Farmhouse 1051

Chapter 1051: Dispensing Rewards

"It must have been Gu Youyou who told him after she returned. When he was using the molds on those troublemakers, it was Gu Youyou who stood up to stop him."

The Emperor, however, looked at Jin Zijin with surprise, not expecting him to defend himself and bite back at King Jin.

He thought that Zijin didn't care about anything.

"Jin Zijin, those I killed were rebels. They spread rumors everywhere and deserved to die."

"Do you have evidence? Did they confess?" Jin Zijin asked indifferently.

"Of course, they confessed. I have their signed confessions."

"I suspect they were coerced into confessing. Minister Jie, you were present at the time. You know best. Why not speak out in front of everyone?"

Minister Jie had already spoken before, which is why the other ministers stayed silent.

King Jin sensed something off in the atmosphere and turned his gaze to the Ducal Residence.

The Ducal Residence gave him a wink, signaling him to stop talking.

The Emperor's face bore anger as he said to King Jin, "Xiaoran, do you not realize your guilt?"

King Jin felt extremely aggrieved by the situation. He then looked towards Jie Huanzhi, who raised his chin with an insufferable air, and in a flash, King Jin knew who had betrayed him.

"Good for you, Jie Huanzhi. You didn't see how hard I worked, yet you snitched on me."

But he was adamant that he had done nothing wrong, so he refused to confess any guilt.

He bowed to the Emperor and said, "Father, your son has been wronged. Those people truly were rebels, spreading rumors among the crowd and causing panic. I executed them to set an example for others. Otherwise, the rumors might still be rampant even now."

Jie Huanzhi didn't like hearing this. Clearly, the credit belonged to Gu Youyou—how dare this troublemaker twist the truth and steal her credit?

Jie Huanzhi's expression soured as he coldly retorted, "Your Majesty, King Jin's actions have stirred up public resentment, and the rumors have only grown. It was the Crown Princess Consort who pacified the refugees and treated the epidemic. Please, Your Majesty, investigate this matter."

The Ducal Residence, having not helped King Jin, was well aware of the foolish things Jin had done and was now too angry to speak.

"Jie Huanzhi, you're slandering me!" King Jin shouted angrily.

Unable to listen any further and lest the situation escalate uncontrollably, the Ducal Residence implored the Emperor, "Your Majesty, this old servant earnestly requests that Your Majesty confine King Jin to his residence for a month so that he may reflect."

King Jin was stunned to hear the Ducal Residence speak such words.

Just now, he hadn't understood the signs and now he was even more confused.

Among the three Princes, only if he became Emperor could the Ducal Residence continue to flourish. What was his great-grandfather trying to do?

He was too shocked to speak.

"I permit it," the Emperor said, giving King Jin a glance.

"Guards, escort King Jin out."

It was only when people came to lead him out of the Taihe Hall that King Jin finally reacted.

"Father, Father, your son is wronged..."

Unfortunately, since it was the Ducal Residence who had spoken, nobody would stand up for him.

King Jin was greatly shaken. All his suffering had resulted in such an outcome.

He didn’t become the Crown Prince and was now under confinement. He couldn’t understand it...

Today’s discussion in the court was about rewarding merits. After King Jin was taken away, the discussion quickly returned to the main topic.

"Since the Crown Princess Consort has the greatest merit, Zijin, go ask her what she wishes as her reward."

Jin Zijin had anticipated that Gu Youyou would be rewarded, so he had asked her in advance.

Gu Youyou had long wished to make glass, so her answer at the time was for the Emperor to permit her to produce glass on her own.

Chapter 1052: Burning Glazed Glass

Jin Zijin bowed his hands in respect and said, "Youyou has come up with a new method for producing glass, which she plans to apply in trade. Therefore, she hopes for a reward from Father Emperor that loosens the regulations on glass production, allowing her to independently produce glass."

This statement astonished everyone present. Glass production? She was actually capable of making glass?

The technique of glassmaking had always been under the Emperor's control; glass made by glass masters was only to be found in the Imperial Palace, and the ministers could only wish for it if the Emperor deigned to bestow it.

Now, Gu Youyou had actually succeeded in producing her own glass?

"Is this true?" the Emperor asked, somewhat excitedly.

