

## **I. Dynasty 199**

### Chapter 199: Reunion

In the Jade Water Pavilion, Liu li had been waiting at the door.

Since the morning, Consort Zhen had asked several times, afraid of missing Prince Qi.

But it was understandable. Prince Qi had been gone for three years. For a mother, nothing was more painful than that. After all, Prince Qi was now Consort Zhen's only hope.

Leaning by the door, Liu li was bored and counting flower petals. When she heard footsteps, she instinctively looked in the direction of the sound.

She saw a young eunuch leading a handsome young man toward the Jade Water Pavilion.

In the inner palace where the concubines lived, the only man who could freely come and go was the former emperor, other than that, only the princes could enter.

Looking at this young man, Liu li was immediately surprised and happy. Although Xiao Ming's appearance had changed a lot in the past three years, his general look was still the same. She immediately ran back excitedly, shouting, "My lady, my lady, His Highness is back! His Highness is back!"

Consort Zhen, who was anxiously waiting in the pavilion, froze when she heard this. Then two lines of tears rolled down her face. She put down her embroidery and quickly walked out with the help of a palace maid.

Xiao Ming also arrived at the door. He still remembered this palace maid from before — she was Liu li, the one who served Consort Zhen.

Before he could enter, a beautiful woman in a purple palace gown walked out from the hall. Seeing Xiao Ming, the woman's eyes filled with tears as she came forward.

She was none other than Consort Zhen, the mother of the former Xiao Ming.

"Ming'er." When she got close, Consort Zhen hugged Xiao Ming and cried bitterly.

The other palace maids were also wiping their eyes, seemingly moved by the scene.

Xiao Ming felt even more awkward than when he saw Emperor Xiao Wenxuan. After all, the woman in front of him was his supposed mother.

Xiao Ming was truly grateful to Consort Zhen. In any era, mothers were great. Like all mothers, Consort Zhen had shielded him from the wind and rain in the dangerous city of Chang'an.

If not for her help, his wine and perfume would not have sold so well in Chang'an. The fashion trends that spread from the palace played a big role.

Normally, the former Xiao Ming would surely be crying at such a reunion, but Xiao Ming couldn't cry — after all, he wasn't really that Xiao Ming.

Being hugged by Consort Zhen, Xiao Ming didn't know where to put his hands for a moment. After hesitating, he gently patted Consort Zhen's thin shoulder and said, "Mother, your son is back."

Consort Zhen nodded in his arms, then raised her head after a while, not stopping her gaze from scanning Xiao Ming, as if she couldn't look at him enough.

Wiping her tears, Consort Zhen held Xiao Ming's hand, smiled through her tears, and said to Liu li, "After three years, my Ming'er has grown taller and more handsome. Come, let's go inside and sit."

Consort Zhen's gentle and tender manner warmed Xiao Ming's heart. This feeling of being cared for always touched people.

Xiao Ming thought that since he was already Xiao Ming now, he should stop thinking about his past life. After all, this was his new life.

Thinking this, Xiao Ming suddenly felt more at ease. He followed Consort Zhen into the Jade Water Pavilion, smiling along the way.

"Mother, this Jade Water Pavilion looks exactly the same as three years ago. It hasn't changed at all."

When they got inside, Consort Zhen had Xiao Ming sit close to her and asked Liu Li to make tea for him.

From the moment Xiao Ming entered the pavilion, Consort Zhen's eyes never left him. She said, "Many things in here were arranged by me for you. Every time I see them, I think of you. That's why I never let the servants touch them."

Xiao Ming nodded. He could tell that Consort Zhen truly cared for him. He said, "Mother, have you been well in the palace these past three years? Did any concubines bully you? If so, tell me, I'll deal with them."

Xiao Ming's words warmed Consort Zhen's heart, and tears came again.

In the imperial palace, there were very few people one could trust. Everyone guarded against and attacked each other. Life was like walking on thin ice. Like every concubine, their only hope was their children.

"No one dares bully me. After your great victory in Cangzhou, the concubines in the palace all respect me more," Consort Zhen said with red eyes.

Xiao Ming took out a handkerchief from his robe and wiped her tears, saying, "Mother, it's a pity I can't bring you to Qingzhou. Otherwise, we wouldn't have to be separated."

Consort Zhen sighed, "A man's ambition should be far-reaching. Besides, you are a royal prince. As long as you're doing well, I will be at ease. If you can live peacefully and safely, everything I do is worth it."

Xiao Ming was even more touched in his heart. To have such a mother was a kind of blessing.

Liu li, with red eyes, advised, "My lady, please don't cry anymore. His Highness coming back is something to be happy about. Crying too much will harm your body."

"Yes, yes, I won't cry," Consort Zhen wiped her tears and suddenly smiled, "Ming'er, there's a great joy this time. Your father is discussing with Fei Ji to marry their daughter Fei Yue'er to you."

Liu li laughed and said, "Your Highness, Fei Yue'er is a famous beauty in Chang'an. She's good at music, chess, calligraphy, and painting. Most importantly, she's from the Fei family. Even the most powerful nobles can't win her over."

Xiao Ming had already been told about this by Consort Zhen. He said, "But not many people in Chang'an have seen Fei Yue'er. How can they be sure she's beautiful?"

Consort Zhen glared at Xiao Ming, "Your temper hasn't changed a bit. 'Lust' is a dangerous path. How can marriage be based on looks? As long as she's a daughter of the Fei family, even if she's ugly, others would still fight to marry her. And you're still being picky. For this matter, your father has talked to Fei Ji many times. Even now, Fei Ji is still unclear. This time, after receiving your rewards, go visit Fei Ji. He cares a lot about face. Just your visit should be enough to settle it."

"Mother, Fei Ji is being too arrogant. He doesn't even listen to the Emperor? Is he trying to rebel?" Xiao Ming slapped the table.

Consort Zhen gently tapped Xiao Ming, "Everyone says you've changed your temper, but I still see the same old you. If your father issued an order, Fei Ji wouldn't dare refuse. But between ruler and subject, there should be proper manners. If not, how could the Fei family stay loyal to your father? You can't force a cow to drink water. While in Chang'an, you must not act recklessly like before. If you do, I'd rather die."

Saying this, Consort Zhen started crying again.

Xiao Ming was helpless and said, "Mother, I'll listen to you. After tomorrow, I'll visit the Fei family. I just hope Fei Ji doesn't make things difficult on purpose."

Consort Zhen immediately smiled, "That's better. Don't worry. Visiting the Fei family is just a formality. Fei Ji definitely won't make it hard for you."