

Mythical 57

Chapter 57: Generous Terms

"That formula has indeed been verified by the two of us. It's truly a technology that benefits the entire world. Although we, Su Shuang and I, are horse merchants from Zhongshan and not experts in the salt industry, commerce has its commonalities. We plan to purchase land in Qingzhou to operate the salt business," Su Shuang laughed heartily, making no attempt to hide his excitement. After all, this was an immensely profitable venture, providing a commodity essential to everyone. While horses might become hard to sell, salt had never faced such an issue in the four hundred years of the Han Dynasty.

Chen Xi concealed a smirk. "Commonalities in commerce," he thought. "What you really mean is that you're planning to exploit this opportunity. Even if other salt merchants were to cut prices, you would still make a profit. In an industry where making money is almost like robbery, as long as you don't get assassinated or have your technology stolen, you could dominate the salt market of the Han Dynasty."

"I suppose you understand how profitable this industry is. But don't expect to get it all. You wouldn't want to end up like those who were executed and had their properties confiscated during Emperor Wu's reign, would you?" Chen Xi said nonchalantly, referencing a chilling possibility that would unsettle any merchant.

"Of course not," Zhang Shiping said, visibly nervous as he wiped his sweat. "We've spent our entire lives in business just to leave something for our descendants. Even if they turn out to be incompetent, at least they'll have something to fall back on."

Chen Xi raised an eyebrow, observing Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping. These two were no fools, skillfully invoking familial loyalty to sway the conversation.

"Yes, it's not easy for anyone. We're all doing this for the sake of our descendants. Since we share the same goal, let's discuss the details in the courtyard," Chen Xi said, feigning a compassionate demeanor to emphasize their shared purpose.

"Please, Advisor Chen, lead the way," Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping visibly relaxed. Such immense wealth was within reach, and they struggled to maintain their composure, inadvertently revealing their intentions.

Chen Xi smiled and turned to lead the way, with Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping following closely. For ancient people, this was an enormous fortune, but to Chen Xi, it was just another task. What troubled him more was the lack of paper...

Chen Xi yawned and pulled a roll of white cloth from a pile of bamboo slips, tossing it casually to Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping. "I was bored while waiting for you, so I drafted the contract. If there's anything you need or find unsuitable, let me know, and we can discuss it further."

Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping took the cloth and began to read through it. After a quick review, they both sighed in relief. The terms were reasonable, without the domineering stance typically seen in government contracts. Each clause was fair and logical.

However, they hesitated at the last two clauses. One specified the regions where they could sell salt, and the other required all sales agents and distributors to register. The final clause stipulated that the original version of the contract would remain with Chen Xi, which seemed reasonable enough.

"Advisor Chen, we don't quite understand the second-to-last clause," Su Shuang finally said after much deliberation.

"Oh, that just means I need to know who you're selling the salt to, so they can sign and leave a thumbprint. This way, I can offer some protection if problems arise," Chen Xi explained nonchalantly.

Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping frowned slightly. This would reveal their entire distribution network to the government, making it easy to shut them down if things went wrong.

"Don't worry, I'm not looking to shut you down. I just want to know the main sales channels within the Han Dynasty. You can sell freely outside the empire, and we have the first right to purchase any goods you bring back. But I'm not interested in the final distribution channels," Chen Xi explained further, seeing their concern.

"I only need to know the top three layers of distribution. When you sell salt to major merchants in each province, they need to sign. Then, when those merchants distribute it to regional sellers, they need to sign. After that, I don't need to know," Chen Xi said, easing their worries. He wasn't interested in their sales channels but rather the secondary distributors.

"If you're worried about a government crackdown, I can classify your salt as official salt. As long as you don't break the law, no one will touch you. That's my bottom line," Chen Xi said more sternly, almost hinting that if they didn't agree, he would find someone else to negotiate with.

Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping exchanged glances and nodded slightly. The terms were already generous, and pushing further might provoke Chen Xi, potentially losing everything.

"Very well, we'll sign now," Su Shuang said, eager to conclude the agreement.

"Great," Chen Xi replied. Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping each picked up a brush, signed their names on the white cloth, and then bit their thumbs to leave a thumbprint, eschewing the ink pad.

"It's settled. I'll keep the original, and here's a copy for you, signed and sealed," Chen Xi said, retrieving another piece of cloth from the bamboo slips. He signed and pressed his thumb into an ink pad, marking the document before handing it over.

"Compare them to make sure there are no discrepancies," Chen Xi said, watching as Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping checked the documents before storing their copies.

"Advisor Chen, the ten thousand dan of grain will be delivered in two batches. The first two thousand dan will arrive by land within three days. The remaining eight thousand dan will be shipped to Qingzhou by the Zhen family, then transported to Jinan via the Yellow River, and finally delivered to Mount Tai by land. Please be prepared to receive them," Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping said, their faces glowing with satisfaction as they tucked their copies of the contract into their robes.

"The Zhen family, huh," Chen Xi mused, nodding. "I suppose you're eager to buy land in Qingzhou for your salt operations. Let me wish you great success in your venture. I'm sure you don't want me to hold you up any longer."

"Thank you for your kind words, Advisor Chen. We won't stay any longer. Our stewards will come soon to handle the rest of the matters," Su Shuang and Zhang Shiping said hurriedly, eager to leave now that they had what they wanted. After a quick bow, they departed.