Jin Zijin replied, "Youyou's method of production is quite simple and allows for mass production. If Father Emperor permits, in no time at all, glass could be sold in every household, and it will be quite cheap."

The biggest issue with glass wasn't the imperial regulation but rather its complex craftsmanship and limited production. Rarity brought value, which was why it became an exclusive item for the Imperial Family.

If everyone could use glass, that would be quite a noteworthy thing.

Of course, there were also voices of opposition.

The Huanzhi family possessed no small amount of glass, representing a source of pride for them. He said, "If common people could afford it, then what would be so extraordinary about glass? Would not all those treasures gifted by the Emperor become utterly worthless?"

Jie Huanzhi countered, "According to Lord Huanzhi, is the worth of the Emperor's gifts in the items themselves? If the things gifted by the Emperor became worthless, would Lord Huanzhi then find them meaningless?"

"You... Jie Huanzhi, I did not say that the gifts from the Emperor are meaningless if they are not expensive. Do not twist my words."

"I’m merely stating the obvious truth."

"It seems you just want to disagree with me." If not for Jie Huanzhi, King Jin would not have been punished.

"Think whatever you like," Jie Huanzhi said with a cold snort.

Minister Jie and Lord Huanzhi were well-known for their confrontations in court, so everyone was used to it, and no one bothered to intervene.

"Both of you, calm yourselves!" the Emperor spoke up. "Lord Huanzhi, everyone knows of your love for glass, and I think it would be a good thing to let the Great Prince’s Consort mass-produce glass. The value of glass lies in its scarcity and being priceless; once there is more glass on the market, you will be able to feast your eyes on it!"

Jin Zijin continued, "Youyou’s idea is to use glass for windows. Glass has good transparency; replacing paper windows with glass will make houses brighter."

Someone exclaimed in surprise, "Glass for windows? Isn’t that too luxurious?"

"Ah, how could that be? Didn’t the Great Prince just say? There will be mass production of glass, so it will be very cheap, and even ordinary people can afford it."

"Ah, if only that were true, that would be great. I’d order some for my study right now—turn it into a room with transparent glass windows. I’m getting old and my eyes aren’t as good; the study just doesn’t seem bright enough."

"I want it too, I want glass tiles. Great Prince, does the Great Prince’s Consort make glass tiles?"

Jin Zijin said with a light smile, "Of course, that’s the plan."

Everyone approved, and with the Emperor showing no objections, the matter was naturally settled.

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Chapter 1053: Harvesting Potatoes

Gu Youyou had grown accustomed to this kind of life, initially feeling very embarrassed, but now she was quite calm about it.

Evening was the only time for fun, what else could they do?

It was the same for every newlywed couple.

Jin Zijin, massaging Gu Youyou’s belly, whispered, "It’s about time to get pregnant, isn’t it?"

Gu Youyou’s mouth twitched as she removed his hand, replying, "Is it that easy? My body was too frail before, it’s not easy to conceive."

"Oh?" Jin Zijin raised an eyebrow and said, "Then I must try harder, striving to conceive sooner."

Gu Youyou couldn’t help but smile wryly, pushing away his approaching body, "No, we must be restrained."

"How can we be restrained if we’re trying for a child? If we restrain ourselves, how will we have a child?"

Gu Youyou: "..." Are these two related?

"Having children isn’t like that, oh dear, you wouldn’t understand even if I explained it to you, it’s too complicated to explain in a short time. Anyway, I know what I’m doing. When it’s time for me to tell you to work hard, I’ll let you know. Not these days, it’s a safe period, let’s wait a few days."

"There’s a safe period?" Jin Zijin admitted he really didn’t understand.

"It’s really troublesome, just don’t let any day slip by. Come, let’s go to sleep."

He lifted the washed clean Gu Youyou from the water, wrapped her in a blanket, and dried her body.

Lying on the bed, Jin Zijin talked about the events of the day.

After listening, Gu Youyou curled her lips and said, "King Jin has misused private punishment and killed so many common people, and ends up just confined to his own house for a month? Isn’t this punishment too light? Instead of saying he’s confined for a month, it’s better to say it’s a month of good rest at home. Who came up with this terrible idea?"

