

I. Dynasty 187

Chapter 187: Shockwaves Through the Court

“They’re here! They’re here!”

A young woman’s voice rang out from the main road leading into Qingzhou City.

Everyone turned northward. The Qingzhou Army was marching back in neat formation.

Among the crowd waiting were men, women, elders, and children. Even many young women had come. While noblewomen of the Great Yu Empire rarely appeared in public, common folk didn’t follow such strict rules—especially on a day of celebration like this.

As the soldiers saw how many citizens had come out to greet them, they immediately straightened up, walking with pride and purpose.

But beneath their serious expressions, their eyes flicked toward the young women in the crowd. Some girls accidentally met a soldier’s gaze—then quickly blushed and looked away.

As the Qingzhou Army entered, the citizens rushed forward, handing out buns, fruit, and food from their baskets, stuffing them into the soldiers’ hands.

In the center of the formation, Xiao Ming rode on horseback, surrounded and guarded by soldiers.

With such a large crowd, his safety had to be taken seriously.

Niu Ben rode beside him, keeping a careful watch on the people lining the road, ready to stop anyone who might pose a threat.

Looking at the joyful faces all around him, Xiao Ming smiled.

He had never imagined that commoners would line the streets to welcome him like this.

The warmth in his heart confirmed it—fighting to protect Cangzhou had been worth it.

Up ahead, Luo Xin and Niu Ben walked straight-backed like wooden poles, waving proudly to the citizens.

Xiao Ming shook his head with amusement. Those two always found a way to compete—even in this.

But not every sound in the crowd was cheerful.

Amid the joy were heart-wrenching sobs.

Some families searched desperately for their sons. Those who found them alive rejoiced. Those who learned of their deaths collapsed in grief.

“My son! My son!”

The wailing voice reached Xiao Ming’s ears. He turned and saw a woman in her forties, dressed in ragged clothes, weeping uncontrollably. A young girl was holding her, also crying silently.

When the girl saw Xiao Ming, she suddenly called out, “Your Highness! Your Highness!”

“Stop!” Xiao Ming ordered. The army halted at once.

He and Niu Ben dismounted and approached the girl. Surrounded by his soldiers, Xiao Ming was easy to spot—she had called out intentionally.

The girl tried to kneel.

Xiao Ming gently stopped her. “There’s no need for that. Are you looking for me?”

Through her tears, she said, “Forgive me, Your Highness. I just learned that my older brother died in battle. I ask for nothing—just to know where he’s buried so we can visit and honor him each year.”

Xiao Ming felt a sharp ache in his chest.

Around him, the weeping grew louder.

“Don’t worry,” he said gently. “Every fallen soldier has been brought home. They may have died far from home, but I will ensure they rest in their homeland.”

“Thank you, Your Highness. That is all I could ask for,” she sobbed.

A nearby citizen muttered, “How tragic. Her only son is gone. Now it’s just the mother and daughter... how will they survive?”

Hearing this made Xiao Ming even more uneasy.

Victory had been bought with blood—and he couldn’t allow the spirits of the dead to carry regrets.

“Young lady, your strength humbles me. The families of fallen soldiers will receive compensation from the government. If there’s anything more I can do, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

“There’s no need, Your Highness,” the girl said softly, helping her mother away.

Niu Ben sighed. “Your Highness, don’t be too hard on yourself. War always means death. In time, you’ll get used to it.”

His tone was heavy—his eyes, full of pain.

He had been through this many times.

He had watched countless comrades come and go.

How many of his old brothers-in-arms were still alive?

Xiao Ming watched the mother and daughter walk away.

The only way he could repay the people—was to make sure they lived better lives going forward.

The brief stop had changed the mood.

Smiles faded from the soldiers’ faces as the sorrowful cries reminded them of fallen brothers.

How could they fully celebrate, knowing so many friends had died?

When they reached the city gates, Qingzhou's officials were already there to welcome them.

Pang Yukun stood at the front.

"Congratulations, Your Highness, on your great victory at Cangzhou," he said.

But Xiao Ming was still somber from earlier.

"This isn't the place to talk. Let's go to the Command Center."

Pang Yukun was taken aback. Seeing Xiao Ming's expression, he assumed something bad had happened.

He nodded quickly and followed with the others.

Inside, Pang Yukun asked, "Your Highness... did something go wrong in Cangzhou?"

"No. The city was defended successfully," Xiao Ming said. Pang Yukun sighed in relief.

Then Xiao Ming continued:

“I want to speak with you about compensation. The families of fallen soldiers must receive their money. If there’s any mistake, I’ll hold you personally responsible.”

Pang Yukun scratched his head. It wasn’t the kind of talk he expected on such a joyful day.

Xiao Ming left shortly after.

Niu Ben turned to Pang Yukun.

“This was His Highness’s first time facing such brutal war. It affected him deeply. But he’s right—the aftermath must be handled well. If not, we’ll break the soldiers’ hearts.”

Pang Yukun nodded. “I understand.”

The army returned to the Qingzhou military camp to rest.

At the same time, news of Cangzhou’s great victory was spreading across the Great Yu Empire by newspaper.

The day the battle was won, Zhan Xingchang had sent word to Chang'an.

Now, that news had reached Xiao Wenxuan.

"Cangzhou Victory—100,000 barbarians slain—Beishan fled in defeat!"

Xiao Wenxuan read the message with trembling hands.

He whispered to himself:

"After decades of weakness... finally, Prince Qi has cut down their arrogance. This is a blessing for Great Yu. A blessing for the royal family."

He immediately called a palace attendant.

"Quick! Spread the news of our great victory in Cangzhou! Ha! I want to see the look on my ministers' faces!"

The young eunuch had never seen the emperor so joyful.

He sprinted outside, jumped on a horse, and rode through the streets yelling:

“Cangzhou Victory! Prince Qi has slain 100,000 barbarians!”