

## I. Dynasty 205

### Chapter 205: A Heart-to-Heart Between Father and Son

The maple trees behind Chengqing Hall rustled in the autumn wind, red leaves fluttering down.

After discussing the matter of the cannons, the two fell into silence.

After a while, Emperor Xiao Wenxuan seemed to make up his mind and finally said, “Ming’er, are you still angry with me?”

In Xiao Ming’s memory, Xiao Wenxuan hadn’t called him by name like this since he was ten. Startled for a moment, Xiao Ming replied, “This son wouldn’t dare.”

“Wouldn’t dare? Heh, but you didn’t say you aren’t. Looks like you still hold resentment against me,” Xiao Wenxuan gave a bitter laugh. As he aged, he had become more sentimental. In the past, he wouldn’t have cared what his sons thought of him.

Xiao Ming cursed inwardly. Truthfully, he didn’t really hate Xiao Wenxuan—after all, he was just an imposter.

And in recent days, after reading through the historical records, he knew that in the Great Yu Empire, many princes were either exiled or killed. Xiao Ming surviving until now was already a miracle.

“This son truly doesn’t resent Father. If not for you, I would still be lost in the pleasures of Chang’an, and how could I now contribute even a little to the Great Yu Empire?” Xiao Ming said sincerely.

Xiao Wenxuan turned and stared into Xiao Ming's eyes, as if trying to see through him.

Xiao Ming was unafraid, his expression remained genuine.

In a country like the Great Yu, where rank and hierarchy were so strict, most princes would feel nervous being stared at like this.

But Xiao Ming came from a world where everyone was equal, so he didn't understand this kind of hierarchy. Facing the emperor, he wasn't afraid—instead, he was curious about what being a ruler truly meant.

In history books, emperors were usually labeled simply: wise or foolish. But few cared about what kind of people they really were.

"If that's true, then I'm relieved. My efforts weren't in vain," Xiao Wenxuan said slowly.

"Father?"

Xiao Ming looked confused. At this point, he already had a good idea what Xiao Wenxuan was going to say.

As expected, Xiao Wenxuan said, "Among all the concubines, only your mother had no background. Likewise, among all the princes, only you lacked support from noble clans. If I had kept you in Chang'an back then, with your unruly personality, you might've been dead by now."

"But I must admit, I truly disliked you at the time because of your rebellious nature. So, I gave you Qingzhou as your domain. That way, even if you caused trouble, it wouldn't be too serious. And being far from Chang'an, the other princes would forget you. Even if the Crown Prince ascended the throne, he wouldn't see you as a threat. You could live out your life in peace. This was also my way of keeping a promise to your mother."

Xiao Wenxuan's tone was cold, as if he were simply telling a story.

Xiao Ming was a little surprised that Xiao Wenxuan was really opening up to him, so he said, "In the past, it was my fault for wasting Father's good intentions. But I've changed now and will never let you down again."

"The great victory in Cangzhou has proven that. I didn't expect it, but I'm very pleased. Living a quiet life can preserve your safety, but as a prince, being able to serve your country is a blessing for the royal family. From now on, never forget your original intention. Assist the new emperor as your third uncle has assisted me."

"This son understands," Xiao Ming replied with a bow.

He knew well that he wasn't in line for the throne. After all, traditional law dictated that the eldest is favored over the youngest.

Moreover, while Xiao Wenxuan had protected him, he had never shown particular favor—just as Pang Yukun had analyzed, Xiao Wenxuan’s true favorite was the Crown Prince. As for him, Xiao Wenxuan was simply fulfilling a father’s duty.

And it was also to ease Consort Zhen’s worries.

But to Xiao Ming, that didn’t matter. What did matter was that Xiao Wenxuan’s attitude toward him had clearly changed. That change was more like how he treated the King of Wei—a sign of trust and value.

And that was far more valuable than simple affection.

Affection might be an emotional bias, but trust and recognition affected both feelings and logic. Xiao Wenxuan now valued him both emotionally and practically.

That alone made Xiao Ming very satisfied.

This trip to Chang’an had two goals: to find some allies and to help maintain internal stability in the Great Yu Empire.

So far, the cannons were enough to intimidate the barbarians and the vassals for a while.

During this period of peace, Xiao Ming needed the right time, place, and people to develop Qingzhou. Now he had the time and place—he just needed the people.

Cozying up to the King of Wei was the start of building his network. But in his eyes, the most valuable connection to invest in was still Xiao Wenxuan.

So even without the father-son relationship, Xiao Ming would still try to win Xiao Wenxuan over during this trip to Chang'an.

That's why he acted just the way Xiao Wenxuan liked.

"Good, remember that. Your fief borders the King of Wei's. Learn from him. In the future, don't have any wild ambitions, or I won't be able to tolerate you," Xiao Wenxuan said sternly—clearly a warning against rebellion.

"This son wouldn't dare."

Xiao Ming remained submissive, but thought to himself, Once you're gone, it won't be up to you. If the new emperor is wise, fine. If not—don't blame me.

"I've said what I needed to. Now that you've proven loyal in protecting the royal family, I will naturally reward you more," Xiao Wenxuan said, now smiling.

Xiao Ming chuckled inwardly—Xiao Wenxuan really knew how to play both the stick and the carrot.

The serious talk over, Xiao Wenxuan asked Xiao Ming about trivial things, like whether he had gotten used to life in Qingzhou, whether the food suited him, and so on. Though small, these questions showed genuine care from a father.

Compared to earlier conversations, this part made Xiao Ming feel more like a real son.

Back in Qingzhou, he had only guessed at Xiao Wenxuan's character based on memory. But now, he could see that Xiao Wenxuan wasn't exactly a wise ruler, but neither was he a fool. At least in critical moments, he could still be counted on.

After weighing it all, Xiao Ming thought maintaining a good relationship with Xiao Wenxuan was definitely a smart move. So he said, "Father, I brought a very fine gift for you on this trip. I'm sure you'll like it."