Jin Zijin laughed, "This terrible idea, of course, came from the Protector of the Nation. Seeing King Jin’s demeanor, he harbors resentment towards the Protector, because he always feels he’s done nothing wrong. But had the Protector not come forward to impose confinement, the punishment he’d receive wouldn’t just be a month."

"Did the Emperor agree to this too? Is your father really that apprehensive of the Protector?"

"What are you thinking about?" Jin Zijin gently pinched Gu Youyou’s nose, saying, "With the Protector suggesting it, King Jin has directed all his resentment towards him, which is better than any punishment."

Gu Youyou found it ridiculous, but said nothing more.

So all those people were merely killed by King Jin for nothing?

But in this society, that really was the case.

Gu Youyou asked, "So will the victims’ families receive any compensation?"

Jin Zijin replied, "They should, but you don’t need to worry about this. The Imperial Court will give an explanation."

She naturally didn’t bother to care; there were so many injustices in the world, and she wasn’t idle with nothing else to do, how could she mind everything? With the recent relief efforts, she had already done her best.

Gu Youyou suddenly remembered something and asked, "Oh, I previously asked someone to collect a large amount of potatoes, it should be time to harvest them."

Jin Zijin frowned slightly, asking, "Why did you collect so many potatoes?"

Gu Youyou explained, "Potatoes grow quickly, especially the autumn potatoes. Plant them next month, and in two or three months, they will be ready to eat. This year, the south suffered from floods, and there may not be enough food to last until the next harvest season, and everyone can’t wait until next spring to start planting crops. I figured potatoes yield high and grow quickly, making them ideal for mass cultivation right now."

Jin Zijin, stunned for a moment, poked Gu Youyou’s head forcefully, saying, "I really want to see what’s inside your brain, you’ve thought it through so thoroughly. This action really helps the Imperial Court a lot."

Chapter 1054: Fundraising

He hugged Gu Youyou tightly in his arms and said, "I can’t let you be at a disadvantage either, so I had the Imperial Court pay silver for your potatoes."

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "I won’t be at a disadvantage, I am still waiting to sell them glass."

Indeed, opening the pastry shop recently, expanding the business, and buying potatoes had cost a significant amount of silver. It was time for her to figure out a way to get some.

"Don’t worry about me; I can find a way to get silver. Of course, I’m not a charity; the Imperial Court has to pay silver for these potatoes."

...

Gu Youyou's board meeting was arranged in a restaurant not far from Jisheng Hall. That day, she had reserved the second floor for the event, turning a large room into a conference area.

She had invited not only the Store Managers from each branch but also some big merchants who were interested in cooperation.

Of course, the first meeting was for her own people. Only after they had come to an agreement would she discuss with the business merchants. So, the merchants were scheduled to come later in the afternoon.

Gu Youyou shared her thoughts with everyone and showed them the plans she had made.

These Shopkeepers were all people who had made a fortune following Gu Youyou, so her position in their hearts was unshakeable; naturally, there were no voices of opposition.

Gu Youyou could lead them to earn even more money; only a fool would be unwilling.

"Doctor Gu, we'll do as you say, we'll follow your lead."

"Well then, since that's the case, all the Shopkeepers know what they should do now, right?"

"We understand!"

From now on, Gu Youyou would personally oversee the overall situation, no longer always sending a maid to run errands, and everybody was very pleased about this.

Seeing Gu Youyou was as exciting as seeing their idol.

Some were so astonished they couldn’t close their mouths, everyone felt honored to meet Gu Youyou in person.

Gu Youyou asked everyone to quiet down and said, "There’s another thing I want to tell you all; in addition to opening the pastry shop, we will expand into another line of business."

Everyone quieted down and listened carefully to what Gu Youyou had to say.

Gu Youyou said, "Previously, we put all our effort into disaster relief and made great achievements. Yesterday, the Emperor wanted to reward me, and the Prince requested on my behalf that the reward be the release of the glass crafting technology, allowing us to produce it ourselves."

Hearing this, everyone’s expression turned awkward.

Someone spoke up, "The art of crafting glass is in the hands of the Imperial Family’s artisans. Of course, as the Emperor’s daughter-in-law, with the Emperor’s consent, you will naturally be taught this technology. But I’ve heard that crafting glass is extremely difficult and the costs are too high. We’re going to expand our businesses, but I’m afraid we won’t have enough silver!"

