

I. Dynasty 394

Chapter 394: The Decision

The candlelight flickered inside the imperial study.

Emperor Xiao Wenxuan sat in deep thought. He clearly understood what would happen if he removed the Crown Prince. The Crown Prince was his eldest son — and born of his Empress — making him the rightful heir to the throne.

If the Crown Prince were deposed, none of the remaining princes would stay calm. At that point, it wouldn't be about birth order anymore — only strength and ambition would matter.

He glanced at Empress Zhao and realized she had brought up the blood oath just to stop him from removing the Crown Prince, trying to follow the example of the founding emperor. After all, the blood oath had more symbolic than actual power.

To be honest, deep down, he didn't want to remove the Crown Prince either. That was his first son. Empress Zhao was the woman he loved most. Why would he want to hand the throne over to someone else?

But the Crown Prince had caused such a mess... The memorials asking for his removal would soon pile up.

"Your Majesty, if you really remove the Crown Prince, that means the mastermind behind this plan has won," said Empress Zhao, her eyes shining. She clearly understood what Xiao Wenxuan was thinking.

“But how will I explain it to the ministers and the court?” Xiao Wenxuan hesitated.

Hearing that, the Empress brightened. “Your Majesty, the Crown Prince said he just had a bold dream. He wanted to become the Khan of the northern tribes. Didn’t the founding emperor once dream of conquering the tribes too, making them submit to the Great Yu Empire?”

“The Crown Prince said that?” Xiao Wenxuan’s expression softened.

“Yes. After you left, that’s what he told me. As for the assassin — it was a mistake. The Crown Prince didn’t vet his people carefully. One of the attackers was a northern tribesman who slipped in. He was framed.”

Xiao Wenxuan nodded. His expression returned to normal. He even seemed a little pleased with the Crown Prince again. “You’re right. I should have all the princes come to the palace and sign the blood oath. Whoever refuses must be hiding something. Even if they aren’t the mastermind, they still have bad intentions.”

A smile blossomed across the Empress’s face. This was exactly the answer she wanted.

“Your Majesty, the blood oath may not have real power, but if you stamp it with your imperial seal, it becomes law. It can calm the battle for the throne, and preserve the Crown Prince’s position. Isn’t that the best way to stabilize the empire?”

Xiao Wenxuan nodded. “You’re right. Tomorrow, I’ll summon all the princes to the palace. I’ll bring Yang Zhen with me — he’s sharp enough to read their expressions.”

The Empress smiled and said, “That’s wise, Your Majesty. Yang Zhen is an expert at reading people. He might spot something useful. It’s late now. Let’s stop worrying about this. The baby is kicking again.”

“Oh? Come, let me have a look,” said Xiao Wenxuan, helping her up as they walked together toward the inner palace.

Having a child late in life made Xiao Wenxuan very happy — especially since it was with Empress Zhao. He felt as if the heavens were blessing him.

The next day, a royal command spread through Chang’an: all the imperial princes were to come to the palace for a meeting in the imperial study.

After the recent assassination attempt, all the princes were nervous, but they had no choice — they had to obey.

Outside the imperial study, Xiao Ming arrived and saw the others: the Crown Prince, Second Prince, Third Prince, Fourth Prince, Prince Shu, Sixth Prince — all seven adult sons were there.

The princes stood silently, each with a wary look on their faces.

The Third Prince moved next to Xiao Ming. “Seventh Brother, you’re here too? Looks like this isn’t just about the assassination.”

“Maybe they want you to identify the attacker,” he added with a smirk. “You must have made someone really mad.”

Xiao Ming glanced at the Fourth Prince — someone who already had a bad history. He replied, “I’ve offended plenty of people. Could be anyone, right, Fourth Brother?”

The Fourth Prince’s face changed immediately. He snorted and turned away.

“You’re not wrong,” Prince Shu added coldly. “But why drag all of us into it?” He had been peaceful in his own territory, but was summoned back only because Xiao Ming received rewards.

At that moment, Feng Deshui walked out of the imperial study. “Your Highness the Crown Prince, His Majesty will see you now.”

“Hmm.”

The Crown Prince confidently walked in. He already knew what this was about.

Inside the imperial study

Xiao Wenxuan stamped the blood oath with the imperial seal. He had written it earlier that morning. When the Crown Prince entered, he said, “Come here, Crown Prince.”

The Crown Prince quickly walked up to him.

Xiao Wenxuan said seriously, “Crown Prince, I hope what you said is true. If not, even with the blood oath, I will still remove you.”

“Father, I understand. From now on, I’ll work hard to govern and help ease your burdens.”

“Good. Sign your name.”

To Xiao Wenxuan, whether the Crown Prince meant it or not didn’t really matter anymore.

This assassination attempt had finally awakened him — if he kept letting the princes run wild, disaster was only a matter of time.

The Crown Prince signed and left the study.

Soon, Feng Deshui called in the Second Prince.

Outside, the other princes were shocked to see the Crown Prince smiling and even bowing to them one by one.

“Third Brother, Fourth Brother... Seventh Brother — I’ll go first,” he said.

When he got to Xiao Ming, he smiled and said, “Seventh Brother, sorry for what happened in the Eastern Palace. I thought you were trying to frame me.”

“No problem. As long as you understand now,” Xiao Ming replied, puzzled. ‘What did he eat today? Why is he acting like this?’

The Crown Prince then left alone.

A short while later, the Second Prince walked out with an angry face.

Then came the Third Prince, Fourth Prince... Each one entered nervously and came out looking upset.

“Your Highness, it’s your turn,” said Feng Deshui to Xiao Ming.

Inside the imperial study, Xiao Ming walked straight up to Xiao Wenxuan.

The Emperor simply handed him the blood oath.

Xiao Ming was surprised. He carefully read through it — at the bottom, he saw the names of all the other princes.

“Ming’er, I’m sure you’ve heard of the blood oath,” Xiao Wenxuan said warmly.

Xiao Ming gave a helpless smile. He hadn’t expected this was the reason for the royal summons. No wonder the Crown Prince looked so pleased — this was a contract forcing the rest of them to give up the throne.

“Father, the founding emperor once used the blood oath too. People still praise it today.”

“That’s right. The oath is meant to stop brothers from fighting. You’re smart. I know you understand what I’m trying to do,” Xiao Wenxuan said, looking straight at him.