

I. Dynasty 378

Chapter 378: Titles and Honors

As the first rays of sunlight slipped through the cracks of the bedroom window, Xiao Ming slowly woke up.

He instinctively reached behind him under the blanket, only to find the bed already cold—someone had left.

Lying there, remembering the warmth and pleasures of the previous night, he couldn't help but smile. After so many busy days, this felt like real living.

What surprised him the most was how much those two girls knew—it was clear they had been trained in this back in the palace.

Now he finally understood why Xiao Wenxuan was so afraid of losing the throne.

Wealth, beauty, and luxury—there was nothing like the royal palace.

Just then, the bedroom door opened. Lu Luo came in holding a cup of salted tea for rinsing.

“Your Highness, you're awake. Secretary Pang has been waiting outside for quite a while. He said the generals from Shanhai Pass have returned and asked when the reward ceremony will start,” she said, looking at Xiao Ming with new affection.

After giving herself completely to Xiao Ming the night before, she no longer looked shy. Her heart had changed—from a girl into a woman overnight.

Xiao Ming noticed this change clearly. He said to her, “You should let the other maids handle things like this. You already manage the weaving workshop and serve me—don’t work too hard.”

Lu Luo smiled. “Those maids are clumsy. I’m afraid they won’t serve Your Highness properly.”

She passed him the tea.

Xiao Ming chuckled, reached out, and gently squeezed her waist.

Lu Luo rolled her eyes at him. “Your Highness, Secretary Pang has waited long enough. You’ll have plenty of time for this later.”

Xiao Ming took a sip and studied her. Before, she would’ve blushed and squirmed. Now she was calm, like a wife serving her husband.

Shaking his head with a bitter smile, Xiao Ming finished washing up and went to see Pang Yukun. Now more than ever, he valued political affairs—he needed to protect everything he had built.

Though the nomads were held back at Shanhai Pass, they were like hungry wolves, always looking for another chance to attack.

He hadn't forgotten how strong they were in Jizhou. If they launched a full invasion of the Great Yu Empire, the country wouldn't last long.

He didn't think of himself as unbeatable. Until his army matched the level of the world wars, the nomads would remain a serious threat.

Not to mention, the Western powers were still far ahead in technology. He still had a long road to walk.

In the main hall, Pang Yukun had been waiting. Xiao Ming asked for an update, and together they went to the Military Governor's Office.

After the rewards ceremony, he'd begin preparations to travel to Chang'an.

Once at the office, Xiao Ming sent messengers to the Qingzhou army camp, summoned the top students from Bowen Academy, and also called the merchants who had made major contributions during the northern campaign.

Over the past few days, he and Pang Yukun had finalized the list of honorees.

They spent the whole morning preparing, and in the afternoon, the ceremony began at the Governor's Office.

“Everyone, you probably already know why I called you here today,” Xiao Ming said, looking around the room.

There were people from the military, from the business world, and from Bowen Academy.

They all looked excited and hopeful, eyes fixed on Xiao Ming.

He paused before continuing, “If it weren’t for your support during the battle of Jizhou, not only would we have lost Jizhou, but Shanhai Pass would never have been in our hands. So today, I am keeping my promise. You will all be rewarded with noble titles.”

Even though they had expected it, hearing it out loud thrilled everyone. Lin Wentao and others were smiling so wide their mouths nearly reached their ears.

After that, Xiao Ming handed the floor to Pang Yukun.

Pang Yukun stood up and said, “First, we’ll announce the titles. After that, we’ll talk about some changes in Qingzhou’s government positions.”

He cleared his throat and looked at Lin Wentao, Liang Yubin, and He Cheng.

“Lin Wentao led the Physics Department with bold innovation, creating the hot air balloon, which was crucial in the war. He is awarded the title of County Viscount, 1,000 taels of silver, and 200 acres of permanent farmland. Liang Yubin and He Cheng bravely operated the balloons to provide intelligence and scout enemy positions. Each is awarded the title of County Baron, 500 taels of silver, and 100 acres of permanent farmland.”

“Thank you, Your Highness, for this great favor!” Lin Wentao stood up suddenly, his whole body trembling with emotion. Not long ago, he was just a poor scholar, likely to spend his life writing calligraphy to survive.

Now, in one night, he had become a titled noble with land—an incredible honor that brought glory to his family.

Liang Yubin and He Cheng were just as thrilled. He Cheng even burst into tears. Titles like these were dreams beyond the reach of ordinary people.

Xiao Ming had intentionally awarded Bowen Academy members first to show that technology was the most important productive force. There were reporters at the ceremony, and once the news was published, the public would see how much he valued the academy.

After that, Pang Yukun continued: Lu Tong, Chen Qi, Zhang Liu, and Song Changping also received rewards. Lu Tong and Chen Qi were granted the title of County Earl. Song Changping and Zhang Liu received the title of County Viscount.

Lu Tong and Chen Qi had made the biggest contributions, and everyone seemed to agree with these decisions.

After honoring the academy and scholars, it was time to reward the military.

Pang Yukun respectfully handed the floor back to Xiao Ming. He never interfered in military matters.

Xiao Ming picked up the list and looked at Niu Ben.

“Niu Ben, as governor, led the Qingzhou army to defeat the nomads. For his great service, he is awarded the title of Regional Earl, 10,000 taels of silver, and 2,000 acres of land. Lu Fei fought bravely and is granted the title of County Earl, 2,000 taels of silver, and 600 acres. Luo Xin becomes County Earl, Qi Guangyi becomes County Viscount, and Zhu San and Si are made County Barons...”

He read through the names. Every commander who fought in the campaign received some form of noble title. This showed how much Xiao Ming valued the military—breaking the old ways of the Great Yu Empire that favored scholars over soldiers.

“Thank you, Your Highness! We will serve you with all our strength, even unto death!” Niu Ben and the other generals stood up and saluted.

“For glory and loyalty!” they all shouted together.