

I. Dynasty 521

Chapter 521

When the first cannon fired, the Eastern Palace immediately fell into chaos.

The Crown Prince woke up startled from his bed. He loudly asked, "What's going on? Where is that cannon fire coming from?"

"Your Highness, we don't know either, the sound just started."

A group of palace maids serving in the bedchamber said delicately. Ever since Xiao Wenxuan was bedridden, the Crown Prince had been acting recklessly. Few beautiful palace maids in the imperial palace had not been taken by him to the Eastern Palace to serve him.

These days, he truly experienced the unrestrained life of an emperor. Because of this, he became even more obsessed with supreme power. As long as he could ascend the throne and become emperor, no one in the world would ever be able to restrain him.

This country would be trampled under his feet. The wealth and beauties of this world would be taken into his arms. He would live a reckless life and no longer have to worry about being scolded by Xiao Wenxuan.

But at the same time, he became increasingly afraid of losing all of this. These days, he had been woken up several times from nightmares by this fear.

Pushing away the naked body on the bed, the Crown Prince ran out, his clothes disheveled. Although he was incompetent, he understood that the cannon fire meant something big had definitely happened.

As he rushed out the door, Wang Xi ran over in a hurry. Seeing the Crown Prince, Wang Xi said in a panic, "Your Royal Highness, something terrible has happened! The Firearm Battalion has rebelled!"

"What!" The Crown Prince was greatly shocked by the news. "Where is Yang Zhen? Why didn't he detect this beforehand?"

Wang Xi said hatefully, "Your Highness, Yang Zhen, the person in Lijinmen, hasn't returned for two days and two nights. Now no one knows where he went. Your Highness, I told you not to trust Yang Zhen and Du Heng, and these two are indeed treacherous villains."

This news made the Crown Prince's heart filled with rage. A feeling of being betrayed made him wish he could kill Yang Zhen and Du Heng right now. However, he understood that now was not the time to dwell on these things.

He said, "You are to immediately inform the Right Guard to quell the rebellion. Tell the City Defense Battalion to close the city gates and not allow anyone to enter or exit. The gates can only be opened when the Prince of Zhao's troops arrive."

"Yes, Your Highness." Wang Xi heard this and walked out.

After giving the order, the Crown Prince was still uneasy. He called his personal guards and ordered the outer palace guards to immediately close the palace gates and not allow anyone to enter the imperial palace. However, what his personal guard said made him turn pale with fright.

"Du Heng has already entered the palace!" The Crown Prince angrily said, "Kill him immediately."

At this time, Du Heng, who had arrived at the imperial palace in Princess Pingyang's carriage that morning, had already entered the inner palace. He was well aware that after joining the Crown Prince, he was no longer trustworthy.

Princess Pingyang's overnight shelter was precisely because she had become wary of him.

However, unlike Yang Zhen's betrayal, his feigned allegiance to the Crown Prince was indeed under orders. And now, he would prove his innocence with his actions.

"General Du, you're quite early." Zhao Yujie yawned. He had led his men to guard the gate all night.

Du Heng smiled faintly and walked to Zhao Yujie as usual, preparing for the handover. Just as Zhao Yujie was unprepared, he suddenly drew his saber and slashed at Zhao Yujie's throat.

Blood spurted out like a fountain. The hundred imperial guards at the gate were immediately stunned.

One soldier regained his senses and shouted, "Du Heng is rebelling! Kill him without mercy!"

The imperial guards reacted and immediately rushed towards Du Heng. Just then, "swish swish" sounds rang out, and hundreds of sharp arrows shot towards the imperial guards at the gate.

With a series of tragic cries, half of the imperial guards outside Bīshuǐ Pavilion fell. The remaining imperial guards looked towards where the arrows came from, only to see inner palace guards in black armor surging from all directions, like steel torrents.

“The Crown Prince has rebelled and assassinated the Emperor! The Emperor has given an order: all of the Crown Prince’s accomplices are to be executed without mercy!” Du Heng said loudly.

The remaining imperial guards in front of Bīshuǐ Pavilion suddenly understood. They realized that Du Heng had never been loyal to the Crown Prince.

They exchanged glances. They did not surrender, nor did they rush to meet the enemy. Instead, they turned and rushed towards Bīshuǐ Pavilion. They also carried secret orders: if an unexpected situation arose, they were to immediately kill everyone inside Bīshuǐ Pavilion.

“Kill!” The rebellious imperial guards shouted as they rushed into Bīshuǐ Pavilion.

This sudden noise startled the palace maids in Bīshuǐ Pavilion. Seeing over fifty imperial guards brandishing sabers and rushing towards them, the palace maids’ faces immediately turned pale with fright.

Liuli stood in front of thirty palace maids at this moment. Facing these imperial guards, her body trembled. After all, she was just a woman, so how could she not be afraid in such a situation?

But behind her were Consort Zhen and the Emperor. Just as the rebellious secret guards rushed in front of them, Liuli suddenly shouted in a clear voice, "Fire!"

After speaking, she suddenly took out a short-barreled firearm from her sleeve. With a "bang," the imperial guard rushing at the very front fell in response.

The other palace maids also tremblingly raised their firearms. At this moment, to survive, they overcame their fear of firearms, and one by one, aimed at the charging imperial guards and pulled the trigger.

"Bang, bang..." Continuous sounds rang out, and half of the rebellious imperial guards fell.

The remaining imperial guards were greatly shocked by the sight and hesitated in their steps. Just then, Du Heng arrived with his men, and the two sides immediately began to fight.

Relying on his formidable martial arts and the large number of his men, Du Heng quickly killed the rebellious imperial guards.

At this time, Du Heng looked at Liuli, who was still holding the short-barreled firearm and unwilling to put it down, in surprise and said, "Miss Liuli, I'm here to protect the Emperor."

When the Crown Prince broke into Bīshuǐ Pavilion that day, Liuli knew that this boded ill. As Consort Zhen's confidante, Liuli and Li San had naturally interacted many times outside the palace.

And when King Qi sent gifts to Consort Zhen, Li San sent a box of firearms into the palace, instructing her not to use them unless it was a critical moment.

Now that Consort Zhen and the Emperor's lives were in danger, she could only take out the firearms and teach the palace maids how to use them.

"You have already sided with the Crown Prince, you're lying!" Liuli rebuked.

Du Heng gave a bitter smile, realizing that he was now in a situation where he couldn't clear his name.

"Liuli, let him in." Suddenly, Consort Zhen's voice sounded. At the inner palace door, Consort Zhen helped Xiao Wenxuan walk out. "If he wanted to kill us, he wouldn't have gone through so much trouble."

"Your Majesty." Seeing Xiao Wenxuan, Du Heng's expression became agitated.

The booming of cannons outside the city seemed to be getting closer to the imperial palace. At this point, Xiao Wenxuan said, "It seems Luo Quan already knows what happened in the palace. I truly was blind; my whole life I only believed the slanders of treacherous villains and let down the loyal officials who were devoted to me."

"Your Majesty, not only General Luo, but also His Royal Highness King Qi's people are in the city. They are preparing to rescue Your Majesty and Consort Zhen." Du Heng said, "According to the agreed time, they will arrive in less than half an hour."

Xiao Wenxuan coughed violently twice. He said, "No, you only need to escape with Consort Zhen and my last will. I will buy you time."

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"Your Majesty!"

Du Heng and Consort Zhen were greatly shocked. Xiao Wenxuan's words were too astonishing for the two of them.

"I know my own body. Even if I escape Chang'an, I cannot endure this long journey. Moreover, what the Crown Prince wants is my life. If I don't die, he will pursue you relentlessly."

At this moment, Xiao Wenxuan's weak body suddenly straightened a little. He had thought a lot during the days he lay on the bed, and he had made a decision in his heart.

Du Heng said anxiously, "Your Majesty, a country cannot be without a monarch for a single day. If Your Majesty does not leave, this world will fall into great chaos."

"Your Majesty, General Du is right. As long as the green mountains remain, there will be no fear of lacking firewood. As long as Your Majesty can escape Chang'an and go to Qingzhou, gathering the loyal armies from all directions will surely quell the rebellion of the Crown Prince and the Prince of Zhao."

"Cough, cough, cough. You think too simply of the Prince of Zhao. Since he has taken such a dangerous move this time, he must have absolute reliance. Besides, the other vassal kings of different surnames

also have their own ulterior motives. Now that the Prince of Zhao has rebelled, they will certainly take the opportunity to declare independence,” Xiao Wenxuan said.

Concubine Zhen said, “Your Majesty, there are no vassal kings of different surnames, but we still have the Prince of Yong, the Prince of Wei, and Ming’er. They are still loyal to the imperial family.”

“That’s right, there are them, but I’m afraid I won’t live to see that day.” Xiao Wenxuan suddenly coughed violently, and a trace of blood suddenly flowed from the corner of his mouth.

“Your Majesty.” Concubine Zhen became even more flustered at the sight.

