

## I. Dynasty 35

### Chapter 35: Journey to Chang'an

"Your Highness, it seems you're quite drunk," Ziwan said, nudging Lü Luo. "Let's have His Highness rest."

Lü Luo nodded and went to help Xiao Ming to his feet.

Earlier, Xiao Ming hadn't felt too drunk, but the lingering effects of the alcohol had caught up with him. After talking for a while, he began to feel dizzy and had to lean on Lü Luo as they returned to his chambers.

Ziwan also went downstairs. Seeing that Lü Luo had taken Xiao Ming back, she called over the servant responsible for transporting the Drunken Qingzhou wine and said, "Don't rush to send the batch of Drunken Qingzhou distilled this time and the previous batch to the Qin family. We need to inscribe His Highness's poem on the wine jars first."

"Yes, Miss Ziwan," the servant replied.

Ziwan then went to prepare brushes, ink, paper, and inkstones. Coincidentally, Lü Luo returned at that moment. Ziwan said, "The Qin family is leaving for Chang'an tomorrow, and His Highness is drunk. It seems we'll have to copy the poem ourselves and paste it onto the wine jars."

"Alright, since your handwriting is so beautiful, you write, and I'll handle the pasting," Lü Luo said with a playful smile.

Ziwan shot her a look. "You're always so good at slacking off."

With that, she handed Lü Luo a sheet of Chengxin paper. "This Chengxin paper was brought from Chang'an by Her Majesty. It's extremely precious, so be careful when cutting it. His Highness said that pairing this paper with Drunken Qingzhou adds a certain... elegance."

Lü Luo carefully took the paper. Chengxin paper was the most renowned paper in the Great Yu Kingdom, known for its smooth, jade-like texture and fine, glossy surface. Scholars and artists often used it for their most prized works.

With a look of concern, Lü Luo said, "His Highness is really something. How can such precious paper be pasted onto wine jars? It would be better to frame the poem written on it. And what does 'elegance' even mean?"

"I don't know either. It's probably just his nonsense. I tried to persuade him not to waste it, but His Highness said we'll have plenty of paper to use in the future," Ziwan said, shaking her head.

"True. The current His Highness certainly has a lot of ideas."

The two shared a laugh, one cutting and pasting the paper while the other copied the poem.

By noon, they had finished pasting the poem onto all the Drunken Qingzhou jars and had Li San deliver them to the Qin family. By then, Xiao Ming had also woken up.

He hadn't been too drunk, just a little tipsy, and after a short nap, he had sobered up.

After asking about the Drunken Qingzhou and confirming that it had all been delivered to the Qin family, he felt reassured. Li San could set off for Chang'an the next day.

In the afternoon, he discussed with Ziwan and Lü Luo what items Li San should purchase from Chang'an.

Vegetable oil was at the top of the list. Recently, he had been eating animal fat, and sometimes, due to shortages, he had gone without. He couldn't stand it anymore. With vegetable oil, he could at least stir-fry some dishes.

Next on the list were preserved meats, malt sugar, pastries, and other snacks. Unlike modern times, during winter, fresh vegetables were scarce. Radishes hadn't yet been introduced to the Great Yu Empire.

Cabbage, however, was a native crop, and during the depths of winter, it could still be found for sale in Qingzhou's East and West markets.

Thinking of a modern winter dish—cabbage and pork stew with glass noodles—Xiao Ming's mouth watered like the Yellow River overflowing. But then he remembered that sweet potatoes, the main ingredient for glass noodles, were also an imported crop and not available in the Great Yu Empire.

"What a place of scarcity," Xiao Ming muttered, finally giving up on the idea of making a shopping list. There were only a handful of items he could think of anyway.

However, this scarcity also presented an opportunity. Potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, chili peppers—none of these modern staples were available in the Great Yu Empire. If he could introduce and cultivate these crops in his fiefdom...

With the high yields of potatoes and sweet potatoes, would he still need to worry about his people going hungry?

At this thought, Xiao Ming remembered Zhang Liang. He had kept him around precisely for shipbuilding—and not just any ships, but large ones.

The Great Yu Empire was like a frog trapped in a well, complacent and ignorant of the outside world. If Western history hadn't been disrupted, this would have been the glorious Age of Exploration.

The nation he had once loved had lost out during the era of maritime dominance, and he couldn't let that happen again.

Of course, he understood that the upper echelons of the Great Yu Empire, lost in their dream of being the "Celestial Empire," would never agree with him. But he didn't need their approval. With his own fiefdom, he could be the pioneer, using his own resources.

Leaving Ziwan and Lü Luo to excitedly continue discussing the shopping list, Xiao Ming went alone to the third floor of the main hall.

From there, he could see all of Qingzhou City. Taking out a fresh sheet of paper, he began to sketch the most famous ocean-going ship of the Age of Exploration—the galleon.

This three-masted ship had a lifespan of nearly a century, undergoing numerous modifications until it was eventually replaced by ironclads.

The Black Pearl from Pirates of the Caribbean was modeled after a galleon.

Of course, Xiao Ming was also familiar with the structures of treasure ships and Fuchuan ships. However, compared to galleons, treasure ships were too large and not suitable for later modifications into warships.

The galleon, which had dominated the seas for centuries, had a long, narrow hull, low freeboard, and square sails, giving it superior seaworthiness among sailing ships of its time.

Most importantly, it was well-suited for naval warfare. Galleons with cannons mounted on both sides became the prototype for later ships of the line.

The design Xiao Ming was sketching wasn't the original galleon but a later, optimized version with improved seaworthiness, faster construction, and more efficient use of materials.

He also left space for gunports on both sides of the ship, allowing for future modifications into a warship.

However, his current goal in building a galleon wasn't for naval warfare but for potatoes.

Compared to an assembly line for steel production, the structure of a galleon was far more complex. After an afternoon of work, Xiao Ming had only completed about one-twentieth of the design.

Since he had slept in the morning, he wasn't tired at night. Seizing the opportunity, he worked through the night and by early the next morning, he had completed another portion.

At that moment, Li San came to pay his respects and discuss the trip to Chang'an.

"On this trip to Chang'an, you must be cautious and avoid causing any trouble. Do you understand?" Xiao Ming sternly reminded him.

Li San's mission was to secure the silver, and Xiao Ming didn't want any mishaps.

"Yes, Your Highness," Li San said, startled, and quickly nodded.

Taking Li San with him, Xiao Ming made a special trip to the dock. This matter was of great importance to him.

"Your Highness, I'll accompany Li San to Chang'an this time. You can rest assured," Qin Mu said, standing on the merchant ship.

Xiao Ming nodded. Qin Chuanyun was a bit of a sly old fox, but with Qin Mu going along, he felt slightly more at ease. "Then I'll leave this matter in your hands, Brother Qin."

Qin Mu nodded, ordered the boatmen to set sail, and clasped his hands in farewell to Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming returned the gesture, watching as the gray merchant ship slowly departed.