

## I. Dynasty 51

### Chapter 51: Soap

The workshop area officially began construction during the cold winter, and Xiao Ming suddenly found himself responsible for feeding over 900 additional mouths. With new recruits also joining the military camp, the number of people to feed quickly rose to around 3,000.

The continuous drain on silver reserves made Xiao Ming feel immense pressure. Moreover, aside from commerce, he had no other means to quickly amass wealth.

Therefore, whether it was setting up his own trading company or leveraging the Wang and Qin families to make money, time was of the essence.

After arranging matters related to the slaves, Xiao Ming went to the Wang family to discuss trade with the barbarians.

“Your Highness, our Wang family dare not bear such a grave accusation!” Before Xiao Ming could finish speaking, Wang Chengchou fell to his knees with a thud. Wang Shijie, too, broke out in a cold sweat, trembling as if struck by a chill.

They had received news that both the Emperor and the Empress had sent silver to Xiao Ming. Rumors from Chang’an also suggested that the Emperor and the Crown Prince’s faction seemed to be leaning toward supporting Xiao Ming.

A neglected prince and a supported prince were two entirely different matters. In the past, they might have dared to take advantage of Xiao Ming's ignorance.

But now, with the forces backing Xiao Ming, they had to carefully weigh the pros and cons. If Xiao Ming accused the Wang family of colluding with foreign enemies, the entire family could face execution.

Even if the Wang family was powerful and unafraid of Xiao Ming, and even if the Qingzhou army was insignificant, the Emperor and the Crown Prince could still mobilize their forces. In that case, the Wang family's destruction would only be a matter of time.

Xiao Ming felt somewhat helpless. This was the first time he had seen fear in Wang Chengchou's eyes. It seemed that the silver sent by Emperor Xiao Wenxuan and the Empress had arrived just in time, allowing him to borrow their authority.

He said, "Master Wang, Brother Wang, please rise. I am not here to accuse you of any crime. As you are well aware, this year, many of the Huyantuo tribe's livestock froze to death on the grasslands. Recently, barbarian scouts have been frequently spying on the defenses outside Cangzhou. I'm sure you understand their intentions."

Wang Chengchou wiped the sweat from his forehead and forced a smile. "Your Highness, I have indeed heard about this. Many livestock have frozen to death. The barbarians rely on milk, beef, and mutton for their daily sustenance. With the livestock dead and no offspring, they will have no animals to herd come spring. By then, the barbarians will face starvation."

"Commander Lu said the same thing. Therefore, the simplest way to solve this problem and prevent the barbarians from besieging Cangzhou is..." Xiao Ming trailed off.

"Your Highness, please continue," Wang Chengchou urged.

Xiao Ming didn't directly state his plan, as he didn't want to bear the blame for it either. Instead, he hinted at a solution, preparing to nudge Wang Chengchou into taking the initiative. He said, "With the livestock dead, merchants naturally won't want them. However, the fat from these animals can be used to make soap. If Master Wang were to exchange grain for this fat, how would the barbarians react? The barbarians only care about the meat; the fat is worthless to them. If this cheap fat is brought back, it can be used to produce large quantities of soap. What do you think, Master Wang?"

Wang Shijie and Wang Chengchou exchanged glances, their expressions strange.

"Very well, I've said my piece. I still hope Cangzhou remains safe," Xiao Ming said before leaving the Wang residence.

Wang Shijie quickly stood up to see Xiao Ming out. Shortly after, he returned and said to Wang Chengchou, "Father, His Highness is right. If we exchange grain for fat now, it would be an incredibly profitable venture. Moreover, His Highness seems to be encouraging us to do so."

Wang Chengchou, still kneeling on the ground, slowly rose and sat down in a chair. "This Prince of Qi is truly unpredictable. He doesn't want to bear the accusation of colluding with foreign enemies, yet he wants to resolve the crisis in Cangzhou. But our Wang family can't take this risk either."

"Then what should we do?" Wang Shijie asked.

Wang Chengchou chuckled. "There's still a way. We don't need to do this ourselves. Just spread the word among the merchants in Cangzhou that our Wang family is purchasing fat. Then, let the method of exchanging grain with the Huyantuo for fat circulate. With that, we won't lack for people willing to take the risk. At most, we'll spend a bit more silver, but it's better than bearing the accusation. I don't want to end up like the Qin family, with a handle held over us by the Prince of Qi."

Wang Shijie gave a thumbs-up. “Father, you’re truly brilliant.”

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Seven days later, the Wang family delivered the first batch of animal fat to Qingzhou, completing the final ingredient needed for soap production.

Although various sources indicated that the Wang family hadn’t taken the bait, the large quantity of fat excited Xiao Ming. For this purpose, he had the Machinery Department forge five massive iron cauldrons and chose the workshop area as the site for soap production.

From now on, this would be the location for soap manufacturing.

“Your Highness, this smells so oily. How is this soap supposed to be used?” Lü Luo, who had insisted on coming to witness the soap-making process, asked.

Since the concept of soap was introduced, news of it had gradually spread throughout the prince’s residence and Qingzhou City.

Unsurprisingly, women were the most interested in this new bathing product.

In front of Xiao Ming were five large stoves, burning coal, with two-meter-wide iron cauldrons on top. The animal fat inside was steaming.

Since it was winter, the fat hadn't spoiled or gone rancid. The first step was to render the fat from the lard and grease, as the barbarians wouldn't have refined the oil for him.

Once the fat was rendered, the meat scraps and skins were skimmed off. They had now reached this stage.

"Don't worry, the essential oils I asked you to prepare weren't for nothing," Xiao Ming said with a grin.

Lü Luo was momentarily stunned before she understood, blushing as she said, "I thought Your Highness was using them to make perfume."

This time, Xiao Ming didn't avoid Wang Shijie and even had him personally oversee the process. Seeing Xiao Ming and Lü Luo flirt, Wang Shijie couldn't help but feel envious. "Your Highness, you're truly fortunate."

Lü Luo's face turned bright red, while Xiao Ming shot Wang Shijie a glare. The young man couldn't go three sentences without bringing up such topics. Xiao Ming said, "I brought you here to supervise the use of the animal fat. I run my business fairly and won't take advantage of your Wang family."

Since the Wang family provided the fat, it was only appropriate to involve them. However, Xiao Ming wasn't worried about the soap-making technology being stolen, as the key ingredient was the alkali.

This time, Xiao Ming brought the alkali directly, and Wang Shijie had no idea what it was for.

The unrefined fat was a transparent orange-yellow color, similar to modern soybean oil. Once the first batch of pure fat was ready, Xiao Ming had the alkali poured in.

A chemical reaction immediately occurred in the cauldron, and soon the fat thickened, resembling tofu pudding. He then had the essential oils stirred in.

When the soap mixture in the cauldron reached the right consistency, ten strong slaves lifted the cauldron and poured the mixture into prepared square molds.

Once cooled, the soap mixture solidified into large, milky-white blocks that looked clean and emitted a faint fragrance. Slaves responsible for cutting used long knives to slice the soap into standard small squares along marked lines.