Xiao Wenxuan spat out the blood from his mouth. He sneered, “It seems they have calculated exactly when I will die. You don’t need to say more. Du Heng, no matter what, you must send Consort Zhen to King Qi. Otherwise, the Prince of Zhao will threaten with Consort Zhen. At that time, if King Qi saves her, he will put himself in danger. If he doesn’t save her, he will be reviled by the world as unfilial. This is my last order.”

Du Heng’s eyes welled up with tears. He had followed Xiao Wenxuan for twenty years, from battlefields to unifying the world. He understood that many people in Great Yu Empire called him a muddle-headed ruler, weak and incompetent.

But having accompanied Xiao Wenxuan all these years, he also understood that the current Great Yu Empire’s accumulated problems were too deep, so severe that even its emperor was powerless.

He believed that if it hadn’t been for Xiao Wenxuan’s mediation over the years, the Great Yu Empire would have long ago been divided into seven states. Of course, he also admitted that Xiao Wenxuan was not a perfect person; he had his own shortcomings.

It was precisely his obsession with the throne that led him to a moment of confusion, allowing the barbarians to enter the pass.

“Yes, Your Majesty. Even if it costs my life, I will safely deliver Consort Zhen to His Highness King Qi.” Du Heng knelt on the ground and said firmly.

As the three were speaking, suddenly a cry of “kill” rang out from outside Bīshuǐ Pavilion.

Du Heng abruptly stood up. He understood that the outer palace guards had arrived.

Xiao Wenxuan also looked outside Bīshuǐ Pavilion at this moment. He picked up a sharp sword from the ground and slowly walked towards the outside of Bīshuǐ Pavilion. Then he said to Du Heng, “Remember what you promised me.”

Du Heng nodded heavily and said to the soldiers behind him, “Protect Consort Zhen.”

Concubine Zhen wanted to go out with Xiao Wenxuan, but she was immediately stopped by Du Heng and the soldiers in the courtyard. Watching Xiao Wenxuan slowly and with difficulty walk towards the battlefield, Concubine Zhen’s tears flowed down.

Outside Bīshuǐ Pavilion, the Crown Prince, leading the outer palace guards, had arrived and launched an attack with over six thousand outer palace guards.

The sound of artillery fire from outside the city was getting closer, which was a signal of the Firearm Battalion approaching. Therefore, he had to kill Xiao Wenxuan before the Firearm Battalion broke into the imperial palace.

“Whoever takes Du Heng’s head will be granted the title of Ten Thousand Households Marquis and rewarded with ten thousand taels of gold!”

The desire for the throne had driven the Crown Prince into a frenzy. He screamed hoarsely like a raging beast.

The soldiers shouted and rushed towards the inner palace guards defending in front of Bīshuǐ Pavilion. The soldiers, under heavy rewards, were equally frenzied. They continuously charged the battle formation formed by the inner palace guards. Their morale was high due to being twice in number.

Casualties continued to occur. The inner palace guards continuously retreated against an enemy twice their size. Although they were equally brave, the disadvantage in numbers was sometimes impossible to overcome.

While the palace was in fierce battle, Chang’an City had fallen into chaos.

The City Defense Battalion had closed the gates of Chang’an City to prevent any troops other than the Prince of Zhao’s from entering the city, and multiple factions were fighting in Chang’an City.

The Right Guards, dispatched by the Crown Prince, quickly arrived at Vermillion Bird Street and launched a charge against the Firearm Battalion, but they were gradually defeated under the fierce attack of the Firearm Battalion.

At the same time, the news of the Crown Prince assassinating the Emperor spread throughout Chang'an City through the shouts of scouts. Some military generals and ministers, after confirming the news, unhesitatingly joined the Firearm Battalion, while some ministers were busy packing their valuables to flee, and more ministers were trembling with fear, praying that they would not be affected and preparing to congratulate the new monarch.

"Fire!"

"Bang, bang, bang..."

Luo Hong commanded the musketeers to steadily advance towards the imperial city. The training in Qingzhou had taught him how to command firearm troops. Under the continuous firepower of three-stage firing, the charging outer palace guards fell in droves.

However, enemies ten times their number charged again and again, as if they could never be completely killed.

Luo Quan and Luo Hong stood together. The power of the firearms shocked him. In the past, how could these men of the Firearm Battalion so easily defeat the men of the Right Guards?

As they were engaging the Right Guards, there was a sudden confusion behind them, and then a large number of troops came from the west. Luo Quan immediately picked up his telescope to observe, and then he was overjoyed. "It's the people of the Third Prince and Fourth Prince."

Fiji was behind Luo Quan. He said, "This Third Prince is too cautious. If we hadn't launched the attack first, he would have waited indefinitely."

"The King of Chu is an old fox; he's just a little fox." Luo Quan cursed, and then he said to Luo Hong, "Take this opportunity to immediately rout them."

Luo Hong nodded. Now that the Right Guards was being attacked from both sides, it was the time to utterly defeat them. He immediately ordered his soldiers to attack fiercely.

Under the pincer attack of the Left Guard and the Firearm Battalion, the Right Guard quickly fell into chaos, and large numbers of soldiers fled without fighting.

The imperial city was right in front of them. The Left Guard and the Firearm Battalion, after their combined attack, seemed to have an understanding and headed towards the imperial city.

At the same time, a group of ministers shouting "Save the Emperor" also rushed out with their household troops and generals.

Upon reaching the imperial city, the Left Guards soldiers immediately launched an assault. The soldiers carried ladders and climbed the city walls. Just then, a series of cannon shots suddenly rang out. Cannons on the inner palace city walls spewed fire and unleashed shells.

Luo Hong was greatly shocked. He immediately shouted, "Pull the cannons up and smash open the city gate! Hurry!"

“Your Majesty, why did you install cannons in the inner palace?” Luo Quan also stamped his foot.

Some of the cannons Xiao Wenxuan purchased from Qingzhou were deployed outside the city gate, and some were deployed within the imperial palace for defense. Now, these cannons became their biggest obstacle in attacking the city.

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“Boom, boom, boom...”

Thirty cannons on the city gate relentlessly bombarded the soldiers below the city. With each cannonball fired, blood splattered below the city.

Luo Quan was anxious. These outer palace guards were already the elite of the elite. Now, defending the city while also possessing cannons, their forces would be unable to break through the city wall for a while.

Meanwhile, the situation in the palace must be extremely urgent. Thinking of this, he couldn't help but feel a bit anxious.

“Where did Li San go? Wasn't he confident he could rescue the Emperor?” Luo Quan searched everywhere for Li San's figure, but he couldn't find a trace.

Fiji also couldn't maintain his composure at this time. If this plan failed, they would all be doomed.

Just as the two were like ants on a hot pan, a sudden violent explosion occurred on the south side of the imperial city. The attacking soldiers could even feel the ground shake.

“That direction is the Royal Garden.” Luo Quan suddenly realized something.

Fiji nodded and said with a bitter smile, “What a Li San. We were all fooled by him. It turns out he had a complete plan all along. This time, we were merely using us to attack the city from the front to draw the forces of the outer palace guards. Now, the defenders in the direction of the Royal Garden must be thinly spread.”

As the two expected, at this moment, the secret guards in the direction of the Royal Garden had launched an attack on the imperial city. Under the power of ten gunpowder barrels, the city gate in the direction of the Royal Garden was directly blown to smithereens.

Three hundred secret guard members headed towards Bīshuǐ Pavilion along the blown-up city gate. They almost all held short-barreled firearms, and beside Li San were two soldiers holding rifled guns.

The defending general on the city gate just now was shot dead by these two.

“Bang, bang...” The sound of firearms continuously rang out.

Because a large number of soldiers had gone to the main gate, there were very few soldiers guarding the garden direction. Under the gunfire, the soldiers who came to stop them quickly fell.

Before adopting this plan, Li San had learned that the distance from this city gate to Bīshuǐ Pavilion was the shortest. After entering the city gate, they quickly went towards Bīshuǐ Pavilion.

Soon, sounds of fighting reached their ears, and at the same time, they noticed the soldiers fighting fiercely on the stone bridge of Bīshuǐ Pavilion.

“Quick, quick.” The garden’s city gate was on one side of Bīshuǐ Pavilion. Li San wiped the cold sweat from his forehead at this moment. Fortunately, they arrived in time. If the Crown Prince’s men had reached the other side of the bridge, they would have to put in more effort.

Looking at Bīshuǐ Pavilion, Li San said, “Quickly go save Her Highness.”

With that, he led the secret guards towards Bīshuǐ Pavilion. Their arrival had already attracted the attention of both sides. The Crown Prince naturally cursed endlessly in anger, but Du Heng breathed a heavy sigh of relief when he saw Li San.

“I greet His Majesty and Concubine Zhen.” In front of Bīshuǐ Pavilion, Li San bowed and said.

Xiao Wenxuan surveyed Li San and said, “Ming’er seems to have also realized. Good, good. Now quickly take Concubine Zhen and leave.”

