

I. Dynasty 73

Chapter 73: Reaction

“Pass this information to the Qin family secretly. Remember, make sure they don’t suspect that someone deliberately leaked it,” Xiao Ming said.

Wang Xuan remained calm as usual. “Your Highness, when this incident happened, I was sent to Dengzhou to collect debts. I attended Wang An’s banquet, where he got drunk and revealed the matter, including where the seventy-two bodies were buried. This time, I need to dig up the remains and stir up public opinion in Dengzhou. The Qin family will naturally send someone to investigate, and I will quietly leave evidence behind.”

Xiao Ming nodded. Wang Xuan was indeed diligent. Those who had endured hardship had a different kind of spirit.

“Very good. You’re most familiar with the Wang family. I hope you can quickly arrange for spies to infiltrate them,” Xiao Ming said, reminding Wang Xuan just as he had reminded Li San.

“Your Highness, I have already planted a spy in the Wang family,” Wang Xuan replied, still calm.

Xiao Ming was surprised. “Impressive. It’s been less than a month, and you’ve already accomplished this. You’re much faster than Li San.”

Wang Xuan explained, "Your Highness, I merely took advantage of an opportunity. There's a servant in the Wang family named Wang Cheng. While I was in the Wang family, I caught him having an affair with one of Wang Chengchou's concubines. This time, I simply used that to my advantage."

"Oh..." Xiao Ming drew out the word. Wang Chengchou, that old man, had at least twenty or thirty concubines in his household. It was impossible for him to satisfy all of them, so it was normal for a few to seek pleasure elsewhere.

With a spy now in the Wang family, Xiao Ming was overjoyed. His greatest concern at the moment was the local powerful families. If he couldn't keep tabs on what they were doing or what they were thinking, it would be impossible for him to rest easy.

Although he had given these families considerable benefits, these were only meant to temporarily deceive them. He had to have a backup plan.

If they realized that this was merely a delaying tactic and that his true goal was to eliminate them, his fiefdom would likely face a baptism of fire and blood.

However, Xiao Ming did not want such an outcome, as it would severely hinder the development of his fiefdom. He only hoped to use a slow, gradual approach, allowing the local powerful families to quietly fade into history.

The Qin Family

At this moment, Qin Chuanyun was furious. Chai Lingwu was the son-in-law of his second daughter, and Wei Tong was the husband of his youngest daughter and the third son of Wei Hong.

Overnight, Chai Lingwu and Wei Tong had been killed, leaving his two daughters widowed. In a fit of rage, Wei Hong had come to him, demanding that they gather their private armies to kill Lu Fei and avenge his son.

But after calming down, Qin Chuanyun realized that the real culprit behind this was not the Prince of Qi.

“Brother Qin, why are you still hesitating? Lu Fei has gone too far! Although the Prince of Qi wanted to punish my Wei Tong, he didn’t order his immediate execution. I’ve long been dissatisfied with Lu Fei. All we need to do is go see His Highness and demand that Lu Fei pay with his life!” Wei Hong said, furious.

Qin Chuanyun was equally 咬牙切齿 (gnashing his teeth in anger), but he said, “Lu Fei is certainly at fault, but the Wang family is the real instigator. They are the ones who caused the deaths of Wei Tong and Chai Lingwu. Lu Fei has always been reckless, and with the Qin family’s private army arriving at the time, it’s no surprise that he carried out His Highness’s order to execute them on the spot. Even if we go to His Highness, he will protect Lu Fei. Moreover, if His Highness investigates the Qin family’s placement of private soldiers in the Cangzhou garrison, both our families will suffer.”

“Wang Chengchou, you’re too ruthless!” Wei Hong slammed the table, spilling tea everywhere. “Are we just going to swallow this injustice?”

“Of course not. Lu Fei may have done the killing, but the Wang family is the root cause. They’ve caused us heavy losses, and we must repay them in kind,” Qin Chuanyun said.

Wei Hong, in his impulsive anger, had directed his resentment toward Xiao Ming. But upon reflection, he began to understand. “Ah, Brother Qin, you’re right. What I fear most now is that the Wang family will join forces with His Highness to attack us. If that happens, we’ll be doomed.”

“You finally understand. Right now, His Highness has both silver and a new army, and he has regained the Emperor’s trust. The Prince of Wei in the south will have to show some respect to the Emperor by looking after the Prince of Qi. The Prince of Qi is no longer the same as before. This matter is ultimately a capital offense, and in His Highness’s eyes, it cannot be tolerated. If we go and make a scene now, how will His Highness view our families? As rebels?”

Hearing this, Wei Hong broke out in a cold sweat, finally realizing the gravity of the situation. “I was too rash. But Wei Tong was my son. I can’t just let this go.”

“Revenge is a dish best served cold. The Wang family is targeting us like this because they want to compete for profits in the merchant guild. Right now, the most important thing is silver. With silver, we can buy more land and strengthen our private armies. So, our target now is the Wang family, not the Prince of Qi,” Qin Chuanyun said. “Not only should we not pressure His Highness to kill Lu Fei over this, but we should also go and apologize.”

Wei Hong nodded. “Fine, I’ll go with you to the Prince of Qi’s residence.”

With that, the two set off for the Prince of Qi’s residence.

Meanwhile, Li San, who had been keeping an eye on the Qin family, quickly relayed this news to Xiao Ming.

Upon hearing this, Xiao Ming, who had been worried about a backlash from the Qin family, felt a weight lift off his chest. He wasn’t afraid of the scheming Qin Chuanyun, but he was wary of the impulsive Wei Hong.

Impulsive people only saw the surface and would inevitably cause a scene over this matter, while Qin Chuanyun, being more calculating, could see the deeper implications.

This way, Xiao Ming could redirect the conflict toward the Wang family, letting the two families tear each other apart instead of putting pressure on him.

Although he had recruited new soldiers, these soldiers were busy with both farming and training. The most critical issue was that they lacked weapons and equipment. If it came to a fight, they would be nothing more than cannon fodder. A direct confrontation would result in heavy losses on both sides.

However, once the plate armor and other equipment were ready and the soldiers had a few more months of training, he would no longer fear the private armies of the local powerful families.

Qin Chuanyun and Wei Hong soon arrived at the Prince of Qi's residence. Qin Chuanyun naturally expressed remorse, condemning Chai Lingwu and Wei Tong while distancing the Qin and Wei families from their actions, claiming it was their own doing.

"Please rise. Since this matter has nothing to do with the Qin and Wei families, let bygones be bygones. I will not pursue this further. I hope your families will remain law-abiding," Xiao Ming said, his final words carrying a warning.

Qin Chuanyun and Wei Hong replied in unison, "We will heed Your Highness's teachings."

“You may leave,” Xiao Ming said, relieved. The first step had been successfully completed. Now, it was time for Wang Xuan to take action.

The two acknowledged his words and left the Prince of Qi’s residence together.

Watching their retreating figures, Xiao Ming frowned. The Qin family’s placement of private soldiers in the Cangzhou garrison made him uneasy. He couldn’t shake the feeling that this matter was far more complex than just the actions of Chai Lingwu and Wei Tong.

Thinking this, he had Ziyuan prepare a horse. The hydraulic forging press had just been completed, and the craftsmen were still getting used to this new machinery. He needed to personally oversee the steel workshop to ensure that plate armor production could soon be streamlined.

Both commerce and military affairs needed to be handled with equal importance and strength.