

I. Dynasty 20

Chapter 20: The First Snow Since Transmigration

“Your Highness.”

Qin Mu was the first to enter the main hall, followed closely by Sun Dong and Wei Qing.

Noticing Wang Shijie was already there, Qin Mu asked in surprise, “Brother Wang, you’re usually the last to arrive. What brings you here so early today?”

“I couldn’t sleep all night because of the coal stove matter. I was too anxious, so I came earlier than usual,” Wang Shijie replied, avoiding eye contact, clearly guilty.

“Hmph.” Qin Mu sneered. He was certain Wang Shijie was up to something. Just looking at his shifty eyes, it was obvious his early arrival had ulterior motives.

Sun Dong glanced between the two and said, “Your Highness is busy with official affairs. Let’s not waste time and hand over our sealed bids.”

Wei Qing, with his loud voice, added, “That’s right. Let’s each take out our sealed letters and let His Highness open them in front of us. I trust His Highness to be fair.”

Xiao Ming smirked inwardly. Wei Qing was buttering him up, afraid he might show favoritism. Xiao Ming said, "I still have to visit the Engineering Department later, so go ahead and give me your letters."

Wang Shijie immediately handed over his letter, and the other three followed suit.

Xiao Ming organized the sealed bids and opened them one by one.

Wang Shijie's bid was five taels per stove. Sun Dong and Wei Qing both offered three taels. Qin Mu, however, had bid six taels.

"Your Highness, what's the result?" Qin Mu asked nervously. The Qin family had made a significant offer this time.

Xiao Ming spread the four letters out on the table. "I haven't tampered with anything. It looks like the coal stove business goes to Qin Mu."

Wang Shijie's face darkened. He hadn't expected the Qin family to offer such a high price. Still, his real focus was the coal briquettes, not the stoves, so he didn't care too much.

"Congratulations," Qin Mu stood up and cupped his hands toward the others, looking quite pleased with himself.

Sun Dong and Wei Qing showed little reaction. They had always known they couldn't compete with the Qin and Wang families in this matter.

The Wang family controlled coal. The Qin family controlled the canal trade. These were advantages neither of them had.

“Since Qin Mu has won, we’ll finalize the arrangements. I’ll have the Engineering Department produce the stoves, and Brother Qin, you can pick them up daily,” Xiao Ming announced.

“Thank you, Your Highness,” Qin Mu said joyfully.

With the coal stove business settled, the four men left to report back to their families.

Xiao Ming counted the silver notes in his hand, grinning. Technology monopolies really are the most profitable.

As an engineering student, he knew all too well what technological inferiority meant. In his previous life, countries without technology had to buy it from others—at whatever price was demanded.

Technology monopolies were an absolute goldmine.

And now, he had unlimited technological knowledge in his mind. Once he implemented it all, he could establish his own monopoly.

When that day came, he could simply sit back and collect wealth.

Qian Dafu's round face was nearly lost in his wide grin. Since arriving in Qingzhou, their prince's residence had never been this wealthy.

"Dafu, here's a thousand taels. Prospecting for minerals is tough work—this is for your expenses," Xiao Ming said, slapping two banknotes into Qian Dafu's hands.

Qian Dafu's smile grew even wider. "Since Your Highness earned this money, this old servant will gladly accept it!"

Xiao Ming shook his head helplessly. The residence had simply been too poor for too long.

After pocketing the silver notes, Qian Dafu asked, "Your Highness, if I leave to search for mines, who will manage the affairs of the residence?"

Xiao Ming glanced at him and said casually, "You've been protecting Ziyuan so much—don't you already have an idea?"

"Heh, Your Highness is indeed perceptive. I can't hide anything from you," Qian Dafu chuckled. "Lüluo and Ziyuan both served under Her Ladyship. They would never betray you. But Lüluo is timid and won't be able to control the household servants. Ziyuan, on the other hand, is sharp and strong-willed. She'll have no trouble managing the residence."

“Then let her handle it,” Xiao Ming agreed. “You are my trusted aide. In the future, I’ll have far more important matters for you to take care of. You can’t be tied down with household chores forever.”

The words trusted aide made Qian Dafu’s heart surge with emotion. With such faith from his master, he would willingly walk through fire and water.

The mining expedition was urgent. After going over some details, Xiao Ming began preparing for the journey. He also assigned ten loyal cavalrymen under Lu Fei to accompany Qian Dafu for protection.

Now that he had money, Xiao Ming’s first priority was building the water-powered lathe workshop.

As a prince, he had absolute authority over his fief. He easily claimed a plot of land along the swiftest section of the Mi River—no one dared to object.

Next, he ordered Chen Wenlong to post notices recruiting craftsmen. The planned workshop was 100 meters long and 15 meters wide—a major construction project.

With winter fast approaching, he wanted the workshop operational by spring.

Meanwhile, the Engineering Department worked overtime producing lathes, which would be moved to the new facility once it was built.

Coal stove production also continued. Since they were easy to manufacture, the Engineering Department could produce thirty per day.

The next day, the Qin family came to pick up their first batch. Although they had paid a high price, they were cautious, buying only a limited number initially to test the market.

As work pressed on, the weather grew colder by the day.

By the end of Xiao Ming's first month in this world, a thick snowfall from the north blanketed Qingzhou.

The snow was heavy and relentless. By morning, the entire city seemed buried beneath it.

"Your Highness, look at all this snow!" Lüluo called out cheerfully.

Her cheeks were flushed red from the cold as she trudged through the snow, leaving deep footprints behind.

Xiao Ming sat at the entrance of his sleeping quarters, warming his hands over a coal briquette stove.

The temperature had to be at least minus seventeen or eighteen degrees Celsius.

In his past life, he had been a southerner. He had never experienced such bitter cold. Right now, he just wanted to cling to the stove and never leave.

Lüluo and Ziyuan, however, were used to the weather and played happily in the snow.

“Your Highness, come join us!” Ziyuan called out with a grin.

“You two have your fun. I’ll just watch,” Xiao Ming said, amused. Watching beautiful women play in the snow was entertainment in itself.

Lüluo and Ziyuan exchanged glances before suddenly scooping up snowballs and throwing them at him.

“How dare you!” Xiao Ming feigned anger, dodging left and right as the snowballs missed their mark.

The two girls giggled mischievously but abruptly stopped when they saw someone approaching from the front hall.

It was Chief Attendant Pang.