“Your Majesty, His Highness means for Your Majesty and Concubine Zhen to leave together. We can then make long-term plans when we reach Qingzhou.” Li San said.

Xiao Wenxuan smiled, "He remembers me, so I am at ease. But I don't want to leave, and I can't walk anymore. Don't waste any more time, you two leave quickly."

Li San looked at Du Heng and Concubine Zhen at this moment, undecided in his mind. He didn't understand what was going on.

While they were at a standstill, a secret guard suddenly said, "Commander, our people are signaling."

Li San heard this and picked up his telescope, looking at a high ground in the Royal Garden. He saw a secret guard rapidly waving a flag.

After reading the flag signals, Li San's expression suddenly changed. He said to Xiao Wenxuan, "Your Majesty, if you don't leave now, it will be too late. The Prince of Zhao's Black Armored Iron Cavalry has arrived, and his army also has barbarian cavalry archers."

"Barbarian cavalry archers?" Xiao Wenxuan frowned, then he suddenly laughed, "Retribution, it truly is retribution. This is my retribution. You all leave quickly, don't mind me. The soldiers can't hold on much longer."

Du Heng looked at the stone bridge. Most of the stone bridge was now occupied by the Crown Prince's men, and the remaining inner imperial guards were retreating step by step.

Li San's expression turned cold. He said to the secret guards behind him, "Quickly take Her Highness away."

“Yes.” The secret guards, upon receiving the order, immediately forcefully led the still weeping Concubine Zhen towards the Royal Garden.

Then Li San looked at Liuli and said, “Let’s go. If we don’t leave now, it will be too late.”

Xiao Wenxuan was still unmoved at this time. He looked at the Crown Prince on the other side of the small river, his eyes filled with complex emotions, but he still had no intention of leaving.

Du Heng took a deep look at Xiao Wenxuan. He said to Li San, “Your Majesty has made up his mind. No need to wait any longer, let’s go.”

Li San nodded and led a group of secret guards towards the Royal Garden. In the Royal Garden, two hydrogen balloons were being prepared. This was their escape plan, and also the most secure plan.

“Your Majesty, I am leaving,” Du Heng knelt before Xiao Wenxuan, bowing deeply.

Xiao Wenxuan did not speak, his eyes still fixed on the soldiers fighting fiercely. At this moment, he lifted his feet and walked step by step towards the stone bridge.

Du Heng stood up, took one last look at Xiao Wenxuan, and followed the secret guards, protecting Concubine Zhen, towards the Royal Garden.

Outside Chang'an City, dense cavalry, like a black torrent, were surrounding Chang'an City from north to south. In the north of the city, the City Defense Battalion had already opened the Zhengde Gate. An old man fully armored and Zhao Yuanliang rode their horses into Chang'an City.

Behind the old man were cavalrymen all wearing black armor. These cavalrymen followed closely behind the Prince of Zhao, like the scythe of death.

"Father, this Chang'an City is finally ours," Zhao Yuanliang said excitedly.

The Prince of Zhao's hair was already somewhat gray, and his seemingly kind face was ruined by an aquiline nose, giving him a somewhat strange demeanor. Hearing this, he said, "Now is not the time to be happy. We still have many things to deal with."

"Yes, Father." Zhao Yuanliang nodded.

This time, to take Chang'an, not only did one hundred thousand Black Armored Iron Cavalry move out, but they also borrowed fifty thousand troops from the barbarians, totaling one hundred fifty thousand troops heading towards Chang'an City.

Then Zhao Yuanliang said, "Father, aren't we going to rescue the Crown Prince?"

A smile appeared on the Prince of Zhao's face. He looked at his youngest son and said, "Why save the Crown Prince? Wouldn't it be even better if he died? That way, the Thirteenth Prince, as the legitimate son, can ascend the throne rightfully."

Zhao Yuanliang thought for a moment, then immediately laughed, “No wonder Father isn’t anxious at all. This Thirteenth Prince is still a baby, much easier to control than the Crown Prince. From now on, Father can rightfully assist the Emperor in overseeing the country.”

“Yes, that’s right.” The Prince of Zhao looked confident. He continued to Zhao Yuanliang, “Now gather all the officials of Chang’an City. They are still needed for the Thirteenth Prince’s ascension to the throne.”

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The dust raised by the warhorses flew.

The sound of galloping cavalry was clearly audible even within the city. The people of Chang’an at this moment hid in their homes like startled rabbits. Only a few daring individuals peeked out, watching the Black Armored Iron Cavalry run rampant through Chang’an City.

“Barbarian soldiers, they are barbarian soldiers.” Sharp-eyed citizens who saw the barbarian cavalry mixed in the ranks immediately cried out in alarm and fled back, while some citizens looked ashen.

Having lived in Chang’an for a long time, they were always exceptionally sensitive to power struggles and wars. This time, the Prince of Zhao led the Black Armored Iron Cavalry and barbarian soldiers with such intimidating force that they basically understood what was about to happen.

Combined with the rumors circulating in the streets during this period, this made them even more certain of it.

News of the Prince of Zhao's troops entering the city reached Luo Quan and Fiji immediately. Li San, upon receiving the news, immediately sent someone to inform the two.

"General Luo Quan, Councillor Fei, Commander Li wants you to lead the soldiers towards the Royal Garden. Now the Prince of Zhao's troops are encircling from both sides, and the only way to escape is from the Royal Garden."

"What had to come, has finally come." Luo Quan and Fiji exchanged glances, sighed deeply, and then he asked the secret guard, "How are the Emperor and Her Highness?"

"Her Highness has been sent to the Royal Garden, but the Emperor refuses to leave." the secret guard said.

Luo Quan was shocked when he heard this, "Why!" Fiji also looked surprised.

"The Emperor said that his body cannot hold on, and even if he escapes, he would not be able to reach Qingzhou alive. Instead, he would drag down King Qi's carefully prepared rescue plan." the secret guard said.

"Alas, the Emperor's temper hasn't changed at all. Back then, for Empress Zhao, he refused to retreat in the face of a large barbarian army, and now it's for Concubine Zhen again." Fiji sighed deeply.

Luo Quan nodded, "Perhaps Empress Zhao disappointed the Emperor too much. The Crown Prince's current heinous actions are not unrelated to Empress Zhao's indulgence."

With that, Luo Quan said to Luo Hong, "You immediately take Councillor Fei and all the officials and their families towards the Royal Garden. There's a small path in the garden that leads to the Chang'an pier. You can only escape by water."

"Father, you and Councillor Fei should go. Let me cover the rear." Luo Hong's gaze was firm.

Luo Quan shook his head and said, "No, the future world will be a world of firearms. Now you have learned how to command firearm troops, which is very useful to King Qi. And I can no longer keep up with the current battlefield situation."

While the two were arguing, the Third Prince and Fourth Prince said, "At a time like this, you're still pushing each other away. If you don't leave soon, no one will be able to leave. We're leaving, you take care of yourselves."

With that, the Third Prince and Fourth Prince led several thousand troops towards the Royal Garden.

Luo Hong still wanted to speak, but Luo Quan suddenly said angrily, "Don't say anymore, this is a military order! At this critical juncture for Great Yu Empire, how can there be so much sentimentality! Someone must stay here to stop the Prince of Zhao's troops."

Fiji sighed and said to Luo Hong, "Your father is right. You must now protect the others and ensure their safe arrival in Qingzhou."

Luo Hong bit his lip and nodded, with a hint of tears in his eyes. Then, he led over a thousand musketeers and retreated towards the Royal Garden.

Watching Luo Hong and Fiji leave, Luo Quan then looked at the imperial city again and shouted to the artillerymen beside him, “Open fire!”

“Boom, boom, boom...”

Amidst the booming of cannons, the imperial palace gate finally shattered.

Luo Quan raised the long saber in his hand and shouted loudly, “The Crown Prince has rebelled and assassinated the Emperor! Kill!”

The remaining soldiers had initially fallen into a panic, but after seeing Luo Quan’s figure, they calmed down again. Since the God of War Luo Quan was still there, what else did they have to fear?

Leading the charge, Luo Quan was the first to rush into the imperial palace. At this moment, he recalled the times when he fought to conquer the world with Xiao Wenxuan. He understood that over the years, Xiao Wenxuan had gradually become wary of him, but he still cherished his patronage back then.

Without him, there would be no Luo Quan. He refused to leave, just as he refused to abandon his commander and flee back then.

He refused to leave because Luo Quan would not abandon his soldiers and flee for his own life. His refusal to leave was also to preserve the lives of most people, hoping that one day King Qi would revitalize Great Yu Empire.

Inspired by Luo Quan, the soldiers' morale soared again. They madly rushed into the imperial city, for the last glory and dignity of the royal family.

Meanwhile, in front of Bīshuǐ Pavilion, the bodies of the inner palace guards lay across the entire stone bridge.