"Yes, Doctor Gu, I fully support your idea, but silver is a major concern. We spent quite a bit of silver on the disaster relief, and now with opening the pastry shop, silver is a big problem."

Gu Youyou smiled faintly and said, "Don’t worry about the silver, because I’m not planning to monopolize the glass crafting. Instead, I want to do it with wealthy merchants. I think the mere word ’glass’ will interest many merchants with silver..."

"This..." Everyone looked even more bewildered. "If this technology leaks out, how will we make money?"

Some people expressed their disagreement.

They felt that although they had less silver on hand now, as long as they could get through the next few months and the returns from the pastry shop were collected, they could manage on their own. Why let outsiders share in the profits?

Chapter 1055: You Go to Xining

Therefore, Gu Youyou could only explain, "The method I use for firing glass isn't passed down from the palace but my own method. In fact, firing glass isn't difficult, and the cost is very low, it's just that no one knows the method yet.

I'm not creating a high-end product that is expensive because it's rare, but a common good that ordinary people can afford, so it requires a lot of manpower and material resources and needs to be produced in large quantities.

However, precisely because my method has low production costs and the process is simple, it wouldn't be fun to keep it to myself, so it's better to be generous and let everyone contribute funds to finance the project. Together we can do it, and together we can make money..."

Gu Youyou still managed to persuade everyone; she had absolute authority. In fact, speaking to them was just a formality, a sign of respect for everyone. She could have quietly contacted the merchants and started the glass firing business without saying a word.

"Today's meeting is adjourned. Miss Du, please stay."

An ancient business consortium was made very modern by Gu Youyou.

Everyone sat together to discuss matters, instead of the traditional manner where only the biggest boss could sit while the rest of the shopkeepers stood and listened, with very limited right to speak. Gu Youyou's approach made everyone feel respected and important, as if they weren't the lowest class of merchants.

Keep in mind that in this era, the status of merchants was very low, and Gu Youyou's other identity was that of the Prince's consort.

...

The store managers had lunch at the restaurant and left, leaving only Gu Youyou and Miss Du at the restaurant.

With half an hour to go until the appointed time, Miss Du couldn’t help asking, "You seem to be very short on silver, what’s going on?"

Miss Du’s observational skills were also astounding. Gu Youyou had no intention of hiding it from her and whispered, "I’ll let you in on some insider news, there may be a war coming."

"War?" Miss Du was extremely surprised, "With whom?"

Gu Youyou said, "When I returned from the disaster area, I encountered an accident and was captured by the remnants of the third Prince and taken to Xining." She paused before continuing, "Some days ago, the Emperor called the fifth Prince to Beijing, with the intention of seizing the opportunity to kill him, but he escaped."

Miss Du nodded, "I’ve heard about this, it’s well-known. To think he could run away, the fifth Prince is truly formidable!"

Gu Youyou commented, "It’s not that he’s formidable, it’s that when I was in Xining, in their hands, Zijin hijacked the jailer and traded me back, and the Emperor knows about this!"

Miss Du looked at Gu Youyou in astonishment; the Emperor knew about such a thing and agreed to it?

Or was it decided privately by the Prince?

"In short, the Imperial Court is now irreconcilable with the fifth Prince. Before, they were just competing in the shadows without openly breaking face, but now that the mask has been torn off and brought to light, this war must start.

Now that the military forces are ready in all directions, it is feared that they will soon attack Xining. Wars are fought with silver, and the military rations of the Imperial Court all come from the common people, but this year is different, the people have suffered disasters, and the amount of military rations that can

be collected will be greatly reduced, so in the end, they will probably have to scrape it off the merchants. We do big business; naturally, we need to do our part."

Miss Du's expression became grave, "Then should we close our branch in Xining?"

Gu Youyou replied, "No need to close it, the war won't reach the store. You just need to take the time to go to Xining personally and transfer the funds back, leaving only a small part enough for operations. In the future, Xining's accounts should be settled monthly, sending silver back regularly."

Chapter 1056: I Am a Merchant Now

Gu Youyou glanced at the water clock in the corner, guessing that the major bosses were about to arrive.

