

I. Dynasty 11

Chapter 11: Wang Family

“Your Highness, all the coal briquettes and iron ore on the market in Qingzou City have been purchased by me. The Wang family said the next batch will take some time.”

The last cart of coal briquettes arrived at the Armory, and Chen Wenlong reported the situation to Xiao Ming.

“How much silver was spent in total?” Xiao Ming asked.

“Two hundred taels.”

Xiao Ming winced in pain, as if a piece of his flesh had been cut off. Back in his dormitory days, his nickname had been “Xiao the Miser.” “Why are coal briquettes and ore so expensive?”

Chen Wenlong forced a bitter smile, not daring to respond.

In his opinion, this was entirely Xiao Ming’s fault.

When Xiao Ming first arrived in his fiefdom, the esteemed Prince of Qi quickly mingled with the local aristocratic youths.

He spent his days carousing with these privileged young men, indulging in debauchery and bullying the common folk.

These aristocratic youths, knowing that Xiao Ming was not favored by the emperor and was short on funds, generously showered him with money, earning his favor.

However, their intentions were far from pure. Soon, the mining rights of Qingzhou's mountains were sold to these aristocratic families at dirt-cheap prices by Xiao Ming.

Among them, the Wang family of Qingzhou secured the most mining rights, and the coal briquettes and iron ore on the market all came from their mines.

"Your Highness, you're mistaken to blame our Wang family. The mines in Qingzhou are fifty miles away, and with no water transport available, we have to rely on horses and porters, which doubles the cost. If we don't make a small profit, our Wang family won't survive."

At that moment, a frivolous voice sounded from outside the door, and in walked a handsome man dressed in a blue silk robe and cloud-patterned boots.

However, the man's face was pale, and he appeared somewhat frail.

"Isn't this Brother Shijie?"

In Xiao Ming's memory, this Wang Shijie was the eldest son of the influential Wang family in Qingzhou and the first among his circle of dissolute friends in Qingzhou, one of the so-called "Four Scourges of Qingzhou" in the eyes of the common people.

"Greetings, Your Highness!" Wang Shijie gave a slight bow to Xiao Ming, holding a paper fan and cupping his hands from a distance.

"At ease." Xiao Ming raised his hand.

He was no longer the original Xiao Ming, but the memories of the previous Xiao Ming's fondness for Wang Shijie still influenced him.

This was similar to how his memories of Pang Yukun also affected him, but these were all preconceived notions.

Now that he was no longer the old Xiao Ming, he could have chosen to ignore Wang Shijie. However, he understood that taking a populist approach at this time was inappropriate.

Because now he needed to unite all forces that could be united to deal with the real enemies. The local aristocratic families were merely internal conflicts within the fiefdom.

Moreover, they held significant value for him.

“Your Highness, I merely went to Yizhou to check some accounts. Little did I expect that upon my return, I would hear of Your Highness personally capturing thirty barbarian cavalry. Truly admirable, truly admirable.” Wang Shijie sighed, his face filled with reverence.

“You flatter me, Brother Shijie. It was just a stroke of luck. Those barbarians stumbled in by accident.” Xiao Ming had an attendant bring a chair for Wang Shijie and invited him to sit. “Brother Shijie, have you just returned to Qingzhou?”

“Indeed. My father mentioned that Your Highness has been purchasing large quantities of coal briquettes and iron ore these past few days. He sent me to inquire how much more you might need.”

Xiao Ming chuckled inwardly. Wang Shijie’s words were merely an excuse. His real purpose was likely to find out what these coal briquettes and iron ore were being used for.

“For now, this should suffice. I just needed some materials for the Armory to create a few small gadgets. If I need more, I’ll certainly reach out to Brother Wang.”

This time, Xiao Ming had purchased a full ten tons of iron ore and a considerable amount of coal briquettes. These materials were simply for the craftsmen to practice with.

“Of course, of course.” Wang Shijie smiled.

Based on his understanding of Xiao Ming, he knew Xiao Ming wouldn’t lie to him. After a pause, he suddenly leaned closer and whispered, “Your Highness, to express our gratitude for your protection of Qingzhou, my father is hosting a banquet at our home tonight. Little Hong has been missing you dearly these past few days.”

The sugar-coated bullet had arrived. Xiao Ming's expression turned peculiar.

In the Great Yu Empire, banquets hosted by aristocratic families were notoriously chaotic, often no different from brothels.

Apart from dining, the families would typically bring out their more attractive maids to entertain the guests and hosts.

Wang Shijie was particularly fond of such affairs. In the past, when Xiao Ming spent time with him, such activities were unavoidable.

The "Little Hong" he mentioned was one of Xiao Ming's former lovers.

"Well..." As a man, it was natural to feel tempted. But right now, Xiao Ming truly had no desire to attend.

As the saying goes, "He who eats from another's hand is bound by their will." Every time the Wang family hosted a banquet, they would inevitably make demands at the last moment.

Xiao Ming was no fool. If this continued, the fiefdom might as well be renamed the Wang family's domain.

Seeing Xiao Ming's hesitation, Wang Shijie gave him a knowing look. "I heard that Her Majesty the Consort has gifted Your Highness two beauties. Has Your Highness become so enamored that you've forgotten our Little Hong?"

"Ah, Brother Wang, you know how it is." Xiao Ming played along.

Wang Shijie's face showed envy as he sighed, "What a pity. Searching all of Qingzhou, I doubt we could find beauties to rival Luluo and Ziyuan. Your Highness is truly fortunate. When might I have the chance to—"

Xiao Ming's expression instantly darkened. This Wang Shijie was a notorious lecher in Qingzhou, and now he had the audacity to set his sights on Xiao Ming's own maids. He was truly bold, even coveting Luluo and Ziyuan.

"Brother Shijie, Luluo and Ziyuan are Her Majesty's personal maids!" Xiao Ming said sternly.

Wang Shijie, whose mind had been filled with images of Luluo and Ziyuan's graceful figures, suddenly snapped back to reality. Seeing the dangerous glint in Xiao Ming's eyes, a cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

His earlier words could be considered treasonous.

"Your Highness, please forgive me. I was being foolish," Wang Shijie said cautiously, forcing a smile.

Xiao Ming snorted coldly. The influence of the aristocratic families in Qingzhou was significant. While he could certainly discipline them, doing so would inevitably weaken his fiefdom. Therefore, his current strategy was to use them as much as they used him.

For example, he still relied on them for coal and iron.

As for Wang Shijie, if this had been the old Xiao Ming, he might have indulged him. But now, under the new Xiao Ming, Wang Shijie had hit a wall. He was merely speaking in the same manner as he had with the old Xiao Ming.

“No matter. Please inform your father that I won’t be attending the banquet tonight,” Xiao Ming said, effectively dismissing him.

Wang Shijie, being a shrewd man, realized that Xiao Ming was no longer following the old script. “In that case, I shall take my leave.”

After seeing Wang Shijie out of the Armory, Xiao Ming continued teaching the craftsmen how to build and use lathes.

Chen Wenlong listened intently. Although what Xiao Ming was explaining was entirely new to him, he found that he could understand it perfectly.

Moreover, images of these lathes began to form in his mind. Gradually, the manufacturing process of the lathes became clear to him, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

By evening, the necessary knowledge had been imparted. The detailed manufacturing process from the technology crystal had been fully transmitted. All that remained was for the craftsmen to put it into practice.

As the saying goes, "Talking without practicing is just empty talk." Turning technological knowledge into tangible products would still take time.