After the last imperial guard fell, the outer palace guards frantically rushed onto the stone bridge. Concubine Zhen and her group had not gone far yet, and there was still hope to catch up.

But as they charged forward, a figure blocked the center of the stone bridge.

Seeing this figure, all the outer palace guards stopped. They exchanged glances, but no one dared to lay a hand on this person, as the person before them was the Emperor of Great Yu Empire.

"Chase! Chase!"

The Crown Prince's voice continued to come, still filled with frenzy. Seeing his leverage, Concubine Zhen, about to escape, made him extremely anxious.

As he shouted, he saw Xiao Wenxuan standing alone in the middle, a hint of malice flashing in his eyes. He walked straight forward.

“Father Emperor, why aren’t you fleeing? Could it be that you already know you won’t live past today?” The Crown Prince’s face was twisted, his smile sinister and eerie.

Xiao Wenxuan felt a wave of nausea and suddenly spat out a large mouthful of blood. At the same time, almost all the strength left his body. He stabbed the sharp sword he held into the ground to support himself.

“Flee? How can I flee without personally seeing you, this rebellious son, die before me?” Xiao Wenxuan said sternly.

The Crown Prince sneered, “Father Emperor, you know you can’t escape, don’t you? Imperial Physician Wu probably told you everything. But luckily I found out in time, otherwise he might have let you live a few more days.”

“You rebellious son.” Xiao Wenxuan coughed violently again. Imperial Physician Wu, risking his life, told him about the poisoning after he was poisoned, and also told him the time the poison would take effect.

Because of this, he decided to stay today, because estimating the days, his life would only last one or two more days, and the increased frequency of his blood vomiting today further proved this point.

“Father Emperor, you can’t blame me. I’ve waited too long for this throne. Now I’m over thirty, but Mother has given birth to the Thirteenth Prince. If you changed your mind and made him the Crown Prince, my hope for the throne would be gone forever. You can’t blame me, you forced me to do this!” The Crown Prince shouted, like a madman.

“Indeed, indeed.” Xiao Wenxuan muttered to himself mournfully. The Crown Prince ultimately walked this path because of the Thirteenth Prince.

Taking a deep breath, he said, “But do you really think you can ascend to the throne and become Emperor?”

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On the stone bridge, the Crown Prince and Xiao Wenxuan stood facing each other.

Xiao Wenxuan’s words enraged the Crown Prince. He roared, “As long as you die, I will be the Emperor of Great Yu Empire!”

“No, you won’t be the Emperor of Great Yu Empire. You are merely a pawn of the Prince of Zhao. From the moment the Thirteenth Prince was born, he has been using your desire for the throne to gain the supreme power he wants. Now that the Prince of Zhao has arrived with his forces, you will be the next to die, rebellious son. You have ruined Great Yu Empire and everything of the royal family!”

As he spoke in anger, Xiao Wenxuan’s face suddenly flushed.

“Impossible, absolutely impossible! I am the Emperor! The Prince of Zhao must obey me! I will not believe your words anymore!” The Crown Prince shook his head and suddenly raised his sharp sword, stabbing towards Xiao Wenxuan.

The outer palace guards looked at the Crown Prince in horror at this moment. A scene of regicide unfolded before their eyes.

Blood flowed down the cold sword. Xiao Wenxuan spat a large mouthful of blood onto the Crown Prince's body. At this moment, a hint of relief suddenly appeared in Xiao Wenxuan's eyes.

He didn't escape not just because he was deeply poisoned and beyond saving, but more so out of self-reproach. If he hadn't supported the Crown Prince, things wouldn't have come to this.

If he hadn't indulged the Zhao family, the Prince of Zhao wouldn't have grown stronger and more arrogant day by day. If it weren't for his suspicions back then, the Prince of Ning and the Prince of Kang wouldn't have died, leading to the weakening of the royal family, nor would the barbarians have occupied the sixteen prefectures of Yan and Yun.

"I have failed my ancestors, failed my loyal ministers, and failed my people." Life was slowly slipping away, and Xiao Wenxuan was filled with remorse.

After spitting a mouthful of blood onto the Crown Prince's body, Xiao Wenxuan used all his strength to swing his sword at the Crown Prince.

At this moment, the Crown Prince was startled by Xiao Wenxuan's blood. When he regained his senses, he saw Xiao Wenxuan's sharp sword cutting towards him. In great alarm, he immediately dodged.

However, because they were too close, he didn't have time to dodge. A scream rang out as the Crown Prince cried out, clutching his arm; one of his arms was cut off by Xiao Wenxuan and fell to the ground.

"I'm going to kill you! I'm going to kill you!" The intense pain completely drove the Crown Prince insane. He kicked the tottering Xiao Wenxuan.

At this moment, Xiao Wenxuan could no longer support himself, and his consciousness gradually blurred.

"I will beat you to death! Beat you to death!" The Crown Prince was still not satisfied, kicking Xiao Wenxuan's body with all his might, but a sudden burst of gunfire abruptly startled him.

He looked towards the source of the gunfire and saw the outer palace guards falling continuously under rounds of fire from the musketeers, and Luo Quan was looking towards him.

Seeing this, the Crown Prince was greatly alarmed. He said to his personal guard, "Go quickly and light the beacon."

"Yes, Your Highness." The personal guard, upon receiving the order, immediately ran towards the Eastern Palace. Not long after, a plume of smoke rose into the sky.

The Prince of Zhao, who was leisurely approaching the imperial palace, was overjoyed when he saw the beacon. He said, "The Crown Prince has lit the beacon. Xiao Wenxuan is dead. Immediately charge into the imperial palace and round up all the rebels!"

"Yes." The general behind the Prince of Zhao immediately led the cavalry along Vermillion Bird Avenue and charged towards the imperial palace.

At this time, in the palace, under the attack of the musketeers, the outer palace guards scattered. The Crown Prince, seeing this, also followed the guards and fled towards the Eastern Palace.

Seeing Xiao Wenxuan in his dragon robe on the stone bridge, Luo Quan spurred his horse and rushed over.

“Your Majesty! Your Majesty!”

Luo Quan knelt before Xiao Wenxuan, gently shaking him.

As if he heard Luo Quan’s voice, Xiao Wenxuan opened his eyes as if regaining consciousness. He suddenly grasped Luo Quan’s hand and said, “I have let you down. I was so suspicious of you, and yet at the moment of my death, it is you I see.”

“Your Majesty.” Luo Quan’s voice choked.

Xiao Wenxuan tightened his grip on Luo Quan’s hand and continued, “Today, only King Qi can turn the tide. I have already made a last will appointing him to succeed to the throne. You should assist him as you assisted me. Also, I do not wish for concubines, princes, and princesses to suffer humiliation. If they cannot escape, then kill them.”

“Yes, Your Majesty!” Luo Quan nodded heavily.

After saying this, Xiao Wenxuan closed his eyes. He understood Luo Quan. If there hadn’t been this last order, he would have fought to the death without retreating, but he didn’t want such a trusted official to perish with him.

Luo Quan looked deeply at Xiao Wenxuan, then suddenly stood up.

At this time, the palace was in great chaos. Concubines, princes, and princesses were in a disarray. Some concubines followed Concubine Zhen and fled towards the Royal Garden, while some were sobbing in fear, not knowing what to do.

Seeing this scene, Luo Quan sighed. He ordered, "Immediately protect the princes and princesses and head to the Royal Garden!"

"Yes, General."

At this time, Luo Quan's army was mixed with musketeers, private soldiers, and some Left and Right Guard soldiers from the city. The arrival of the Prince of Zhao made many soldiers understand the situation.

But at this point, the tide had turned. The city walls and palace walls were still in the Crown Prince's hands, and a continuous stream of cavalry was entering Chang'an City. He had only seven or eight thousand soldiers gathered, and most of them had scattered.

Following Luo Quan, the soldiers searched for princes, princesses, and concubines in the imperial palace. All who were willing to follow them departed together towards the Royal Garden.

Meanwhile, in the Royal Garden, the secret guards had completed the preparations for heating the hot air balloons, and Fiji and other pro-war ministers had also arrived with their families.

Luo Quan's appearance with his soldiers made them overjoyed.

"General, you all quickly take the people to the Chang'an pier. All the Qingzhou merchant ships docked at the Chang'an pier have received His Highness's orders. You will be safe once you board the ships." Li San said.

Luo Quan looked at the hot air balloons and said, "Aren't we taking these?"

"General, these two hot air balloons are only to be used in the worst-case scenario. The plan is proceeding smoothly now, so there's no need. We need to use them to lure the enemy." Li San said, "The real escape method is by ship."

Luo Quan nodded, realizing that the secret guards had two plans. These hot air balloons were merely a last resort, and likely only intended to save Concubine Zhen, while the ships were the second plan, to rescue most of the escaping people.

"Luo Quan, I thought I wouldn't see you again." Fiji suddenly smiled and said, "Let's go quickly, Concubine Zhen has already boarded the ship. The rest are us."

