

I. Dynasty 220

Chapter 220: Marriage

“Very well. A nation cannot be without its ruler for even a day, and a vassal state cannot be without its vassal king for long without inviting criticism. Stay in Chang’an with your mother for a few more days, then set off to return.”

Emperor Wenxuan then added, “I have received news that Beishan’s Blood Wolf Tribe has entered Youzhou and taken control of Shanhai Pass. It seems there will be more turmoil on the grasslands in the future.”

“Father, rest assured. No matter who it is, I guarantee that Cangzhou will not fall,” Xiao Ming vowed.

Emperor Wenxuan nodded slightly with a smile and said to the Prince of Shu, “As an elder brother, you should reflect on yourself.”

Though the Prince of Shu seethed with hatred inside, he obediently replied, “Yes, Father.”

Having received some exquisite gifts from Xiao Ming, Emperor Wenxuan was eager to return and admire them. He signaled to Feng Deshui, who announced, “Court is dismissed!”

Since there were no pressing matters today, the officials bowed and slowly exited Chenqing Hall.

“Your Highness, Your Highness!”

As soon as he left the hall, Luo Quan caught up with him and said, “Your Highness, do you have any more of those telescopes? Could you spare one for this old minister?”

Xiao Ming replied, “General Luo, don’t worry. While others may not have them, I won’t forget you. Yesterday, I visited Grand Secretary Fei, and today I was planning to send the gifts to you.”

“Your Highness is too kind. I don’t need anything else—just the telescope!” Those who had never fought in wars couldn’t understand the telescope’s importance on the battlefield.

“Is that so? Then I’ll take back the Drunken Qingzhou wine,” Xiao Ming joked.

Luo Quan was taken aback and said, “Your Highness, once a gift is given, how can it be taken back?”

Xiao Ming laughed. “I knew General Luo loved his wine too.”

As they walked out of the palace gates, Xiao Ming suddenly remembered Luo Xin and asked, “General Luo, I’ll be returning to Qingzhou in a few days. Luo Xin has been quite useful to me there, but after all, he’s still a general of the Imperial Army.”

At this, Luo Quan’s expression turned serious. After a moment of hesitation, he said, “Your Highness, Luo Xin has been idle in the Imperial Army. Rather than wasting his time, it’s better for him to return with you and contribute in some small way. If Your Highness doesn’t mind, I’ll petition the Emperor to assign Luo Xin to you as a family general. How does that sound?”

Bringing up Luo Xin was a test of Luo Quan's attitude. If Luo Quan refused, it would mean he didn't trust Xiao Ming. But now that he offered Luo Xin as a family general, it showed his favor toward Xiao Ming.

"That would be perfect. Thank you for your kindness, General Luo," Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Luo Quan replied, "In the Great Yu Empire today, how many are like Your Highness, truly devoted to serving the nation? For this reason alone, Luo Xin will surely achieve great things under your command. This old minister is only doing this to ensure the Luo family's legacy doesn't end abruptly."

"What do you mean, General?" Xiao Ming asked, puzzled.

Luo Quan said, "If one doesn't plan for the future, troubles will come soon enough. Your Highness, this is just an old man's unnecessary worry."

Xiao Ming frowned, suddenly thinking of Niu Ben. Perhaps Luo Quan feared ending up like him.

By placing Luo Xin under Xiao Ming's command, at least the entire family wouldn't suffer together.

Back at his residence, Xiao Ming had servants deliver gifts to Luo Quan. By now, he had already given gifts to all the officials outside the palace.

The only ones left were the imperial concubines.

Those who whispered in the Emperor's ear were dangerous, and since they were close to Emperor Wenxuan, Xiao Ming didn't dare neglect them. He entered the palace to deliver perfumes, soaps, and other items.

"You're returning to Qingzhou in a few days?"

Upon hearing this, Consort Zhen looked reluctant to see him go.

"Mother, Qingzhou is still in a state of recovery, and I cannot afford to slack off. Every day, I feel as if I'm treading on thin ice. The journey there and back takes a month, and I fear unrest may arise in my absence," Xiao Ming explained.

Consort Zhen was a reasonable woman. Instead of tearfully begging him to stay, she said, "You've grown up and finally understand that governance cannot be neglected for even a day. Since that's the case, I won't keep you."

In this world, Consort Zhen was the only person who made Xiao Ming feel warmth. He said, "Mother, you must also be careful in the palace and guard against schemers."

Consort Zhen held Xiao Ming's hand and smiled. "A mother's status depends on her son. Now that you've gained your father's favor, he will naturally take better care of me. If you're worried about me, focus on developing your territory."

Xiao Ming nodded. Though Consort Zhen lived deep in the palace, she understood the situation clearly—the more powerful Xiao Ming became, the higher her status would rise.

“Understood, Mother. Please distribute these gifts to the concubines you’re close with. That way, you’ll have more allies,” Xiao Ming said.

Gift-giving was a delicate matter—knowing who to give to and who to avoid. Since he wasn’t familiar with the palace and couldn’t move freely, he entrusted the gifts to Consort Zhen for distribution.

“Don’t worry about this. I’ll handle it,” Consort Zhen assured him.

As they spoke, Feng Deshui’s voice came from outside. Soon after, Liuli led him in.

“Congratulations, Your Highness! The marriage decree has been issued. The marriage between Your Highness and the Fei family is now official!” Feng Deshui announced joyfully.

Consort Zhen was overjoyed. She said, “Thank you for your trouble, Minister Feng. Liuli, prepare some gifts for Minister Feng.”

“Your Majesty, there’s no need. This old servant is not greedy—His Highness has already rewarded me generously,” Feng Deshui said with a smile.

“The Prince is the Prince, and I am I. This is different. Besides, this is a joyous occasion,” Consort Zhen insisted excitedly. She had been waiting for this news for a long time.

Liuli came out with some rewards, and Feng Deshui had no choice but to accept them.

After Feng Deshui left, Consort Zhen said to Xiao Ming, “Now that the marriage is settled, once the Six Rites are completed, you can wed.”

The imperial family of the Great Yu Empire still followed the Six Rites of marriage: Proposal, Name Inquiry, Divination, Betrothal Gifts, Date Selection, and Wedding Ceremony. These procedures were extremely elaborate.

With the marriage settled, the Ministry of Rites would handle the arrangements. However, completing all these steps would take at least half a year, and selecting an auspicious date would likely push the wedding to a year from now.

“Now that the marriage is settled, there’s truly nothing left for me to do in Chang’an,” Xiao Ming said with a smile.

Consort Zhen nodded. With this matter resolved, she said, “In that case, you should set off soon. I’ll handle the wedding preparations. Once an auspicious date is chosen, I’ll inform you. But it will likely take a year or so.”

Her words aligned with Xiao Ming’s expectations. He felt relieved—a year would give him enough time to stabilize Qingzhou. If the wedding happened immediately, it would delay many of his plans.

With the marriage settled and nothing else keeping him in Chang'an, Xiao Ming spent a few more days with Consort Zhen before having Ziyuan and Lü lu pack their belongings for the return to Qingzhou.