She stood up, opened the door of the suitcase, and whispered to Miss Du, "It won't be possible to start the campaign that quickly. It will take nearly a month for the troops from Lingnan to reach Xining. You should go there soon, and once the battle starts, it's best not to go in that direction."

The Silk Road leads to Xining, and along that road, there are especially many merchants. It's just that once the fighting starts, merchants might be scared off from traveling there.

Miss Du nodded lightly and said, "There has been less to do lately, I'll arrange it and go."

Miss Du, who partnered with Gu Youyou in business, was not only interested in the affairs of Manxiu Building. She had invested in thirty percent of the silver for this new dessert shop. Furthermore, she owned many other shops, as many of them were launched by her.

All the big bosses nearby Beijing and Manxiu City had arrived. Boss Zhang from the textile workshop, Boss Li, who ran a restaurant specializing in liquors, and Boss Hu, who was looking to get into the jade business.

Especially Boss Hu, he had once acquired a glass bowl pawned by a down-on-his-luck official from the Imperial Court, a single piece he deeply cherished. Unfortunately, as a mere merchant, he had no access to such items and this had always been a source of frustration to him.

Now Gu Youyou was offering to collaborate with them to produce glass, and of course, they were more than willing.

Who wouldn’t want tribute items for the Imperial Palace?

It didn’t really matter whether they were good or not; it was a matter of prestige.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please take a seat inside."

A spacious room greeted them, with a long table at the center instead of the traditional round dining table.

The same kind of wooden stools were placed in front of the table, and on the table itself, there were assorted special pastries, exquisitely made, too beautiful to eat. Yet the scent of milk was so tempting, it tickled one right to the heart.

In the very center of the table, there were beautifully crafted flowers. They weren’t fresh given the season but rather made of silk, looking even more delicate and luscious than real flowers.

Shopkeepers under Gu Youyou were used to these oddities, so they saw nothing unusual. However, this was the first collaboration for these bosses with Gu Youyou, and they were seeing such peculiar things for the first time, naturally arousing their curiosity.

An excited Boss Hu asked, "How are these flowers made? They look just like real ones?" He mainly dealt in jade, but that was not all. Beautiful gold and silver jewelry, some fine craftwork—he sold them all. In his opinion, a flower arrangement such as this could rival a fine piece of craft.

And since this was the first sighting of such flowers for everyone, he, as a discerning merchant, saw a business opportunity.

Gu Youyou smiled faintly and said, "If Boss Hu is interested, I will have someone send a pot to your residence tomorrow."

Boss Hu was pleasantly surprised and hastened to bow and say, "Prince’s Consort, this commoner thanks you in advance."

Gu Youyou said, "Boss Hu, you’re too polite. Today, I am here as a merchant. We are here to discuss business, so you may call me Shopkeeper Gu."

With everyone calling her Shopkeeper Gu, it brought them much closer together and everyone felt more at ease.

However, the status of a merchant was considered the lowest in society, whereas Gu Youyou’s marriage into the Imperial Family was of the highest nobility, making it hard for the others to utter such a title.

Boss Chen said, "Wouldn’t that be disrespectful to the Prince’s Consort then?"

Gu Youyou replied, "Youyou is firstly a doctor, a merchant, and only then a consort. I married into the Imperial Family with the identity of a doctor and a merchant, so there’s nothing about respect or disrespect. We’re all straightforward people; why bother with such trivial formalities?"

Chapter 1057: Win-Win

Gu Youyou spoke like that, and everyone’s apprehensions were completely dispelled.

"Gu Youyou is right," laughed Boss Hu heartily. "We are businessmen, and we don’t care for the pomp and protocols of the nobility. Yu Youyou marrying into the Imperial Family as a merchant is indeed a matter of pride for us!"

"Exactly, haha... Miss Gu is a true hero among women. I hope our cooperation will be pleasant this time!"

"The production of colored glaze is a surefire profit. Gentlemen, I trust that we will work together very pleasantly. Please have a seat."

Miss Du clapped her hands, and soon someone brought in tea, pouring a cup for each businessman at their seat.

"The art of glass-making is complex and has always been in the hands of the Imperial Family. But I hear that Miss Gu has a new method of glass-making, is it true?"