Luo Quan nodded, "The Emperor left a last will appointing King Qi to succeed to the throne, and ordered me to protect the princes and princesses, so I can only keep this old life of mine."

“King Qi.” Fiji nodded. “Making such a choice under these circumstances was also the last wise move. However, even with the last will, it won’t be of much use. The fragmentation of Great Yu Empire is already unavoidable.”

“You are right. The vassal kings of different surnames have been waiting for the decline of the imperial family for too long. Now they can finally declare independence legitimately.” Luo Quan sighed deeply.

Chapter 526

The hot air balloon flew north with the wind.

Li San glanced at the hot air balloon in the sky, then turned and headed along the small path in the Royal Garden towards the Chang’an pier.

These days, he had been planning the famous retreat route day and night, and now his hard work had not been in vain. After descending the mountain, he and the remaining secret guards rushed to the pier.

At this time, most of the soldiers, officials, concubines, and palace maids on the pier had already boarded the ships, and some merchant ships had already departed for Qingzhou before he arrived.

Now, the last merchant ship was docked at the pier.

Glancing at the hydrogen balloon in the sky, Li San and the secret guards boarded the merchant ship. With the boatman’s chants, the merchant ship drifted downstream along the rapid currents of the Yellow River. Once they were on the ship, the Prince of Zhao’s cavalry could only watch them leave due to the Yellow River’s breadth.

However, to prevent being encircled and pursued by large numbers of cavalry, he still ordered the hydrogen balloon to take off. On the hydrogen balloon, secret guard members had changed into Concubine Zhen's clothes, and they were responsible for luring the Prince of Zhao's pursuing troops.

As Li San and the others boarded the ship, the Prince of Zhao's forces had already completed their encirclement of Chang'an City. In front of the imperial palace, the Prince of Zhao and Zhao Yuanliang rode their horses and grandly entered the imperial palace through the main gate.

"Father, I never thought that one day we could ride horses into the imperial palace," Zhao Yuanliang said, looking at the magnificent buildings within the imperial palace.

The Prince of Zhao laughed heartily upon hearing this, "Hahaha, from now on, we can all ride in and out of the imperial palace. Not only that, we can also live in the palace."

"Father is absolutely right. However, living in this imperial palace without beautiful women accompanying us—your son will now find some beauties in this imperial palace for you. After all, there are three thousand beauties in the imperial palace, which can be said to gather all the beauties of the world."

The Prince of Zhao became even happier. He said to Zhao Yuanliang, "You truly understand my thoughts best. Not just beauties, this Chang'an City is very prosperous and can provide us with the money to forge firearms."

"Yes, Father." Zhao Yuanliang reined in his horse and led a detachment of cavalry into the inner court of the imperial palace.

Just then, a contingent of imperial guards and the Crown Prince came from the direction of the Eastern Palace. Seeing the Prince of Zhao, the Crown Prince was overjoyed. His wound had already been bandaged. Enduring the severe pain, the Crown Prince said, "Prince of Zhao, you have finally arrived."

The Prince of Zhao sat on his horse, showing no intention of dismounting. He looked at Xiao Wenxuan's corpse on the stone bridge and said, "The Emperor was killed by you?"

"Of course, just as planned." The Crown Prince said through gritted teeth, "Now that the Emperor is dead, I shall soon call myself 'Emperor'. This time, the Prince of Zhao has rendered meritorious service in protecting the imperial carriage, and I will surely reward the Prince of Zhao handsomely."

"Is that so? Then I must thank the Crown Prince." The Prince of Zhao said indifferently, then he said to his generals, "The Crown Prince committed regicide and usurped the throne. Someone, take down this ruthless and ungrateful person!"

The Crown Prince's smile froze instantly. He looked incredulously as the Prince of Zhao's soldiers approached him. He said anxiously, "Uncle, what do you mean by this?"

"What do I mean? Regicide and usurpation are capital offenses. This old official is loyal to the Emperor, and naturally, I must enforce justice on behalf of Heaven." The Prince of Zhao said loudly, with a righteous appearance.

At this moment, even if the Crown Prince was foolish, he understood. His face turned pale with fright.

"Clang, clang." Just as the Crown Prince hesitated, there was a sound of weapons falling behind him. All the imperial guards behind the Crown Prince dropped their weapons.

The leading imperial guard general said, "Your Highness, the regicide has nothing to do with us. This was all done by the Crown Prince alone. Prince of Zhao, spare our lives."

"Hmm, as long as you can serve this King, this King will pardon your sins." The Prince of Zhao laughed heartily.

The Crown Prince suffered the pain of a severed arm and now carried the crime of regicide. At this moment, his body trembled violently, and fear rapidly spread in his heart. Then, he remembered Xiao Wenxuan's words.

'The Prince of Zhao would never let him become emperor!'

At this moment, he finally understood that everything was the Prince of Zhao's conspiracy.

Thinking of this, he fell into complete despair. To survive, he said tearfully, "Uncle, I am your nephew! Uncle, I beg you, spare me!"

The Prince of Zhao remained unmoved. He said to the generals, "What are you waiting for? Take the Crown Prince to prison to await judgment after the new Emperor ascends the throne."

"Yes, Your Highness."

A group of wolf-like soldiers immediately swarmed forward, seized the Crown Prince, and dragged him away. The Crown Prince cried out on the way, but no one sympathized with him.

At this time, the Prince of Zhao asked the imperial guards, "Where are the Empress and the Thirteenth Prince?"

"Your Highness, Her Majesty the Empress and the Thirteenth Prince are both in the Eastern Palace under strict guard." The imperial guard general said.

"Lead this King there." The Prince of Zhao said.

The imperial guards nodded, rose, and led the Prince of Zhao towards the Eastern Palace. Guided by the imperial guards, the Prince of Zhao arrived at a side hall in the Eastern Palace.

"Your Highness, the Empress is here."

The Prince of Zhao nodded. After a moment of hesitation, he pushed open the door of the side hall.

"Wan Rong."

In the side hall, Empress Zhao was holding the Thirteenth Prince and softly singing a mournful song.

The movement at the door made her look up. Seeing the face of the newcomer, she suddenly sneered, "So it's the Prince of Zhao. Congratulations, Your Royal Highness, your many years of plotting have finally come to fruition today." Newest update provided by NOvelFire.net

Empress Zhao's coldness made the Prince of Zhao's heart ache. He said, "Wan Rong, why do you speak to me this way? We are family."

"Family?" Empress Zhao sneered, "Since you're here, His Majesty must surely be dead. The Crown Prince didn't come along, so he must have been imprisoned by you on the charge of regicide. Why are you here for me, and not for the Thirteenth Prince in my arms?"

With Empress Zhao having guessed everything, the Prince of Zhao's face hardened. He said, "Wan Rong, you and Xiao Wenxuan are merely husband and wife, but we are bound by flesh and blood. Now that our Zhao family has gained the world, aren't you happy?"

"Should I be happy?" Empress Zhao's eyes filled with hatred, "My husband is dead, and my son is about to die. The infant in my arms will become nothing but your puppet, and his future life and death are uncertain, yet you ask if I am happy."

The Prince of Zhao choked. He said, "Wan Rong, for the sake of this world, everything is worth it. I know you have lost a lot, but you have brought supreme imperial power to the Zhao family. When the Thirteenth Prince grows a little older, I will make him abdicate to me, and I promise not to kill him."

"You wish." Empress Zhao's eyes suddenly turned bloodshot. She violently lifted the infant in her arms. "I would rather throw him to his death than let your scheme succeed."

The Prince of Zhao was startled. He immediately said nervously, "Wan Rong, why must you do this? Do you truly have the heart to harm your own flesh and blood? I promise you, I will not make him abdicate, and I will assist him as Emperor, how about that?"

Empress Zhao shook her head and said, "I don't believe you. You will never get the throne. You will only be a traitor and a rebel of Great Yu Empire."

With that, she violently threw the infant in her arms.

Chapter 527

"Caw, caw..."

A baby's cry suddenly sounded, and Empress Zhao, who was about to drop the infant, suddenly hesitated.

Motherly instinct made her heart flinch. Just then, the Prince of Zhao seized the opportunity and suddenly reached out to grab the Thirteenth Prince from Empress Zhao's hands.

Empress Zhao was greatly shocked, but it was too late. The Prince of Zhao's strength was immense, leaving her no chance to snatch the child back.

Holding the Thirteenth Prince in his arms, the Prince of Zhao's expression suddenly turned cold. He said to the guards, "Watch the Empress. No one is to see her without my command."

“Yes, Your Highness.” The soldiers in black armor immediately closed the door of the side hall, leaving only Empress Zhao’s heartbroken sobs.

The Prince of Zhao walked outside the door and said to the general behind him, “You are to immediately go into the city and find a wet nurse for the Thirteenth Prince. There must be no delay.”

The general clasped his hands in acknowledgment and left with a detachment of men.

