

I. Dynasty 198

Chapter 198: Father and Son

Autumn had arrived. The elm trees on both sides of Vermilion Bird Avenue shed their leaves as the breeze gently passed.

Triggered by the splendor of Chang'an, Lu Fei said with envy, "When will Qingzhou ever be as prosperous as this place?"

"That's tough. Chang'an has been the capital of seven dynasties. Its prosperity is inherited," Luo Xin replied proudly.

"Nonsense! Prosperity isn't like having children—it can't just be passed down. Hmph, as long as His Highness is in Qingzhou, it won't take many years before we surpass Chang'an," Lu Fei retorted.

Luo Xin curled his lip, clearly unconvinced.

Xiao Ming smiled. Actually, Luo Xin had a point. The prosperity of Chang'an came from the concentration of all the nobility and powerful people of Great Yu.

In modern economic terms, it was high consumption driving Chang'an's economy and prosperity.

Right now, his strategy in Qingzhou—to attract merchants—served the same purpose.

While the group was traveling halfway along the route, the sudden sound of galloping hooves came from ahead. Before long, three cavalymen in imperial guard armor arrived before Xiao Ming.

“Big brother!” Luo Xin exclaimed happily when he saw the man—it was his older brother, Luo Hong.

Luo Hong glanced at Luo Xin and smiled faintly. He dismounted and respectfully bowed to Xiao Ming. “Commander of the Capital Guards, Luo Hong, greets Your Highness.”

Upon learning that he was Luo Xin’s brother, Xiao Ming relaxed. According to the rules, the thousand cavalymen who came with him were not allowed into the palace. The city’s imperial guards would house them in military camps.

If it had been someone else, Xiao Ming might’ve been wary. But with Luo Hong, he was at ease.

“No need for formalities,” Xiao Ming said. “Commander Luo, are you here to arrange accommodations for my troops?”

“Yes, by His Majesty’s order,” Luo Hong replied seriously.

Compared to Luo Xin, Luo Hong was much more rigid—something Xiao Ming had heard about during his earlier time in Chang’an.

Xiao Ming then said, “Lu Fei, go with Commander Luo and make sure the soldiers are settled properly.”

Lu Fei nodded and cupped his fists. “Yes, Your Highness.”

Luo Hong took another look at Xiao Ming, said nothing, and led Lu Fei and the cavalry eastward.

Taking the chance, Feng Deshui said, “His Majesty still cares deeply for Your Highness. Afraid other princes might cause trouble for your men, he sent Luo Hong, who is honest and reliable, to handle the reception. So there’s no need to worry.”

“Father’s kindness moves me,” Xiao Ming replied politely.

Feng Deshui had been speaking well of Emperor Xiao Wenxuan throughout the journey. Xiao Ming understood that it was likely the emperor’s way of softening the tension between father and son—perhaps out of guilt for past treatment.

Chang’an stretched long from south to north, with the imperial palace sitting at the northernmost end.

It took the group an hour to reach the palace, stopping at its main entrance—Xuande Gate.

“Your Highness, this is it,” Feng Deshui said with a cheerful face, having finally completed his mission.

Looking at the grand palaces behind the gates, the white jade-paved paths and stairs, Xiao Ming felt like he had entered the Forbidden City from his past life.

The only difference was the architectural style.

Following Feng Deshui, they passed the Hall of Chengqing and crossed a corridor. They stopped at a hall in front of a lotus pond.

Feng Deshui asked a young palace attendant, “Is His Majesty in the Imperial Study?”

“Reporting to Minister Feng, His Majesty is inside waiting for His Highness,” the attendant replied.

Feng Deshui pointed to the room across the white jade bridge over the lotus pond and said, “Your Highness, I won’t go any further. His Majesty is waiting for you.”

“Thank you, Minister Feng, for your company on the road,” Xiao Ming said, cupping his hands. “In the future, I won’t forget your kindness.”

Feng Deshui beamed. “Hearing that warms my old heart. Please go ahead, Your Highness.”

Nodding, Xiao Ming walked toward the Imperial Study. He knew the place well—after all, he had grown up in the palace, familiar with every corner.

The study in front of him was a place where the previous Xiao Ming often played as a child.

But he was no longer that Xiao Ming. Now, he was about to meet his “father,” Xiao Wenxuan—the emperor of Great Yu, the man who once whipped and banished him to Qingzhou three years ago.

Crossing the white jade bridge, he reached the Imperial Study. The three golden characters above the door shimmered in the light.

Entering the room, he saw a man in a dragon robe, standing with his back to him. Xiao Ming bowed deeply and said, “Your son greets Father Emperor.”

Xiao Wenxuan slowly turned around, his gaze falling on Xiao Ming. Feng Deshui had informed him earlier that Xiao Ming was nearing the capital.

He had been waiting in the Imperial Study since. After three years, he was finally seeing the son he had once cast out and punished. How would Xiao Ming view him now?

“You’ve grown up,” he said after silently studying Xiao Ming for a while. The words he had planned all vanished, replaced with a simple sigh.

Xiao Ming was momentarily stunned. He looked up at Xiao Wenxuan.

Now over fifty, Xiao Wenxuan's hair showed streaks of white, and his body was slightly stooped. He looked like an aging man.

But the aura of imperial authority still clung tightly to him.

"Father Emperor still looks as majestic as ever," Xiao Ming said evenly.

Xiao Wenxuan chuckled. "Since when did you learn to flatter? Seems like you've picked up a lot in Qingzhou these past three years."

"That's all thanks to Pang Yukun's teaching. I've only learned the surface," Xiao Ming replied, shifting the blame.

Xiao Wenxuan gave him another look. He didn't believe that for a second. He knew Pang Yukun well—flattery wasn't in the man's vocabulary.

He understood Xiao Ming was just being modest.

Still, he didn't press the issue. Xiao Ming had come to Chang'an because of the Cangzhou situation.

"It's getting late. Go see your mother. She's been missing you. As for the Cangzhou matter, we'll talk tomorrow."

"Yes, Father Emperor," Xiao Ming answered properly.

The moment Xiao Wenxuan's eyes shifted, Xiao Ming realized he had said something inappropriate. He reminded himself to be more cautious in front of this emperor.

Xiao Wenxuan waved him off. He had a lot to say, but as both father and emperor, pride kept him from speaking freely. Rather than make things awkward, he chose to wait.

Xiao Ming bowed and left the Imperial Study, feeling a slight relief. He had no idea how to talk to Xiao Wenxuan, and the whole encounter was deeply awkward.

Following the path east, a palace attendant led him through an arched gate. Behind it was the area where the emperor's consorts lived.

Now Xiao Ming was even more nervous—he was about to meet Consort Zhen, his supposed mother.