Gu Youyou cast her gaze over the group, saying, "Since I have invited all of you here, it naturally is true. My method is not only simple, but also low-cost. What we aim to do is not to make colored glaze that only the rich can afford, but colored glaze that the common people can afford, which will bring about an enormous change in our lives. Of course, most importantly, it will fill all the businessmen's coffers to the brim!"

Making money is naturally a good thing, and one by one the businessmen's expressions became excited.

However, there were also questions.

Someone asked, "This sounds like a great opportunity, so why doesn't Miss Gu do it herself, rather than partnering with us?"

Gu Youyou replied, "Boss Wang poses a good question, so please allow Miss Du to explain to everyone the reasons for seeking collaboration."

Everyone looked serious, even those few businessmen who couldn't help but sneak a few bites of cake licked the corners of their mouths and looked attentively toward Miss Du.

Miss Du's upbringing made her appear more like a demure maiden.

She rose to her feet, made a slight bow to everyone, and then began to speak.

"Each of the businessmen present today is well-known in both Beijing and near Jinxiu City. Not only in terms of the size of your businesses but also your character and reputation, which are well-regarded in our circles, both Miss Gu and I trust completely.

"Boss Wang also mentioned that glass-making is good business, so why not do it alone instead of inviting everyone to join in? It's because what Miss Gu aims to produce is colored glaze that can enter every

household, changing people’s lives. In turn, the required output will be incredibly large, and the upfront investment of silver will not be insubstantial.

"Everyone knows about the recent floods in the south. Miss Gu played a leading role in the disaster relief, and in exchange, won the Emperor’s grace, allowing us to produce our own colored glaze. But to achieve this leading role, Miss Gu’s Jisheng Hall and my collaboration with Gu Youyou to open Manxiu Building invested a significant amount of silver, especially Jisheng Hall, which provided medicine to treat patients free of charge. All this costs a considerable amount of silver.

"In short, we currently lack sufficient silver and manpower to produce colored glaze on a large scale exclusively. Secondly, everyone is aware of your prestige in the business community. Miss Gu believes that by leveraging your esteemed reputations, we can quickly heat up the popularity of this colored glaze..."

With Miss Du’s detailed explanation, everyone understood.

To make money together is the mark of a merchant with great vision.

At the same time, for such a wonderful opportunity to fall into one’s own lap is an extraordinary stroke of luck.

Now that everyone had reached an intention to cooperate, it was time to discuss how to divide the profits.

Chapter 1058: Mildly Proper

Gu Youyou had long drafted the contract, and she directly handed it over to the various bosses for review.

"Everything about how we’re to proceed and how profits will be distributed is written in the contract. Gentlemen, please read the contract first and if there’s anything you don’t understand, then ask me."

Everyone skeptically took the contract that Miss Du distributed and read it carefully.

Gu Youyou provided the method of production, tools, and technical personnel. The bosses supplied the workers, the silver for purchasing raw materials, and the factory premises. After production, everyone would wholesale to retail shops. Custom orders were an exception!

Regarding pricing, uniform management would be implemented, and undercutting with malicious pricing was prohibited.

This clause was good.

As for profit-sharing, retail sales would split thirty-seventy, and since the bosses were to establish the retail shops, Gu Youyou would only take thirty percent.

Custom orders would be split fifty-fifty.

After everyone reviewed the contract for a long while, it seemed that they were at a slight disadvantage, but Gu Youyou now had the absolute say, for the technology was in her hands. If they were unwilling to participate, there were plenty of others eager to do so.

After a long look, Boss Hu said to everyone, "Gentlemen, this is fairly reasonable, isn't it?"

Although Gu Youyou herself claimed to be nothing more than a merchant, she also had the identity of the Crown Prince's consort. To be able to get so much in business dealings with the officials, they were already getting a good deal.

Some had to provide everything themselves yet received a smaller share. Compared to this, Gu Youyou was indeed being quite fair.

"Boss Gu is genuinely interested in doing business with us. I, Chen, will sign this contract."

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Gentlemen, please look over it carefully. Once we start cooperating, you're not allowed to back out halfway through. Moreover, it's forbidden to learn the technology and then break away to work on your own. This contract will be submitted to the Governor's Office for stamping!"