At this moment, another troop of cavalry stopped in front of him. A general dismounted and said, “Your Highness, Concubine Zhen and the others seem to have escaped in the flying things.”

The Prince of Zhao looked up at the sky. He saw two huge objects slowly floating across the sky, and in the baskets beneath the large spheres were some elegantly dressed women.

“This must be the hot air balloon that Yuanliang mentioned. Hmph, this King Qi is truly not a simple opponent. However, Yuanliang said that this hot air balloon cannot fly very far. You are to immediately lead a troop of men to pursue them.” The Prince of Zhao said, gazing at the balloons in the sky.

The general accepted the order and left. Before long, another general returned to report, saying, “Your Highness, Qingzhou merchant ships have departed from Chang’an pier. The people at the pier said that these merchant ships carried many soldiers and officials away.”

“Qingzhou merchant ships.” The Prince of Zhao frowned.

Currently, his attitude towards Xiao Ming was somewhat complex, as the firearms and cannons in Zhao territory were all purchased from Qingzhou. This time, King Qi sent people to help, and if he offended them too deeply, this arms business would naturally be impossible to continue.

However, thinking that they had now mastered the method of forging matchlock guns, and having captured many cannons from Chang'an City this time, he said, "You should also send a troop of men to pursue them along the riverbank."

"Yes." The general accepted the order and left.

At this time, the Prince of Zhao glanced at the hot air balloons, and then at the direction of the pier, feeling a bit hesitant. He was now unsure whether Concubine Zhen had gone with the ships or the hot air balloons.

However, this meant that his pursuing troops could only split into two groups.

After another glance at the hot air balloons, the Prince of Zhao walked towards the stone bridge. Xiao Wenxuan was dead, but a state funeral must be held for Xiao Wenxuan before the Thirteenth Prince ascended the throne. This was an unbreakable royal etiquette.

And after the state funeral, they could hold the enthronement ceremony. When the Thirteenth Prince was placed on the throne, his reign over Great Yu Empire would begin.

He was naturally disinclined to bother with these complicated rituals, but he had already sent people to gather the officials of Chang'an. With these people, Xiao Wenxuan's funeral could be completed smoothly.

Thinking of being able to control Chang'an soon, the Prince of Zhao's expression became increasingly pleasant.

Meanwhile, at this time, the Qingzhou merchant ships carrying those fleeing from Chang'an had already traveled a long distance downstream.

Gazing at the beacon fires in Chang'an City from afar, Luo Quan and Fiji felt complex emotions.

"This truly is a national calamity, a disgrace to Great Yu Empire." Fiji's expression was sad, his tone somewhat low.

Luo Quan was equally downhearted. He said to Fiji, "Now that this is the reality, further lamenting is useless. You should now think about how to discuss this last will with Xiao Ming once we reach Qingzhou."

"Not only that, so many court officials have come along. It will also be a problem once we reach Qingzhou," Fiji shook his head.

Luo Hong said at this point, "His Highness recently passed the government reform, and there are many vacant official positions in the vassal states. Perhaps His Highness will welcome them, but..."

"But what..." Luo Quan asked.

“While in Qingzhou, Luo Xin told me that His Highness is not against officials from outside Qingzhou, but to hold office in Qingzhou’s bureaucracy, one must study at Bowen Academy and pass the relevant examinations,” Luo Hong said.

Fiji nodded, “Yue’er did tell me about this. Since we have entered Qingzhou, we naturally have to adapt to local customs. Besides, His Highness is about to become His Majesty.”

At the mention of this, the three of them looked somewhat gloomy.

Luo Quan said, “Now that the Prince of Zhao has occupied Chang’an, he will certainly support the Thirteenth Prince’s ascension. If that is the case, will His Majesty’s last will be useless?”

“Not only that, the ‘pledge of allegiance’ that His Majesty made King Qi sign back then is still in the Imperial Study. The Prince of Zhao can even use this to proclaim to the world and not acknowledge the Emperor’s current last will.”

Luo Hong said, “Actually, whether there is a last will or not doesn’t really matter anymore. The world is in chaos now, with each acting independently. Even without a last will, King Qi is the legitimate bloodline of the royal family.”

“Yes, you’re right. In this situation, the last will is both real and fake.” Fiji said, “Once we reach Qingzhou, we’ll discuss this with King Qi.”

As the three spoke, news of the chaos in Chang'an rapidly spread throughout Great Yu Empire.

This time, the Third Prince and Fourth Prince both fled, and along their escape route, they spread the news of the Crown Prince's rebellion, causing widespread panic among the people in the royal territories.

Li San's message, sent by urgent courier, reached Qingzhou three days later.

When Xiao Ming opened the secret letter from Chang'an, his heart surged with emotion—Great Yu Empire was in chaos!

"Your Highness, what's wrong?"

Pang Yukun, Zhan Xingchang, Niu Ben, and others were all in King Qi's residence. They noticed the change in Xiao Ming's expression.

Xiao Ming handed the secret letter to Pang Yukun, "See for yourselves."

The three immediately gathered to read it. Upon learning that the Crown Prince had assassinated the Emperor, and the Prince of Zhao had entered Chang'an City with the Black Armored Iron Cavalry and barbarian cavalry, the three exchanged glances.

They not only didn't panic, but Pang Yukun also said to Xiao Ming, "Your Highness, given the Prince of Zhao's nature, he will certainly not allow the Crown Prince to ascend the throne. It is likely that the Thirteenth Prince will become the Prince of Zhao's puppet. In that case, we have no need to obey the court's orders."

"That's right. After this, I'm afraid not only us but also the Prince of Wei, the Prince of Yong, and other vassal kings will no longer obey the court's commands. Before, he was outwardly compliant but inwardly disloyal to the court. Now, it's probably only a matter of time before he declares independence." Zhan Xingchang added.

Niu Ben, being a soldier, was always straightforward. He said, "Now is an opportunity for Your Highness. In times of great chaos, heroes are made by the circumstances."

Pang Yukun and Zhan Xingchang's words were more subtle, but Niu Ben's words were very direct, openly suggesting that Xiao Ming should establish his own power and become a great king.

"The situation in Chang'an is not yet clear. We will discuss it again when Li San returns."

Chapter 528

The ship was still drifting on the wide Yellow River.

One day after the Qingzhou merchant ship left Chang'an pier, the Prince of Zhao's troops appeared on the riverbank. However, after the merchant ship passed through a continuous mountainous area, the Prince of Zhao's troops no longer appeared.

They had now been drifting on the river for five days. According to Li San, they would reach the Qingzhou pier in at most two more days.

These days, they had all been staying on the merchant ship. Because they were prepared in advance, the ship's hold had ample food, enough to sustain them on board.

However, the closer they got to Qingzhou, the more nervous the officials on the ship became. They were not familiar with King Qi, nor did they know what their fate would be.

These days, many people deliberately tried to get closer to Fiji. This Councillor Fei was King Qi's father-in-law, and perhaps he could put in a good word for them with King Qi.

The ship continued to drift in the river. In the afternoon, a troop of cavalry suddenly appeared on the riverbank. These cavalymen wore silver breastplates.

Upon seeing the merchant ships, these breastplate cavalymen pointed and gestured at the fleet for a while, and then one person on the shore began to signal with flags.

Li San, on the merchant ship, was overjoyed when he saw the flag signals and these breastplate cavalymen. He then had the secret guards signal back.

After receiving clear information, the breastplate cavalry began to follow the merchant ships along the riverbank towards Qingzhou.

"Councillor Fei, Li San sent a message. He said these are the Qingzhou Army's breastplate cavalry, probably sent by His Royal Highness King Qi to protect us." A soldier guarding the stern came over and said to Fiji.

To ensure communication on the ship, each ship had a person at the stern responsible for relaying messages.

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing this.

Fiji said, "It seems His Highness has already received news from Chang'an, which is why he dispatched these breastplate cavalry to protect us."

The other officials on the ship showed joy. King Qi's action relieved a burden from their hearts. It seemed King Qi attached great importance to their group.

With the protection of the breastplate cavalry, the atmosphere on the merchant ships immediately became lively. People on each merchant ship discussed Qingzhou with each other, and Xiao Ming's name was frequently mentioned.

On the seventh day, the fleet vaguely saw the Qingzhou pier in the distance. Merchant ships were lined up along the riverbank at the Qingzhou pier. The prosperity of the Qingzhou pier greatly surprised them. In their opinion, the prosperity of the Qingzhou pier had now surpassed that of the Chang'an pier.

Seeing that they were about to arrive in Chang'an, everyone on the merchant ship stood up. Unlike the discussions of yesterday, everyone's face was solemn. The ship was terribly quiet, and everyone was worried about their fate.

The pier got closer, and then everyone saw the scene on the pier: a young man dressed in a blue round-necked long gown stood on the pier.

Beside him were four beautiful women of outstanding appearance, especially the woman beside the young man who was stunningly beautiful. And beside the five were some people dressed as officials.

