

I. Dynasty 393

Chapter 393: Blood Oath

A bright moon hung above the trees, casting silver light over the palace. Everything looked mysterious and hazy under the moonlight.

In just one day and night, Chang'an was already in turmoil — Xiao Ming had been attacked, and the Crown Prince was under house arrest.

"Your Majesty, the Empress has been kneeling outside for half an hour. If she keeps kneeling like this, what will happen to her health?" said Feng Deshui, watching Emperor Xiao Wenxuan pacing back and forth.

Ever since he returned from the Eastern Palace, the Emperor had been agitated. Feng Deshui knew that the Crown Prince's act of hiding the Khan's tribesmen inside the palace had completely thrown the Emperor off balance.

"If she likes kneeling, let her kneel! If she hadn't spoiled the Crown Prince so much, would he be this useless?" Xiao Wenxuan roared.

Feng Deshui shrank back a little. It was clear that the Emperor was truly furious this time.

He sighed and tried again, "Your Majesty, even if not for Empress Zhao's sake, shouldn't you consider the royal baby she's carrying?"

Xiao Wenxuan frowned. Only then did he remember the Empress was pregnant. He gave a cold snort and said, "Let her in."

Feng Deshui nodded. He knew the Emperor was only angry about the Crown Prince, but deep down, he still cared for Empress Zhao.

After all, Feng Deshui had served Xiao Wenxuan since youth — he knew very well how much the Emperor cherished her.

Most people believed that the Emperor supported the Crown Prince only because of Prince Zhao, but the real reason was that the Emperor loved Empress Zhao the most.

Back when Xiao Wenxuan was still a prince, he and the then-Crown Prince had traveled to the Zhao Region together. That's where they both met the woman known as the greatest beauty of Zhao — the future Empress Zhao.

Both princes fell in love with her at first sight. Later, during a tribal invasion, Empress Zhao was trapped while visiting family, and it was Xiao Wenxuan who braved danger alone to rescue her.

During that time, they developed deep feelings.

However, Prince Zhao favored the Crown Prince and strongly opposed the match. But Empress Zhao threatened to take her own life, and only then did her father give in and allow her to marry Xiao Wenxuan.

Afterwards, Xiao Wenxuan went on to win many battles and earn the Emperor's trust, while ministers constantly praised him.

Under such circumstances, the Crown Prince began to see him as a threat. Secretly, he wrote to King Kang and set a trap for Xiao Wenxuan during his mission to suppress the Jizhou rebellion.

But that letter was intercepted by Xiao Wenxuan. From that moment on, he was determined to take the throne. Upon returning, he launched a coup, forcing the Crown Prince to take his own life. The former Emperor was locked away in the cold palace.

Thinking of the past, Feng Deshui felt a wave of sorrow. So much pain, so much regret — but all of it was now history.

Feng Deshui carefully helped Empress Zhao to her feet. "Your Majesty, His Majesty is in a bad mood. Please be careful with your words."

The Empress wiped away her tears. She had been with Xiao Wenxuan since she was fifteen — now it had been over thirty years. She naturally understood her husband.

She nodded gently. "Thank you for your reminder, Lord Feng."

Feng Deshui smiled softly and led her to the imperial study, then stepped outside to stand guard.

Inside, Xiao Wenxuan barely glanced at her before looking away.

The Empress gave a bitter smile. “Your Majesty still blames me for protecting the Crown Prince?”

Xiao Wenxuan snorted but didn’t reply.

Seeing this, the Empress grew more sorrowful. “Do you think I only cared about the Crown Prince because of his future as Emperor? Yes, he made mistakes. But if he was truly the one who ordered the attack on Prince Qi, why would he hide the assassin in the Eastern Palace? He was clearly framed. This is all part of the struggle for the throne.”

“In the end, you still want him to keep his title as Crown Prince. I know he was used by others, but it’s a fact that he hid the Khan’s men in the palace — and for fun! He’s too foolish. How can I entrust the Great Yu Empire to such a failure?” the Emperor snapped.

The Empress replied calmly, “I understand the Crown Prince is unworthy. But hasn’t this assassination attempt shown you something, Your Majesty? Even with the Crown Prince still alive, others already want to kill Xiao Ming. If he’s removed, the remaining princes will kill each other. And whoever takes the throne — how will they treat Prince Qi?”

“Don’t forget, Your Majesty — back then, to get rid of King Kang, you let the enemy take the Yan-Yun Sixteen Prefectures. Though the Khan didn’t keep invading, you’ve never had peace in your heart, have you?”

“Enough!”

The Emperor exploded. Her words had struck his deepest guilt.

It was true — he had once ordered the Imperial Guard to stand down, which allowed the Khan to capture Yan-Yun. He did it all because of that secret order from the old Crown Prince.

“Your Majesty, I know you don’t like to recall these things. But please think it over. Right now they want to kill Xiao Ming. If they take the throne, what do you think they’ll do next? They might collude with the Khan again to kill him. And when that happens, the Great Yu Empire won’t have another Prince Qi to stop the Khan.”

“Hmph! You say the other princes would kill Xiao Ming, but would the Crown Prince not do the same? Didn’t you see how he treated Prince Qi in the Eastern Palace?”

“I’ll have the Crown Prince make a blood oath and give it to all the other princes. If he breaks his word after becoming Emperor, anyone may kill him!” the Empress declared. “But please also have Prince Qi and the other princes make the same oath.”

“Blood oath?”

The Emperor’s face changed slightly. That oath had been created by the founding emperor and seven powerful lords — a pledge to avoid civil war.

The oath stated that any prince who killed a brother would be punished by the others. It had been a symbol of honor in the Great Yu Empire ever since.

The oath was last used during the founding emperor's dying moments, when the battle for succession was fierce. He made all his sons swear it publicly, and that saved the throne.

But Xiao Wenxuan knew this oath was just a piece of paper. Whether it was followed or not depended entirely on the princes themselves.

"Empress, you're taking that blood oath too seriously," Xiao Wenxuan shook his head. "You think like a woman."

Empress Zhao didn't back down. "Of course I know the oath alone can't control them. But I promise the Crown Prince will keep his word. And Your Majesty can name Prince Qi as the enforcer. If the Crown Prince breaks it, Prince Qi can legally raise troops to punish him."