

## I. Dynasty 204

### Chapter 204: A Small Victory

“Your Majesty, please forgive us!”

All the ministers had never seen Emperor Xiao Wenxuan this angry before. Cui Hao was so frightened that he trembled and immediately begged for forgiveness.

“Hmph, all of you stand on the shore acting all righteous. Do you really think I’m a fool? If we can’t take back Youzhou, then it belongs to the barbarians.” Xiao Wenxuan continued speaking.

Then he looked around the entire Chengqing Hall and said, “Since you all disagree with Prince Qi’s plan, fine. I’ll give you the chance. Whoever takes back the land of Youzhou, I will reward them with that land. Do you dare?”

Cui Hao and the other civil officials immediately shrank back, not daring to speak. They were good at arguing, but when it came to real battle, they were too scared to fight.

After waiting a while with no one speaking, Xiao Wenxuan sneered, “It seems no one else is willing to go to the grasslands and fight for me. In that case, I grant Prince Qi’s request as a reward.”

“Thank you, Father,” Xiao Ming bowed.

It had to be said, just now Xiao Wenxuan finally acted like a true emperor, full of authority.

Xiao Wenxuan sat back on the dragon throne and looked at Prince Wei. "Prince Wei, what reward do you want?"

"Your Majesty, your brother only wants to ask if Prince Qi could sell me some cannons," Prince Wei said hesitantly.

The Third Prince immediately said with suspicion, "Third Uncle, it's understandable that the northern lords like Prince Zhao and Prince Liang need cannons to defend against the barbarians. But what do you need them for?"

"Prince Wei, the Third Prince has a point. Why do you need cannons?" Xiao Wenxuan also frowned.

Prince Wei sighed and said, "Your Majesty doesn't know, but your brother needs the cannons to defend against pirates from the sea. In recent years, my trading ships have often been attacked by pirates. These pirates also raid the coastal areas. They come ashore in thousands or tens of thousands and retreat back to the sea after robbing. It's a real headache."

When he mentioned these pirates, the Third Prince went quiet. That's because Prince Chu's territory had also suffered pirate raids. That made this a good reason. He said, "Father, there are also pirates in Prince Chu's land. So I think Third Uncle's words make sense."

Prince Wei glanced at the Third Prince and thought to himself that he was indeed smart. By supporting him now, it meant Prince Chu could also buy cannons easily.

Xiao Ming just watched from the side. The more people wanted cannons, the more money he would make.

But what Prince Wei said about pirates made Xiao Ming frown.

These pirates were clearly from an island nation. In real history, pirates often attacked the coast. It seemed they existed in this world too, though Xiao Ming didn't remember much about them.

"Hm, let me think about it," Xiao Wenxuan didn't agree right away.

He was a bit annoyed. Xiao Ming and Prince Wei didn't ask for normal rewards but instead gave him new problems.

Looking a bit tired, Xiao Wenxuan said something to Feng Deshui. Feng Deshui then announced, "If there's anything to report, speak up. If not, court is dismissed."

This morning meeting ended with Cui Hao losing badly. Not only did he fail to get the cannon technology, but he was also scolded harshly by the emperor. It was clear to everyone that Xiao Wenxuan's attitude towards the barbarians had changed.

It was obvious that the pro-war faction would now have the strongest voice in court for some time.

After court ended, the ministers left one by one.

Xiao Ming had gotten what he wanted, so he was very satisfied. Prince Wei, however, looked worried and gloomy. After a quick greeting with Xiao Ming and promising to treat him to wine another day, he left in a hurry.

Xiao Ming laughed to himself. Prince Wei's reason about pirates was fake; he really wanted to use the cannons to threaten Prince Chu and Prince Yan.

Just as he was leaving the Chengqing Hall, Feng Deshui suddenly came over and said, "Your Highness, the Emperor wants to see you behind the hall."

Xiao Ming followed Feng Deshui through a turn and reached a pavilion behind Chengqing Hall. Xiao Wenxuan was standing there.

"Father," Xiao Ming bowed.

Xiao Wenxuan turned to look at him and asked slowly, "Here, it's just the two of us. Be honest with me, how powerful are the cannons really?"

"Father, I don't dare to lie. These cannons are developed from fire lances. Their power and range are dozens of times stronger. As long as the city is well-defended and the soldiers are brave, it's not hard to hold a city," Xiao Ming answered truthfully.

Xiao Wenxuan nodded. "You know the situation of our Great Yu Empire. I didn't send troops to help you because I was afraid that Prince Zhao and others would seize the chance to rebel, not because I didn't care. Today, although Cui Hao spoke so confidently, I knew exactly who was behind him."

“So Father already knew. I was worried you might really make me give up the cannon technology,” Xiao Ming said.

“If it were twenty years ago, I definitely would’ve made you hand it over,” Xiao Wenxuan sighed. “But now I’m old. I must think of the future of the Xiao family’s empire. With the cannons in your hands, I feel reassured, because you’re part of the royal family.”

After a pause, Xiao Wenxuan continued, “Though I’m not forcing you to give up the technology, the first batch of cannons must go to the Imperial Guards. Understand?”

“Yes, Father,” Xiao Ming replied.

Xiao Wenxuan asked again, “So when can the first batch of cannons arrive in Chang’an?” He was very interested in the cannons.

“Half a year,” Xiao Ming said.

“Half a year?” Xiao Wenxuan was angry. “Why does it take so long?”

“Father, cannons are very difficult to make. And we don’t even have enough for Cangzhou yet. We have to make those first. Also, cannons need a lot of coal and iron. Even a clever woman can’t cook without rice,” Xiao Ming complained.

In truth, Xiao Ming was just making a big promise to impress everyone. He agreed to sell cannons, but when to deliver them was entirely up to him.

“No, that’s too slow. I want to see the first batch in three months. If you lack coal and iron, I’ll give it to you. If you lack money, I’ll transfer funds to you. These cannons must be equipped to the Imperial Guards and placed on Chang’an’s city walls,” Xiao Wenxuan said firmly.

He was clearly still angry about being humiliated by the barbarians and the powerful nobles last time.

“In that case, I’ll try my best. But in three months, I can only provide twenty-four cannons. Each cannon costs ten thousand taels of silver. I hope Father can pay first...” Xiao Ming said.

“Hmph, I knew you’d ask for a high price. Eight thousand taels per cannon, no more. You cover the rest yourself,” Xiao Wenxuan said harshly.

Xiao Ming acted like he was reluctant. “If that’s the case, I’ll just take the loss,” he said. But in his heart, he thought, if he had known, he would’ve asked for an even higher price.