"It's younger sister Lu Luo and older sister Ziyuan." Liuli looked around the ship, and when she saw Lu Luo and Ziyuan, she immediately shouted.

The palace maids from Bīshuǐ Pavilion also looked towards the pier and were happily jumping and shouting when they saw Ziyuan and Lu Luo. This text is hosted at [Novel_Fire\(.\)net](http://Novel_Fire(.)net)

Liuli immediately entered the cabin. Concubine Zhen had been in the cabin these days, shedding tears continuously due to Xiao Wenxuan's death. Upon learning that Xiao Ming was at the pier, she finally showed a hint of a smile.

Fiji's and Luo Quan's ship was first. When the ship docked at the pier, everyone walked down the inclined wooden plank.

"Father." Upon seeing Fiji, Fei Yue'er called out excitedly, tears falling down.

Luo Quan and Luo Hong looked at Luo Xin, their eyes also filled with joy.

Suppressing their excitement, Fiji and the father-son pair Luo Quan bowed simultaneously to Xiao Ming and said, "Greetings, Your Highness."

“Dispense with the formalities, everyone has suffered.” Xiao Ming said with a smile to Fiji and the other two. He looked at the fleet of merchant ships. These were all the people who had escaped.

In such a perilous time, their trust in him and their escape to Qingzhou were enough to show that these people were on his side. And from what he understood, these officials were basically all pro-war officials from Chang’an.

Many officials had contributed their strength to him in the court.

Luo Quan and Fiji exchanged glances. Fiji then said sadly, “Your Highness, I was incompetent; His Majesty has passed away.”

At the mention of this, Luo Quan and Luo Hong both showed mournful expressions.

Xiao Ming sighed inwardly. He said, “I already know about this. The Crown Prince committed regicide and rebelled, and the Prince of Zhao aided and abetted evil. I will avenge this blood debt for Father Emperor.”

“Your Highness.” Luo Quan and Fiji’s eyes became moist upon hearing this. This assurance deeply moved them.

At this time, more and more ships docked. Concubine Zhen’s ship also docked at this moment. Supported by a group of palace maids, Concubine Zhen slowly disembarked.

Seeing Concubine Zhen, Xiao Ming walked a few steps forward and bowed, saying, "Mother."

"Ming'er." Seeing Xiao Ming, Concubine Zhen could no longer hold back her grief and threw herself into Xiao Ming's arms, crying bitterly. The other palace maids also quietly sobbed. As women, they had experienced too much these past few days.

Xiao Ming gently patted Concubine Zhen's back. Concubine Zhen's arrival completely reassured him.

He was most afraid of Concubine Zhen falling into the Prince of Zhao's hands, which would tie his hands in dealing with the Prince of Zhao. After all, in Great Yu Empire, filial piety was considered the highest virtue, and even a first-rank official whose parents died had to return home to observe three years of mourning. Filial piety was the standard by which a person was judged in the world.

And this matter of rescuing Concubine Zhen was not only for his sake but also for the officials of Qingzhou.

"Mother, please don't grieve too much. Father Emperor's spirit in heaven surely wouldn't want to see you overly sad." Xiao Ming said.

Concubine Zhen nodded upon hearing this.

At this time, Lu Luo and Ziyuan stepped forward to help her walk towards a carriage. This carriage would take her to King Qi's residence.

After Concubine Zhen, ordinary soldiers disembarked. Luo Hong then reorganized these soldiers.

Seeing these soldiers, a faint smile appeared on Xiao Ming's face. The world was now in chaos, and what he lacked were soldiers. This chaos in Chang'an not only brought him some excellent officials but also these excellent generals and soldiers.

After Fiji bowed to Xiao Ming, Fei Yue'er immediately began chatting with Fiji, while Luo Quan and Luo Xin also exchanged pleasantries.

The remaining officials disembarked from the ships and greeted Xiao Ming one by one. At the same time, Xiao Ming also introduced Pang Yukun and others to these officials from Chang'an.

After introductions at the pier, Xiao Ming said to Fiji and Luo Quan, "Everyone, let us enter the city and discuss in detail."

Fiji and Luo Quan nodded. He was about to talk to Xiao Ming about the last will, and the chaos in Chang'an also needed to be discussed with Xiao Ming on how to handle it.

Chapter 529

The scorching sun baked the earth.

Unlike usual, Qingzhou pier was bustling today because of the merchant ships from Chang'an.

More than seven thousand people escaped from Chang'an to Qingzhou this time, and all of them needed to be settled in Qingzhou City. As Xiao Ming followed Fiji and Luo Quan towards Qingzhou City, Pang Yukun and the Qingzhou officials were responsible for the food, clothing, and housing of these officials in Qingzhou.

At this moment, on the concrete official road leading to Qingzhou City, three carriages were galloping. The crisp sound of hooves stepping on the concrete road made Fiji and Luo Quan both stick their heads out to look at the ground.

"This must be Qingzhou's concrete road, I suppose. Secretary Feng once mentioned it, and it truly lives up to its reputation," Fiji said.

Luo Quan also nodded, "It seems to have just rained in Qingzhou, yet this concrete road is not muddy at all, it's even cleaner than the gravel roads in Chang'an City."

Fiji nodded upon hearing this, then he looked at the citizens entering the city. The citizens were dressed in clean and tidy clothes, and their faces were rosy and full, indicating that life here was good.

After entering the city, Fiji's eyes were even more restless. He noticed that there were an unusual number of merchants in Qingzhou City, and the density of these merchants clearly surpassed that of Chang'an City.

The goods pulled by these merchants' carriages were even more varied. Besides some large merchants with carriages, there were also peddlers carrying poles, shuttling through the civilian quarters of Qingzhou.

Some calls came from the peddlers, and the attracted citizens of the city seemed not to be stingy with their copper coins.

At the same time, on the streets, there were also some people wearing green long robes and carrying waist knives. These people were not soldiers, because there was a “警” (jing – police) character embroidered on their arms, not “兵” (bing – soldier).

These people dressed in police uniforms patrolled the streets. Some idlers squatting in corners looked at these people with great fear, as if they were a flood or a savage beast.

Besides these strangely dressed people, he also saw four or five other types of people wearing peculiar clothing. Because he and Luo Quan were in the same carriage, he could only suppress these questions and wait to ask Xiao Ming.

The carriage wound through the city for a while, then stopped in front of a government office on a street. Everyone got off the carriage.

“Councillor Fei, General Luo, please!” Xiao Ming said to the two.

Luo Quan and Fiji were still stunned by the sights of Qingzhou. Turning their heads, they looked at the Qingzhou Chamber of Commerce opposite. Many merchants were going in and out of the Chamber of Commerce at this time, making it very noisy.

“Your Highness, I could only learn about Qingzhou from newspapers before. Seeing it today, my heart is greatly shaken,” Fiji sighed.

Luo Quan also said, “Indeed, why does it feel like this isn’t Great Yu Empire when I arrived in Qingzhou this time?”

“Gentlemen, you will naturally gain a deep understanding of Qingzhou’s unique features, after all, you will be living here from now on. Today, let’s talk about the chaos in Chang’an.”

At the mention of this, Fiji said sadly, “Your Highness, before His Majesty departed, he entrusted the last will to Concubine Zhen. In the last will, His Majesty decided to establish Your Highness as the Crown Prince. Now that the imperial family has passed away, a nation cannot be without a monarch for a day. We hope Your Highness, after settling the ministers, will choose a day to ascend the throne and become Emperor.”

“Last will!” Xiao Ming was greatly surprised. Concubine Zhen had indeed mentioned something about a last will before getting into the carriage, but Xiao Ming had told her to wait until he returned before saying more, so Concubine Zhen didn’t say anything further. However, he never imagined that at the last moment, Xiao Wenxuan would give him the throne.

But what use was it to him now? Chang’an was now occupied by the Prince of Zhao, and the Thirteenth Prince would surely be installed as emperor. Even if he produced the last will now, the Prince of Zhao and others would probably say it was fake.

However, for him, this last will was not entirely useless. In this era, everything needed a legitimate reason. Now with the last will, he was the legitimate prince of Great Yu Empire. He would be justified in fighting anyone, though whether others were willing to be beaten was another matter.

Luo Quan added, “Your Highness, His Majesty also spoke to me about this last will before he passed away. There will be no mistake. We hope Your Highness can raise a royal army to campaign against the Prince of Zhao to quell his rebellion.”

Fiji's eyes darted around upon hearing this. He said to Luo Quan, "The Prince of Zhao's entry into the capital this time is not simple. Don't forget the barbarian cavalry in the Prince of Zhao's army. In my opinion, the Prince of Zhao must have borrowed troops from the barbarians, acknowledging thieves as his father."

Xiao Ming's heart sank. If barbarians were included, the situation in Great Yu Empire would become even more complex. He said, "Although I also want to immediately raise an army to attack the Prince of Zhao, the current situation within Great Yu Empire seems unclear. If other vassal kings also have ulterior motives, how should I handle it?"

