

I. Dynasty 18

Chapter 18: A Heartfelt Conversation in the Night

The dim candlelight flickered, illuminating a small space.

Outside the sleeping quarters, the night was as dark as ink, exuding an indescribable eeriness.

On such a night, it was easy to recall the frightening tales that grandmothers used to scare children.

Xiao Ming called out to Ziyuan twice more, but the person in the bed remained silent. This made his mind race with all sorts of thoughts.

He had transmigrated into this world, where belief in ghosts and spirits was prevalent. In such an environment, reality sometimes felt more dramatic than television.

“Ziyuan, don’t try to scare me, or else I won’t be polite!” Xiao Ming’s voice trembled slightly. He wasn’t afraid of people, but tales of supernatural beings unsettled him.

The suffocating silence in the room was his only response.

Xiao Ming started to panic. The figure under the blanket was clearly a person—if not a ghost, could it be an assassin?

After all, it hadn't been long since the last assassination attempt.

Even though he was born a prince in this world, deep down, he still felt lonely and afraid.

Facing an unfamiliar world alone—such emotions were only natural.

“Dafu!” In the end, he chose not to approach, prioritizing his own safety.

“Here!” A voice responded promptly as Qian Dafu rushed in. “Your Highness, what happened?”

In Xiao Ming's memory, the only person he truly trusted was Qian Dafu. He pointed at his bed and ordered, “Go, lift the blanket and see what's inside!”

Qian Dafu looked at him strangely and said, “Your Highness, of course, it's Ziyuan. Didn't you ask her to warm your bed? She knows she overstepped today and dares not disobey your command.”

“Really? Then why won't she answer me?” Xiao Ming's anxiety eased slightly, but he was still annoyed at the fright he had just experienced.

Qian Dafu explained, “Your Highness, Ziyuan and Lülou have always served by Her Ladyship's side. They've never encountered a situation like this before. It's only natural for her to be nervous on her first time.”

Xiao Ming frowned. It seemed like no one around him could give him peace of mind. He sighed and said, "Forget it. Have her leave. She's just giving me a headache."

As soon as he spoke, muffled sobbing came from under the blanket.

Then, Ziyuan suddenly lifted the covers and, crying, pleaded, "Your Highness, I was wrong. I shouldn't have tried to be clever and angered you today. But I only did it for your sake—to prevent the servants from gossiping. If Chief Attendant Pang hears of this and reports to Your Highness, then Her Ladyship's request for you to visit Chang'an next year might be delayed again."

"That's right, Your Highness," Qian Dafu sighed. "No one misses you more in Chang'an than Her Ladyship. Please consider her heartfelt wishes."

Hearing Consort Zhen mentioned, Xiao Ming suddenly felt a pang of bitterness.

No matter how much of a troublemaker he had been, Consort Zhen had always doted on him. Every time he made a mistake, she would endure Prince Xiao Wenxuan's scolding just to plead on his behalf.

"Hmph, fine. Leave me be," Xiao Ming relented. "I only meant to remind you—use your intelligence wisely, understand?"

Ziyuan bowed gracefully, tears still glistening in her eyes. "Yes, Your Highness. I understand. I won't dare again."

Qian Dafu glared at her. "Hurry up and leave! You've already upset His Highness enough."

Ziyuan wiped her tears, bowed again, and disappeared into the night.

As she left, Xiao Ming turned to Qian Dafu and said, "You all conspired against me, thinking I wouldn't notice?"

"Heh heh, Your Highness is indeed wise. I knew we couldn't hide it from you," Qian Dafu chuckled. "But truly, Your Highness must think of Her Ladyship. The Emperor's health is deteriorating. If he passes away, Her Ladyship will have no one to rely on in the palace. And if someone proposes the old tradition of consort burial..."

At this, Qian Dafu's eyes turned red with worry.

"Who dares?!" Xiao Ming roared, an uncontrollable fury erupting from within him, as if a hidden nerve had been struck.

Throughout history, it was common for consorts to be buried with deceased emperors. In such times, the only protection for a concubine was the status of her son. Those without strong backing were the first to be sacrificed.

Qian Dafu continued, "Your Highness, forgive this old servant for speaking bluntly. Ever since your severe illness, I've noticed a great change in you. I had once lost all hope, believing that when Her Ladyship passed, I would follow her. But now, I believe Your Highness can turn things around. If you

govern wisely and strengthen your fief, no matter who ascends the throne, they will have to consider your influence.”

Xiao Ming nodded, sensing the sincerity in Qian Dafu’s words.

He had taken over Xiao Ming’s body, which meant he was Xiao Ming now. Having come to this world, he belonged to this world.

Qian Dafu’s words made him realize something crucial—there were people here who needed him, and people he needed as well.

“I understand your concerns,” Xiao Ming said solemnly. “During my illness, I reflected on my reckless past. I won’t live as I did before.”

“Your Highness!” Qian Dafu’s eyes welled with tears.

Xiao Ming smiled and patted his shoulder. Qian Dafu must have felt like a barren tree that had finally bloomed after a thousand years.

But now, Xiao Ming could truly be himself.

After studying Qian Dafu for a moment, Xiao Ming felt something strange.

He only remembered that Qian Dafu had been serving Consort Zhen ever since he was born. But looking at his unwavering loyalty now, it seemed almost excessive.

Unable to hold back his curiosity, Xiao Ming asked, “Dafu, why are you so devoted to my mother and me?”

He asked this not out of sentimentality, but out of a deep-seated fear—what if, one day, Qian Dafu tearfully confessed, ‘I am your real father.’

Qian Dafu hesitated before answering, “Your Highness, years ago, my father was accused of composing a poem that allegedly criticized the Emperor. He was framed and would have been executed along with our entire family, if not for Her Ladyship’s intervention. Thanks to her, we were spared execution and only sentenced to servitude. I was sent to the palace, where I was often bullied by the younger eunuchs, until Her Ladyship took me under her care.”

Xiao Ming nearly blurted out, “So you’re a eunuch?” but stopped himself.

Now he understood.

“Why does every dynasty have a literary inquisition?” Xiao Ming muttered. Then he said firmly, “One day, I will clear your family’s name.”

“Your Highness!” Qian Dafu’s expression was overwhelmed with emotion as he knelt down.

“We are master and servant, working together toward the same goal. No need for formalities,” Xiao Ming said. “Now rise—I have something important to entrust to you.”

At this moment, he fully trusted Qian Dafu.