

I. Dynasty 246

Chapter 246: Your Majesty, an Assassin!

“Did you hear? The Chamber of Commerce is hosting a product exhibition in the East Market. They’re unveiling a brand-new item!”

“Seriously? Then we better go now! I heard the exhibition only lasts seven days. Miss it now, and you won’t get another chance!”

“ ... ”

The next morning, the front page of the Qingzhou newspaper blared bold headlines: “Exhibition Fair!” and “Glass Mirrors!”

The merchants of Qingzhou were thrown into a frenzy. Many had missed out on the previous three blockbuster products and still regretted it to this day. Now, none of them wanted to miss this fourth opportunity.

As soon as they saw the paper, they rushed straight to East Market.

Curious scholars and commoners joined the crowd as well, eager to see what the buzz was about.

Naturally, this exhibition fair was Xiao Ming's idea. No matter how incredible a product was, people had to see it with their own eyes. This was the perfect way to reveal the mirror's magic.

First, it would shock and awe everyone with its clarity; second, it would get merchants talking—word would spread like wildfire, and the hype would build itself.

At the market, a portion of the plaza had been cordoned off and surrounded by soldiers. No one was allowed within three meters of the mirrors.

Inside the roped-off area stood over a dozen glass mirrors, each propped up and gleaming.

Merchants standing in front of them stared in disbelief at their own reflections, so mesmerized that they refused to leave.

"Hey, haven't you looked enough already?" one merchant behind them grumbled. "Let the rest of us see too."

The man up front didn't even glance back. "I got here first. I'll look as long as I like."

"Screw off." The guy behind him grabbed his shoulder and shoved him aside. But the moment he caught sight of his own reflection, he too became entranced.

And so the cycle repeated.

The East Market was soon jam-packed. Tensions ran high. Arguments broke out. A few scuffles even turned into full-blown fistfights.

People were completely blown away by the mirror's clarity—and all they wanted was one more look. The sharper merchants, however, weren't wasting time. They rushed to the Chamber of Commerce to see Li Kaiyuan directly.

"Vice Chairman Li, what's the deal with these mirrors? Can you give us a heads-up?"

One of them discreetly slid a banknote worth over a thousand taels of silver across the table.

Li Kaiyuan immediately pushed the silver note back.

He was fully aware of Xiao Ming's stance on corruption. If he took that money, he wouldn't just lose his position—he'd be facing prison, or worse.

Xiao Ming had made it crystal clear at court meetings: Qingzhou officials received three times the standard salary of their counterparts across the empire. Even the lowest-ranking ones earned at least thirty-six taels of silver annually.

In return, Xiao Ming demanded zero tolerance for bribery. Get caught, and you wouldn't just lose your job—you could lose your head.

As one of Xiao Ming's close aides, Li Kaiyuan had no shortage of silver. He had no reason to accept bribes—and even less reason to be foolish.

“You’d better take this back,” he said, face turning serious. “Otherwise, we have nothing to discuss.”

The merchant was stunned. In the Great Yu Empire, this kind of thing was the norm. An official refusing silver? That left him unsettled.

“Vice Chairman Li... was it not enough?” he asked hesitantly.

Li Kaiyuan slammed the table. “You trying to get me executed? In Qingzhou, we don’t take silver under the table. Take your bribe and go. If you want to talk about mirrors—then talk properly.”

Flustered, the merchant hurriedly tucked the banknote away. “Right... then I just wanted to ask—how are the mirrors being sold? When? What’s the method?”

Li Kaiyuan’s tone eased a bit. “His Highness has ordered that no distribution rights will be granted. The mirrors will go on sale within the next couple of days. As for the method: auction.”

“Auction?” the merchant blinked. “You mean... you’re auctioning off the rights?”

“No,” Li Kaiyuan clarified. “The mirrors themselves will be auctioned. The process is complex, and they can’t be mass-produced yet. Auctioning is the only practical way—and it keeps things fair.”

That was the strategy he and Xiao Ming had worked out. Since the mirrors were positioned as luxury items, their first appearance had to make waves. And nothing did that better than an auction.

While Li Kaiyuan was teasing the merchants with just enough info to get them hooked, Xiao Ming sent a single mirror to Chang'an, addressed to Emperor Xiao Wenxuan.

He held nothing back this time. He didn't even send one to Consort Zhen, deciding to wait and deliver hers after the buzz had peaked.

Li Kaiyuan's statements quickly spread through merchant circles. Many began hoarding silver and preparing to bid. The legend of the mirror soon spread back to their hometowns, and noblewomen and heiresses across the empire began planning pilgrimages to Qingzhou.

Meanwhile, the mirror that Xiao Ming had sent to the capital finally arrived, delivered by Feng Deshui to the Imperial Palace.

"Your Majesty, a gift from the Prince of Qi has arrived," Feng Deshui announced.

Inside the emperor's private chamber, Xiao Wenxuan was reviewing reports when Feng Deshui entered. Two eunuchs followed behind, carrying a tall, cloth-covered object with visible strain.

"What's that rascal sent this time?" the emperor asked, with a hint of curiosity.

A strategic model of the empire sat prominently in the room—a gift from Xiao Ming. A telescope rested beside the emperor's desk. Both items were dearly treasured.

"I'm quite curious myself what surprise His Highness has brought us this time," Feng Deshui said, motioning to the eunuchs.

With a dramatic tug, the black cloth was removed.

A stunning two-meter-tall, fifty-centimeter-wide glass mirror was revealed—its frame adorned with gold, carved dragons, and intricate filigree.

"Your Majesty! An assassin!!" Feng Deshui screamed at the top of his lungs.

He had caught sight of a lifelike figure inside the mirror and panicked.

Even Xiao Wenxuan was startled. But he had weathered many storms and didn't panic easily. He narrowed his eyes and cautiously raised a hand.

The figure in the mirror raised its hand too.

Then he reached over and patted Feng Deshui's shoulder.

The mirror image mirrored the gesture perfectly.

Xiao Wenxuan immediately understood. The figure was just his reflection—incredibly lifelike, but no different than what one might see in a bronze mirror... only vastly clearer.

The clarity was so shocking that, at first glance, it looked like a real person was standing inside the frame. No wonder Feng Deshui was so terrified.

"Protect His Majesty! Guards!!"

Just then, a squad of palace guards rushed in.

At the sight of armored figures in the mirror, they instantly mistook them for enemies. Swords were drawn. They charged.

"You rebel scum—prepare to die!"

Xiao Wenxuan finally snapped out of his daze and shouted, "Stop! HOLD IT!"