These words made Luo Quan silent. He had spoken too quickly and had forgotten the situation Xiao Ming was facing. He said, "Your Highness, I was reckless."

Fiji mused, "Is Your Highness concerned about the Prince of Wei and the Prince of Yong?"

"Yes, that's right. The fiefs of the Prince of Wei and the Prince of Yong are both connected to my fief. If I were to raise an army and head to Chang'an now, with an empty rear, and these two were to attack, I would suffer a complete defeat." Xiao Ming said.

Now that Xiao Wenxuan was dead, the Prince of Wei and the Prince of Yong certainly had their own intentions. I would not trust these two. After all, I had been tricked by the Prince of Wei and had witnessed the shamelessness of the Prince of Yong.

Fiji pondered briefly and understood Xiao Ming's meaning. He sighed. As he had predicted, all the vassal kings would now be suspicious of each other.

Xiao Ming continued, "Moreover, once this war starts, my trade losses will be significant. Most importantly, we will lose the court's grain and fodder support. And it's possible that a large number of refugees will pour in, which will pose a serious threat to Qingzhou's food supply. Without a stable food supply, I will not easily send out troops."

After receiving the news from Chang'an, Xiao Ming and Pang Yukun had already discussed it. Overall, they would try their best to avoid joining the war in the early stages, but instead, take advantage of the chaos to sell weapons in large quantities and accumulate resources to support industrial development and military preparations.

This strategy was similar to the isolationism during the Second World War in the United States. He would not be foolish enough to immediately launch a so-called "righteous war" just because he had a last will. For him, whether he had the last will or not was the same, because he wanted to be emperor.

And this emperor was not just a title in the last will, but the actual entire Great Yu Empire. So, in order to gain the world, accumulating grain and slowly claiming kingship was necessary.

He certainly didn't want to become the target of everyone's attack at this time.

Chapter 530

"Grain."

In the government office, Fiji and Luo Quan exchanged glances, both with helpless smiles on their faces.

At this moment, they realized that Xiao Ming had many constraints, such as the grain problem he mentioned. Looking at Great Yu Empire as a whole, King Qi's fief was not considered a grain-producing area, and for war, a lack of grain was unacceptable.

Slightly sighing, Fiji said to Luo Quan, "We were too eager. His Highness understands the situation of his fief better than us. When and how to fight this war should be decided by His Highness."

"Councillor Fei is right. Now only His Highness can save Great Yu Empire from danger. This battle must be thoroughly considered before the soldiers can move." Luo Quan echoed.

Fiji continued, "But Your Highness, campaigning against the Prince of Zhao is secondary. Now that His Majesty's last will is here, I wonder what Your Highness's intention is..."

"Temporarily set aside the matter of the last will." Xiao Ming said indifferently. He paused and then said, "However, although the enthronement is postponed, you two must make this last will known to the officials of the fief, lest the officials of the fief be influenced by the Thirteenth Prince's enthronement."

Fiji, having served Xiao Wenxuan for so many years, was a shrewd man. He instantly understood Xiao Ming's thoughts.

Now, regardless of whether Xiao Ming ascended the throne, the land he could control was merely the prefectures and counties of his fief. Officials and generals in other lands would not surrender to him. Compared to Xiao Ming, the people in the royal territories would be more inclined to believe that the Thirteenth Prince was the Emperor of Great Yu Empire. After all, there was a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate lineage, and no matter how young the Thirteenth Prince was, he was still the legitimate son.

Moreover, everyone in the world knew about the 'pledge of allegiance' matter, which made his ascension even more absurd, even leading to him becoming the first scapegoat.

Rather than that, it would be better for Xiao Ming to hold the last will but not declare it. This way, he could advance or retreat freely. If the general situation was favorable to him, he could seize the opportunity to make the last will public. If it was unfavorable, he only needed to proclaim it internally. This way, his foreign wars would have a legitimate cause.

“Yes, Your Highness.” Fiji nodded upon hearing this.

The matter of the last will was thus set aside. Xiao Ming pondered how to settle the ministers who came from Chang’an. These former officials of the previous king followed Fiji and Luo Quan to Qingzhou because of him.

Moreover, according to the last will, he was now the Emperor of Great Yu Empire, and he had a responsibility to lead these ministers to restore the magnificent empire of Great Yu.

Given the current shortage of officials in his fief, he had no reason to turn these people away. If these ministers were willing to study some political knowledge at Bowen Academy, it would be even more in line with his wishes.

So he said to Fiji, “Councillor Fei, there are many officials and generals who have come to Qingzhou. What do you think should be done with them?”

“This...” Fiji cautiously looked at Xiao Ming. NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON [novel·fire·net](http://novel-fire.net)

Although the young man in front of him was his son-in-law, he was even more aware that he was the de facto emperor of Great Yu Empire. Serving a monarch was like accompanying a tiger, and this being Xiao Ming's fief, he dared not speak rashly, only saying, "Everything depends on Your Highness's decision."

Luo Quan, being straightforward yet subtle, coughed and looked around, seemingly uninterested in this question.

The demeanor of the two made Xiao Ming feel helpless. Compared to people like Pang Yukun, Fiji and Luo Quan carried a stronger influence of officials under feudal monarchy.

"Alright, you must be tired from the long journey. You two should go back and rest now." Xiao Ming frowned and said.

Fiji and Luo Quan nodded and went to Wei Family Restaurant under the guidance of Qingzhou officials.

After the two left, Pang Yukun, Niu Ben, and other Qingzhou officials returned to the government office.

Pang Yukun said, "Your Highness, a total of eight thousand five hundred thirty-two people have come to Qingzhou for refuge this time. I have already settled them in the civilian quarters of Qingzhou for temporary residence. I hope Your Highness will instruct on how to proceed."

The situation this time was special, and Pang Yukun dared not make decisions on his own.

Xiao Ming said, "Currently there are only eight thousand people. It is estimated that in the coming days, more officials will come to Qingzhou for refuge, and their family members will also arrive in Qingzhou."

"I also think so, which is why I am worried." Pang Yukun's head ached.

Unlike Pang Yukun, Niu Ben was quite happy. He directly said, "Your Highness, however many generals come to Qingzhou this time, I want them all. The army is currently lacking generals, and this is truly a timely rain."

"The bureaucracy also lacks people, but we cannot blindly put these officials and generals into the bureaucracy and the army just because there's a shortage. Qingzhou is different from Chang'an. Generals are easier; a bit of training will suffice. But if officials who don't understand Qingzhou's situation take office, it might cause problems." Pang Yukun saw this matter very clearly.

Xiao Ming nodded, "Chief Grand Councillor Pang is right. For me, what is needed are elites, not just the number of officials. However, this time Mother brought Father Emperor's last will, and I cannot abandon them, otherwise who would be willing to seek refuge with me?"

"Last will?" Pang Yukun and Niu Ben asked simultaneously. Zhan Xingchang, Lu Fei, and other generals also perked up their ears.

Xiao Ming nodded, "Father Emperor made a last will before Mother escaped, allowing me to continue the great succession. Now, this last will is in Mother's hands, but because Father Emperor was trapped in Bīshuǐ Pavilion, there is no imperial seal on this last will."

“So many, Your Highness is now the Emperor!” Lu Fei immediately said loudly, jumping and dancing with joy.

Pang Yukun, Niu Ben, Zhan Xingchang, and others, after their initial astonishment, all showed wild joy. Now that Xiao Ming had inherited the great succession, they were no longer officials of a fief but powerful ministers of Great Yu Empire.

Luo Xin, not to be outdone, said, “So, does this mean we should now call you ‘Your Majesty’?”

“It’s too early to call me that now.” Xiao Ming waved his hand. He said, “Currently, Great Yu Empire is in peril. As long as Great Yu Empire is not unified, I cannot claim to be the Emperor of Great Yu Empire.”

Everyone became fervent because of the last will, but Xiao Ming’s words calmed them down again. Pang Yukun said, “Your Highness is absolutely right. Now that Great Yu Empire is fragmented, Your Highness declaring himself Emperor now would be detrimental to Qingzhou. It would be better to ascend the throne when the world is settled. Furthermore, this last will does not have the Emperor’s imperial seal, and other vassal kings might not acknowledge it.”

“Even if it did, they probably wouldn’t recognize Your Highness as ruler. These vassal kings have long been wishing for chaos in the world. Your Highness, in my humble general’s opinion, a conquered empire is more stable.” Niu Ben said.

Lu Fei and the other generals all echoed his sentiment.

Looking at the fervent crowd, Xiao Ming said, “The empire of Great Yu Empire naturally cannot fall into the hands of ambitious people like the Prince of Zhao. However, we are not yet strong enough to make

enemies on all sides. Therefore, from now on, we must forge distant alliances to attack nearby foes, sow discord, engage in both vertical and horizontal alliances, and compete for dominance in the world.”