Everyone expressed understanding, knowing that in business, the last thing one wanted was for partners to turn their backs after tasting success.

The bosses patted their chests, guaranteeing that they were businessmen of integrity and would never engage in such activities.

Nevertheless, signatures were still required.

Today’s partnership went smoothly, and Gu Youyou collected more than a dozen contracts.

As they were leaving, the major bosses still couldn’t stop thinking about Gu Youyou’s pastries.

Miss Du smiled and said, "These pastries are specially supplied by Ten Li Fragrant Sweet Shop. After the fifteenth, a trial confectionery store will open in both Beijing and Jinxiu City. I hope the bosses will honor us with your presence!"

"The shop that’s being renovated in the east of the city?" Boss Hu asked in surprise.

"That’s the one."

"Very well, I, Hu, will definitely visit."

"The flavor is quite unique and delicious; this is the best pastry I’ve ever tasted. Boss Gu and Boss Du are truly outstanding figures among women; no wonder your Manxiu Building makes a fortune. With such flavors, you’ll guarantee that the ladies and misses from wealthy families will flock to you like egrets to a fish, and it might be just like the clothes from Manxiu Building—so in demand that they’re hard to get."

...

Gu Youyou’s cake shop was successfully set up, and the expansion of business was also very smooth.

The first batch of glass had been produced; different from traditional colored glaze, it was more practical and beautiful.

They decided not to sell the first batch of glass to anyone, but rather, a few bosses would pool funds to build a landmark-like building on the streets of Beijing. This glass would be used on that building; a three-story structure, with the first floor serving as an exhibition hall, the second as their conference room, and the third for client meetings. This was also an idea from Gu Youyou.

Simple, undecorated glass was easy to produce, and what would be on display in this exhibition hall was a unique type of glass, more artistic, specifically targeted for sales to high-end clientele among the officials and the nobility.

Chapter 1059: Heading to Xining

Meanwhile, the Imperial Court and Xining were also preparing for war.

Lingnan had to have the Marquess on guard, so he could not leave.

Seizing this opportunity, he sent his daughter and son-in-law to gain some experience, so the ones to lead the fifty thousand troops to Xining were Yue Ruxue and her husband, Yi Qiuping.

Yue Rujing’s identity was special; he had to stay in Sanqing Temple, so he could not join the battle even if he wanted to.

Beiping was close by, and it was said that troops and generals were being dispatched, while on the East Sea side, Huo Li had already returned and General Che was preparing.

General Lu had received the Emperor’s command and was ready to lead fifty thousand troops westward at any moment. Everything was well organized, and the great battle was about to unfold.

Gu Youyou prepared clothes for Jin Zijin, knowing he too was to go. The main commander of this battle was not yet decided, raising fears of another turmoil.

"Once you are pregnant, I’ll leave," he said.

Gu Youyou punched him softly in the chest and said, "What are you thinking? Wait until you come back, then get pregnant. If I were pregnant and you weren't here, both the child and I would feel very insecure."

"But if you were pregnant, it would be safer," Jin Zijin seriously told her.

Gu Youyou understood his meaning instantly and sighed, "How can one be sure of such things? If it happens, so be it, but if not, I will go with you. Don't underestimate me; I know all the thirty-six stratagems."

"You know the thirty-six stratagems?" Jin Zijin chortled, "What exactly did you learn in the past? You, a woman..."

"Hey, I don't like to hear 'woman' this and 'woman' that; women are not inferior to men. If you think women are not as good as men, it's only because society has decided so, not because they lack intelligence. Look at Searcy; how many men can match her? If she were a man, where would Lu Tianning stand in the Lu Family?"

Jin Zijin scooped him up and threw him on the bed, saying, "Never mind others, let's focus on the child."

"Hey, I haven't finished my business plan; wait a sec," Gu Youyou tried to push him away.

Jin Zijin's breathing quickened as he said, "Why didn't you write it earlier instead of fussing over those clothes?"

"I was afraid you'd leave in a hurry and I wouldn't have enough time."

"That doesn't stop us from having a child; write it tomorrow."

"Beauty brings trouble, at the cost of my silver..."

