when they see us, just like dogs encountering wolves,” another guard said.

The barbarian envoy sneered, “Sooner or later, I will turn this place into my palace. By then, I will select all the beauties of the world, just like that dog emperor of the southern people.”

“When that time comes, Taiji, don’t forget about us,” the guard said with a lewd grin.

The barbarian envoy laughed heartily and nodded, then suddenly turned serious. "It's a pity that Father Khan has grown old and lost his ambition. If I were the Heavenly Khan, why would we need to waste words with Great Yu?"

"Taiji speaks wisely. We, the noble people of the steppe, should be like eagles soaring in the sky, going wherever we please," one guard laughed.

Another guard, however, said, "But Beishan Taiji, the Great Taiji has always been displeased with you. You should still be careful."

The barbarian envoy nodded, his eyes narrowing slightly. "That coward is no match for me. What concerns me is someone else."

As the three were speaking, Zhao Xing, who had just left, turned back and said, "Honored envoys, the wine, food, and women have all been arranged. Please, follow me."

Beishan snorted, shoved Zhao Xing aside, and strode out of the guesthouse.

Zhao Xing staggered from the push but still maintained a fawning smile. Being one of Zhao Wang's men, he dared not show any disrespect to the barbarians.

Moreover, the moment he entered earlier, he heard a guard address this man as "Taiji"—which in the barbarian tongue meant "prince."

Judging from this man's appearance, it seemed that this envoy was none other than Beishan, the youngest son of the Heavenly Khan of the Golden Tent Khanate.

Rumor had it that Beishan Taiji was a formidable warrior, feared across the Western Regions. During the barbarian westward campaigns, half of the small states in the Western Regions had fallen to his might.

Realizing this, Zhao Xing put on an even more ingratiating expression. Perhaps in the future, even Zhao Wang might have to rely on this Taiji.

The next morning at court, Xiao Wenxuan finally met with the barbarian envoys who had come to Chang'an.

He had already heard of their arrival the previous day but had deliberately delayed meeting them to curb their arrogance.

However, whether out of displeasure or not, Zhao Xing reported early in the morning that the songstresses who had served the three envoys the previous night were all dead—each in a gruesome state.

Upon hearing this, a surge of fury welled up within Xiao Wenxuan. Though these songstresses were mere entertainers in his eyes, they were still subjects of Great Yu. These barbarians had slaughtered them as they pleased—it was a blatant slap in his face.

But upon learning that the culprit was likely Beishan Taiji, Xiao Wenxuan forcibly suppressed his anger.

“Honored envoys, I apologize for any shortcomings in your reception,” Xiao Wenxuan spoke first.

The barbarian state was strong, while Great Yu was weak in comparison. Unless absolutely necessary, Xiao Wenxuan did not wish to go to war with them.

“Thank you, Emperor of Great Yu. The hospitality last night was decent, though those songstresses couldn’t handle the fun and died,” Beishan said arrogantly.

Luo Quan, upon hearing this, was furious and was about to step forward, but upon seeing Xiao Wenxuan’s warning gaze, he reluctantly stepped back.

“Heh, the envoy is truly full of vigor,” Xiao Wenxuan forced a smile. “May I ask the purpose of your visit to Chang’an?”

Beishan swept a disdainful gaze over the officials. Aside from a few showing displeasure, most of them had obsequious expressions.

His contempt for Great Yu only deepened.

“By the decree of the Khan, I present this national letter to His Majesty. Firstly, we request the cession of the five prefecture—Cangzhou, Qingzhou, Yizhou, Dengzhou, and Laizhou. Secondly, an annual tribute of one million taels of silver must be added. Thirdly, a Great Yu princess must be sent to marry Beishan Taiji, the Khan’s most beloved son. If His Majesty agrees, the Khan guarantees that for the next ten years, he will not wage war against Great Yu. Fourthly, from this day forth, the Emperor of Great Yu must address the Khan as his sovereign and refer to himself as the ‘the filial emperor’ under the Khan.”

“If not, in three months, our Khan will personally lead his army to seize Cangzhou. By then, not only will Cangzhou be utterly destroyed, but so will the surrounding prefecture,” Beishan declared, still unaware that his identity had been exposed.

As soon as these words fell, the entire court erupted into heated discussions. Luo Quan clenched his fists tightly, gritting his teeth in fury.

At the same time, however, many officials looked pleased, whispering among themselves and nodding subtly.

Xiao Wenxuan was so enraged that he nearly fainted. Land cessions, indemnities, a forced marriage—all of this was an unprecedented humiliation to Great Yu.

As fury overwhelmed him, he suddenly lost consciousness.

“Your Majesty! Your Majesty!” The eunuch attending Xiao Wenxuan panicked.

At this moment, Fei Ji turned to Beishan and said, “Honored envoys, please return for now. His Majesty is unwell and will respond to your demands once he recovers.”

“No need. If you agree, send the princess over. If not, see you in three months at the gates of Cangzhou!”

With that, Beishan laughed wildly and left.

After the barbarian envoys departed, rumors soon spread through the streets.

It was said that the Emperor had been so angered by the barbarian envoys that he had fallen gravely ill and remained bedridden. The people of Chang'an sighed deeply at this news.

What an utter disgrace.

In The Green Water Pavilion, Consort Zhen was gently holding a bowl of lotus seed porridge and serving Xiao Wenxuan. "Your Majesty, no matter how angry you are, you must eat something."

At this moment, Xiao Wenxuan's face was sallow, and his expression was filled with dejection.

If the barbarian invasion had once been mere speculation, then the arrival of their envoy had now made it a clear and present danger.

"How can I eat? That day in court, the barbarian envoy openly demanded that I cede Cangzhou, Qingzhou, and Dengzhou, that future emperors of Great Yu must call the Khan their sovereign, increase the tribute by one million taels, and send a princess for marriage. In exchange, they promised not to attack for ten years. If I refuse, in three months, the Heavenly Khan himself will lead an army to seize Cangzhou."

After a pause, Xiao Wenxuan continued, "But the most infuriating thing is that more than half of my court officials are now submitting petitions urging me to accept these humiliating terms!"

The more he thought about it, the angrier he became.

Consort Zhen sighed softly and said, "These ministers... How could they agree to such humiliating terms?"

"Exactly. Are there still any men of backbone left in Great Yu?" Xiao Wenxuan sighed. Then, as if recalling something, he asked, "Consort Zhen, I remember Qi Wang sending a letter. What did it say?"

For the past few days, Xiao Wenxuan had been bedridden, leaving Fei Ji to handle state affairs.

Now, he suddenly remembered the letter that Xiao Ming had sent ten days ago.

"Your Majesty, your health is most important. Please don't concern yourself with that matter," Consort Zhen said with a melancholic sigh.