

I. Dynasty 27

Chapter 27: Result

“Your Highness, this old servant has troubled you.”

Qian Dafu’s face was still pale. Blood loss and the cold had rendered him unconscious shortly after being struck by the arrow.

Xiao Ming had instructed Ziyuan to bring a coal stove into Qian Dafu’s room. The added warmth helped him regain consciousness.

Doctor Sun remarked, “Fortunately, the severe cold caused Steward Qian’s wound to freeze, preventing excessive blood loss. Otherwise, his life might have been in grave danger.”

Xiao Ming, still shaken, nodded in gratitude. “Thank you for your efforts, Doctor Sun.”

The physician was taken aback and quickly bowed. “Your Highness, this is merely my duty. You are too kind.”

Ziyuan and Lü Luo were tending to Qian Dafu. Seeing Doctor Sun so flustered, Lü Luo covered her mouth and giggled.

It seemed the physician was startled by Prince Qi's unusually polite demeanor. She and Ziyuan had also needed about a month to adjust to his changed personality.

After a final check on Qian Dafu, Doctor Sun said, "Since Steward Qian is out of danger, I shall take my leave."

Xiao Ming nodded, signaling Lü Luo to escort the physician to the door. The doctor hurriedly waved his hands in refusal, clearly unaccustomed to such treatment.

For Xiao Ming, talent was the most valuable resource. Treating skilled individuals with respect was a simple yet crucial principle—one he could easily uphold as someone with modern sensibilities.

Once Doctor Sun had left, Xiao Ming sat beside Qian Dafu's bed. "Steward Qian, you have endured much. I have already ordered that the bandits who attacked you be executed and put on display as a warning."

Despite his weakness, Qian Dafu struggled to sit up, his expression urgent. "Your Highness, that must not happen! The man who attacked me was Zhang Liang."

"Zhang Liang?" Xiao Ming searched his memory but only recalled a vague impression of the name.

Qian Dafu elaborated, "Your Highness may not remember, but Zhang Liang once owned a shipyard. When the barbarians raided, his shipyard was burned to the ground. Several merchant vessels belonging to the Qin family were also destroyed. Zhang Liang owed the Qin family a great debt, and they hounded him mercilessly. Out of desperation, he took his clan and fled into the mountains, turning to banditry to escape his creditors."

"I remember now. Qin Mu even asked me to send troops to suppress them," Xiao Ming recalled.

“Your Highness, when I saw Zhang Liang, he and his men were dressed in rags. They likely attacked me out of desperation to survive the winter. The heavy snow impaired visibility—he may not have even realized I was with the government. If Your Highness truly wishes to revitalize this land, Zhang Liang could be of great use.”

Xiao Ming was momentarily moved. His domain was impoverished, but at least he had loyal retainers like Qian Dafu.

“Very well. I will instruct Lu Fei to capture him alive,” Xiao Ming decided.

“Your Highness is wise,” Qian Dafu said with a faint smile.

The movement pulled at his wound, causing him to wince. But he continued, “Your Highness, I spent over a month searching for minerals. I found a limestone deposit thirty miles north of Qingzhou City and a graphite mine a hundred miles east. I also located iron, coal, and copper deposits. I have recorded their precise locations.”

With that, he retrieved a sheepskin map from his robes.

Xiao Ming examined it closely. The map detailed the locations of various mineral deposits, marked with precise distances measured in steps. Though only five sites were recorded, they were more than enough to address Xiao Ming’s immediate needs.

“Dafu, this is a great achievement! Tell me, how shall I reward you?” Xiao Ming exclaimed, thrilled.

Qian Dafu’s discovery further confirmed that the geography of this world matched his knowledge from his previous life. He had read scientific theories suggesting that when history diverged, an alternate timeline could form, developing along a different trajectory.

If Qian Dafu’s mineral findings aligned with his mental map, then locating the remaining resources would be straightforward.

With a weak smile, Qian Dafu said, “Your Highness need only reward the soldiers who accompanied me. And... please spare Zhang Liang.”

Xiao Ming nodded. Seeing Qian Dafu’s exhaustion, he said, “Alright. I promise you that. Now, focus on your recovery.”

Qian Dafu gave a slight nod before closing his eyes. Fatigue from his wounds and the long journey had taken its toll.

Turning to Ziyuan, Xiao Ming instructed, “Take good care of Steward Qian. Make sure he has the best food. Also, visit the East and West Markets to see if there’s any meat for sale—buy as much as you can.”

Ziyuan’s eyes flickered with a strange light, and she nodded. “Yes, Your Highness.”

With Zhang Liang's situation in mind, Xiao Ming needed to speak with Lu Fei. If left unchecked, the hotheaded commander might kill Zhang Liang before he could be recruited.

Xiao Ming headed straight for the governor's office.

Lü Luo watched him go before turning to Ziyuan. "Sister, the prince treats his servants so well now. He really has changed."

"Indeed." Ziyuan smiled, dimples forming on her cheeks. "If Her Ladyship knew that His Highness had turned over a new leaf, she would be overjoyed."

Lü Luo pouted, her eyes brimming with longing. "I wonder when we'll return to Chang'an. This place is so dull compared to the capital. I miss the lively streets... and the malt candy."

Ziyuan pulled her into an embrace. "Her Ladyship sent us here to care for His Highness. We'll return when he does. If you're bored, His Highness would surely be willing to entertain you."

Lü Luo's cheeks flushed. "Sister, don't tease me! His Highness always gets too handsy."

Ziyuan giggled. "Just wait until he gets married—then we'll see what you say."

She suddenly lunged at Lü Luo, tickling her.

“Ah! Sister, stop! I’m too ticklish!” Lü Luo gasped between peals of laughter. “But if His Highness really does marry, I wonder how he’ll treat us then...”

“Who knows?” Ziyuan mused. “But given Her Ladyship’s temperament, she will surely choose a kind and understanding woman.”

Just then, a cough sounded from the bed.

Ziyuan and Lü Luo exchanged nervous glances before sticking out their tongues mischievously.

“Let’s leave. We shouldn’t disturb Steward Qian’s rest,” Ziyuan whispered.

Lü Luo nodded, taking Ziyuan’s hand as they quietly closed the door behind them.

At Governor’s Office Lu Fei arrived promptly after being summoned. He and Xiao Ming were deep in discussion about capturing Zhang Liang and his men.

“So, it’s Zhang Liang? He truly was a master shipbuilder,” Lu Fei mused. “But with the mountains buried under snow, tracking him down won’t be easy.”

Xiao Ming smirked. "I've already devised a plan. Listen carefully—all you have to do is follow my instructions..."