Miss Du, accompanied by her maid Cuiya, set out for Xining.

Because of the Silk Road, the business for Manxiu products in Xining was quite substantial, surpassing the sums of Manxiu City and Beijing combined.

Such a big deal necessitated Miss Du's personal attention.

Many merchants were headed from Beijing to Xining, banding together for added safety.

Miss Du was well-known in both Manxiu City and Beijing, so her traveling as a woman on business didn't seem too unusual.

Of course, there were other women on the road apart from Miss Du and Cuiya, some accompanying the merchant caravans.

With everyone talking and laughing, the journey was far from lonely.

"Miss Du, you still handle your business personally; it must be hard," said an older woman.

"Some businesses must be handled in person; it's all for the sake of business, not about hardship. Madam Luo, why are you personally running a business as well?"

Madam Luo sighed, "My son is ill; I had no choice but to go!"

Chapter 1060: There are Bandits

Madam Luo was a tea merchant in Jinxiu City. When she was young, her husband died, leaving her to raise their son alone and manage their extensive family business. She grew the Luo Family's tea business even larger.

Unfortunately, when her son grew up, he was frail and sickly. With no other choice and despite her age, she continued to travel to conduct business.

The journeys were incredibly tiring but for the sake of her large household, she endured.

Miss Du greatly admired Madam Luo and during a break, she had Cuiya, the maid, deliver some snacks to Madam Luo.

Madam Luo was very generous in return, having her own maid send back some fruit to Miss Du.

Their group consisted of five or six firms. Xining was vast and sparsely populated so by the time they reached a suitable inn for a mid-journey rest around lunchtime, everyone started to eat something quickly before preparing to set off again.

On the low hills, dust filled the air, causing Miss Du to slightly frown as she ate.

"Madam Luo, what's that over there?" asked Miss Du.

This was Miss Du's first trip far from home, and she was unfamiliar with many things along the way, always asking Madam Luo for guidance.

Madam Luo glanced over, set down her water skin, and said, "I'm afraid it might be bandits."

"Bandits?" Miss Du's face paled, but seeing that everyone just glanced and did not treat the possible arrival of bandits as a serious matter, she gradually relaxed.

The area was desolate, a common spot for bandits, and it was Miss Du's bad luck to encounter them.

Miss Du, puzzled, asked, "If there are bandits coming, why isn't everyone running?"

Madam Luo, unfazed, replied, "It's quite normal for bandits to be here, but Miss Du doesn't need to worry. We just need to pay them some money, and they won't trouble us."

"Bandits can be reasoned with like that?" Miss Du incredulously looked towards the approaching dust cloud.

Madam Luo explained, "Bandits are after wealth, not lives. There’s no need for them to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. They collect some money each time, allow the merchants to go, and can collect again next time. If they rob merchants to ruin all at once, there won’t be a next time. Nowadays, bandits have also gotten smarter."

Miss Du, "..."

"How much money should we give them then?"

"It depends. Their leader will decide based on the actual situation of the merchants. Miss Du, since you do substantial business, it will likely be more."

"Ah...?"

Miss Du had never encountered such a bizarre situation in her life.

She had never encountered bandits either and was somewhat worried.

She pulled her cloak over her head and called out to Cuiya, who was boiling tea water behind her, "Cuiya, stop boiling the water; the bandits are here."

Cuiya, also having never faced bandits and imagining them as ruthless, was scared out of her wits. The tea water she was about to boil spilled onto the ground. Without needing further instructions from Miss Du, the tea didn’t need to be made anymore.

Cuiya quickly tidied up and gathered everything onto the wagon, frantically rushing about when the bandits had already crossed the nearby low hills and were fast approaching on horseback.

"Miss," facing the bandits, Cuiya was terrified but positioned herself in front of Miss Du to protect her.

Miss Du said, "Cuiya, step aside, go prepare some money."

Madam Luo and the others did not act as if they were facing a great enemy, appearing unsurprised and naturally took out the boxes filled with silver.

It seemed as though they were prepared beforehand.

Miss Du breathed a sigh of relief, just hoping the bandits wouldn't be excessively greedy but from what Madam Luo hinted, it seemed they wouldn't be too unreasonable since they were after a steady source of income.