

## I. Dynasty 265

### Chapter 265: Thoughts

A cold wind blew through the air, and the young man in white shivered.

Xiao Ming noticed it. Judging from the man's soft skin and gentle appearance, he likely lived in the warm southern regions where people were more scholarly and less used to the cold.

Xiao Ming realized that his earlier words might have been too harsh. If Prince Wei had heard them, he probably would've jumped up in anger and yelled at him.

But as the old saying goes, "ally with the far, attack the near." Xiao Ming understood the value of strategy. Even if he knew Prince Wei had selfish motives, it was still smart to cooperate for now.

After all, many unrelated princes were eyeing the throne. Xiao Ming and Prince Wei were at least from the same family.

So Xiao Ming said calmly, "Don't take it personally. I was just rambling. Since my third uncle sent you, I know this visit is about cannons. Let's get to the point. How many cannons does he need, and how much is he offering for each?"

The young man in white breathed a quiet sigh of relief. He had already noticed something, Prince Qi was very different from the other royal sons. He gave off a feeling of danger and strength, and his words carried authority.

That earlier outburst had stunned him for a moment. But now that he had recovered, he replied, “Prince Wei said he needs 300 cannons. You gave Prince Zhao a price of 20,000 silver taels per cannon. Prince Wei hopes that, since you’re family, you might offer a small discount. But if not, he’s also willing to pay the same price.”

“Hah, my third uncle is generous,” Xiao Ming replied. “Since he’s so generous, it would be rude of me not to give a little discount. Fine, I’ll reduce it by 500 taels—19,500 silver taels per cannon.”

The young envoy smiled bitterly in his heart. Prince Wei had guessed right, Prince Qi was stingy and not someone who gave large discounts.

He said, “Understood. Your Highness, I brought silver with me. We only ask that the cannons be delivered to Prince Wei as soon as the Imperial Guards receive their first shipment. That way, we can deal with the pirates.”

Xiao Ming thought to himself: Prince Wei really is rich.. much more straightforward than Prince Zhao. So he replied, “Very well. Once the Imperial Guards get their first batch, I’ll immediately send the next to my third uncle.”

“Thank you, Your Highness,” said the envoy with a smile.

Actually, this wasn’t Prince Wei’s idea. It was Xiao Qi’s own decision. In just a few words, he had figured out Prince Qi’s personality, he only cared about results and money, not flattery.

Prince Zhao had failed in Qingzhou because he was too hesitant.

After thinking about it, Xiao Qi decided to pay right away. That would surely please Prince Qi. Although Qingzhou had earned a lot this past year, it still couldn't compare to the wealth of Prince Wei's territory.

And with all of Prince Qi's projects in the six prefecture, he surely needed money.

"No need to thank me," Xiao Ming said, smiling. "It's getting late. How about staying for a meal before heading back?"

Xiao Qi smiled warmly. "No need, Your Highness. I've already waited in Qingzhou for a month. Prince Wei must be anxious. I should return right away."

"Fair enough. When you return, give my regards to my third uncle. Those coastal pirates are a real problem. Maybe we'll have more chances to work together in the future."

"I will pass on your message," Xiao Qi replied respectfully.

Then they talked about the payment. Xiao Qi admitted that it was impossible to bring three million taels of silver at once. Instead, he brought silver notes worth one million, and 100,000 taels of gold, which were already waiting at the Tuo River Dock. Someone just needed to go and collect them.

The remaining one million taels would be paid with goods, which was common in Great Yu for large transactions.

Knowing the military factory would need a lot of raw materials soon, Xiao Ming asked for iron, coal, 50,000 dan (approx. tons) of grain, 30,000 bolts of cloth, and saltpeter and other resources.

Xiao Ming actually preferred this kind of barter system. In times of war, silver couldn't be eaten. But food, cloth, and materials were always useful.

After finalizing the deal, Xiao Qi bowed and left.

Xiao Ming watched him go and felt a strange sense of familiarity. It was like seeing a long-lost relative.

Still, he didn't dislike Xiao Qi. The young man was polite, calm, and seemed very smart.

But one thing puzzled him.. why would Prince Wei choose such a young, handsome man to be his chief aide?

Then he suddenly remembered some... "odd preferences" certain nobles had in history.

Xiao Ming shivered and got goosebumps.

He quickly shook his head to clear the thought and told Ziyuan to summon Fan Zeng—he had more serious matters to deal with.

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## Tuo River Dock

Xiao Qi ordered the sailors to unload the gold. Officials from the local government were already at the dock to receive the goods.

He had been in Qingzhou for over a month. While Xiao Ming was away in Cangzhou, Xiao Qi had taken the chance to visit many parts of Qingzhou.

And in that month, he saw many things that were completely different from the capital, Jinling City.

The biggest difference? There were no noble clans in Qingzhou. The people lived freely and peacefully, without being oppressed by powerful families.

Even more important is that the people of Qingzhou loved Prince Qi.

So much so that they only cared about Prince Qi, not the Emperor.

No one talked about Chang'an. No one even mentioned the Emperor. People only talked about new laws, new inventions, and things like the Bowen Academy and local markets.

When someone dared to insult Prince Qi, the locals would scold them—or even beat them up. That kind of loyalty deeply impressed Xiao Qi.

“Third Uncle,” Xiao Qi muttered while looking toward Prince Qi’s residence, “how can someone like Prince Qi be easy to deal with?”

He had been with Prince Wei for years. He understood how stubborn Prince Wei could be. But now, that stubbornness looked very dangerous.

On his return, Xiao Qi decided he must persuade Prince Wei to give up any reckless plans. It was better to stay a peaceful vassal king.

Because now, Xiao Ming had become a serious threat.

“Set sail,” someone shouted.

The merchant ship flying Prince Wei’s banner slowly left the dock. Xiao Qi turned and went back into the cabin.

He had come to Qingzhou for two reasons: to arrange the cannon deal, and to meet Xiao Ming in person, to see this legendary seventh prince of Great Yu.

Now that he had met him, he finally understood and he was worried.

Still, he knew Xiao Ming's strength came from defending the city with cannons. In a real open-field battle, Prince Wei still had the advantage.

There were still ways to beat Xiao Ming. All it would take was surrounding Qingzhou with a larger army for a year or two.

That would be enough to bring him down.