

## I. Dynasty 42

### Chapter 42: The Slave Trader

Qingzhou

The winter snow had been falling intermittently for twenty days. It wasn't until this morning that a crystal-like blue finally peeked through the gray clouds.

Golden sunlight broke free from the clouds, casting a dazzling golden hue over the white snow.

"Your Highness, it's been over twenty days since Li San left. Do you think the perfume and Drunken Qingzhou have impressed the Empress and the Emperor?" Lü Luo stretched out her small hands, warming them over the coal stove while supervising the servants distilling rice wine in the courtyard.

"Counting the days, he should be back soon," Xiao Ming said, wrapped in a thick felt blanket. As winter deepened, the cold northern weather became increasingly unbearable.

Especially when sitting still, the cold felt like invisible hands creeping all over his body.

"Hmph, I hope he didn't forget the things we asked him to buy," Lü Luo muttered, still thinking about her malt sugar.

Xiao Ming tapped Lü Luo's head. "You, always thinking about food."

Lü Luo giggled, her eyes narrowing into crescents as she seemed to drool in anticipation of Li San's return.

Xiao Ming tightened the felt blanket around him and looked in the direction of Chang'an, the political and economic center of the Great Yu Empire. Even a fool could guess that few people living in Chang'an were kind-hearted.

He just hoped Li San would bring good news and avoid causing too much trouble.

Although there was no news from Li San, word from Qin Mu came quickly. Drunken Qingzhou had become a sensation in Chang'an. Scholars, merchants, and nobles alike were clamoring to buy it after tasting it.

The price of Drunken Qingzhou had quickly surpassed that of Daughter Red, which sold for twenty taels of silver, and had doubled to forty taels per jar.

Even so, Drunken Qingzhou was in short supply, as Xiao Ming had only distilled a hundred jars.

Unable to wait, Qin Mu sent a fast horse, and the news reached Qingzhou in just five days. Upon hearing this, Qin Chuanyun personally visited Xiao Ming, requesting an increase in the supply of Drunken Qingzhou and promising to raise the cost price to thirty taels per jar.

The ten-tael profit per jar made Qin Chuanyun, the old fox, deeply appreciate the benefits of cooperating with Xiao Ming. As a gesture of goodwill, he also handed over the Zhang family's shipyard to Xiao Ming, a clear exchange of interests.

With the fiefdom in dire need of development, Xiao Ming was most in need of silver. He naturally wouldn't refuse such an offer.

He immediately had Chen Qi produce nine more distillers and converted a side hall of the prince's residence into a small factory. The production of Drunken Qingzhou increased from ten jars a day to a hundred.

At this scale, Xiao Ming dared not expand further. Due to his need for green ant wine, large quantities of grain were being purchased for brewing, causing the price of staple foods to rise significantly. If production were to increase further, the lives of the common people would become even harder.

This winter was already difficult for the people. As their feudal lord and the parent of the six prefectures, Xiao Ming had to consider their well-being.

Therefore, he planned to establish an official brewery, but instead of purchasing grain from his fiefdom, he would buy it from regions with surplus grain.

Once the people of his fiefdom had enough grain, he would then purchase locally to stimulate economic development.

"By the way, Your Highness, this morning when Sister Ziyuan went to Haizhou, she mentioned that our residence is short on manpower. She asked me to tell you if we should buy some slaves," Lü Luo suddenly said, remembering something.

Ziyuan had been sent by Xiao Ming to the fiefdom of Prince Wei to purchase plow oxen.

Compared to the five million households in the fiefdom, the shortage of plow oxen was too great. With only three months until spring, if the farming tools weren't ready, it would definitely affect the next year's harvest.

Prince Wei, the old fox, seemed to have figured out Xiao Ming's shortage and raised the price of plow oxen by three taels. Now, a plow ox cost twenty taels of silver, which was a headache for Xiao Ming.

He had considered buying oxen from other places, but the distance was too great, and the transportation risks made it unfeasible.

"Buy!" Xiao Ming said decisively.

During Li San's absence, Xiao Ming had been thinking about development issues. In this technologically backward era, people were a production resource. In past wars with the barbarians, the goal of many battles was to capture slaves.

Because these slaves could be converted into labor, greatly boosting production.

Xiao Ming now faced the same problem: a lack of funds and a shortage of labor.

With the fiefdom's limited resources, the four to five million people could only be used to restore agricultural production, while workshops required a large number of workers.

In the early stages of industrialization in the modern West, a significant portion of wealth accumulation came from the black slave trade. Rough estimates suggest that around twenty million black slaves were traded during that period.

This was also one of the reasons for the rapid rise of the capitalist world.

Xiao Ming knew he wasn't yet capable of participating in the black slave trade, as he didn't even have a decent ship. At the same time, he had no such thing as savior complex.

Living in this era, one had to act in accordance with the laws of the times. Therefore, he didn't oppose the slave trade. For him, it was even a necessary condition for the revival of his fiefdom.

"If Your Highness wants to buy slaves, Sister Ziyuan said there's a slave trader in Qingzhou City. He has a slave market in the East Market," Lü Luo added.

Xiao Ming's spirits lifted. If Ziyuan hadn't brought this up, the slave issue might have been delayed. He said, "Ziyuan is always so thoughtful. Have Zhao Long and Zhao Hu go to the East Market and bring that slave trader here."

Now, Xiao Ming was gradually adapting to his role and fully aware of his supreme authority in the fiefdom.

To accelerate development, he had to flexibly use his feudal privileges.

Lü Luo acknowledged the order and went to find Zhao Long and Zhao Hu. Half an hour later, a shifty-eyed man was brought to the Prince of Qi's residence.

"This humble commoner, Liang Dahai, greets His Highness, the Prince of Qi," Liang Dahai bowed deeply, not daring to breathe too loudly.

When Zhao Long and Zhao Hu appeared, he was terrified, thinking the authorities had come to arrest him. After all, no one in the slave trade was clean.

"At ease. Are you Liang Dahai?" Xiao Ming sat upright in the main hall, the red flames of the stove illuminating half of his face.

"Yes, I am," Liang Dahai replied cautiously, glancing at Xiao Ming.

Xiao Ming spoke solemnly, "I called you here for one reason: your business."

Liang Dahai's face turned pale, and he immediately knelt on the ground. "Your Highness! The slaves I sell are either voluntary or purchased from elsewhere. Each one has a deed of sale. None were abducted!"