

## Golden 104

### Chapter 104 Picture within a Picture (Part 1)

"Clang...clang...clang..."

The crisp sound of the hammer striking the stone carried far into the night.

But when Zhuang Rui picked up the stone again, he was disappointed to find that the few blows had only left a few insignificant dents on the surface of the stone, and had not even knocked off a piece of stone.

If someone with even a slight understanding of jade gambling saw this scene, they would definitely laugh their heads off. They've never seen anyone try to smash jade out of a rock with a hammer. It wasn't until several months later that Zhuang Rui realized how foolish and ridiculous his actions had been.

The little white lion, who had followed Zhuang Rui out of the house, looked at its owner with some confusion. It clearly couldn't understand why Zhuang Rui would take a hammer and hit its toy.

Picking up the stone from the ground, Zhuang Rui was somewhat troubled. This thing lived up to the old saying, like a stone from a latrine—stinky and hard. For a moment, Zhuang Rui had no way to deal with it. Obviously, the idea of cracking it open with a hammer was impossible. At this time, Zhuang Rui did not know that there were more than a dozen types of stone-cutting machines in the world specifically designed for gambling on stones.

"Never mind, I'll just find a grinding wheel to polish it in a few days."

After calling out to White Lion, Zhuang Rui went to the supermarket at the entrance of the community, bought a few packs of cigarettes, and went home. He had a lot to do tomorrow. In the morning, he was going to visit the mounting master with Song Jun, and in the afternoon, he was going to visit the site of the mastiff kennel with Liu Chuan. He probably wouldn't be able to take care of these stones for the time being.

Although jadeite was found in the stones, Zhuang Rui didn't take them seriously. Back in 2003, everyone knew that diamonds were valuable, but only people in certain circles knew the true value of top-quality jadeite.

"Hmm, stop fooling around, I'm getting up now."

Zhuang Rui, fast asleep, suddenly felt something wet on his face. Opening his eyes, he saw the little white lion at the head of the bed, licking him with its tongue and dragging the blanket to the floor with its tiny paws. Looking out the window, he saw it was already bright daylight. Zhuang Rui glanced at his phone on the bedside table; it was almost 7 o'clock. He quickly got up.

Since getting the white lion, Zhuang Rui's life has become regular again. Every morning, he has to take the little guy for a run because the little guy is very sensible and never poops or pees at home. He always holds it until morning and takes care of it outside. Then Zhuang Rui has to prepare breakfast for it, usually dog food made with corn porridge and a few dog calcium tablets. Only after taking care of this little darling does Zhuang Rui have time to wash up and eat breakfast.

"Sorry, the number you dialed is not in service. Sorry, the number you dialed is not in service."

As Zhuang Rui was preparing breakfast for the little white lion and sitting at the table drinking the porridge his mother had cooked, his phone rang. The little white lion's ears perked up immediately, and it ran into Zhuang Rui's room and grabbed the phone.

Zhuang Rui patted the little guy's fluffy head approvingly, then took the phone from the white lion's mouth. He saw that it was Song Jun calling.

"Hey, Brother Song, didn't we agree on nine o'clock?"

"Go early, the old gentleman called and said he has another guest at 10 o'clock, so he wants us to go early. I'm on my way now. You live on Zhongshu Street, right? Wait for me at the intersection, I'll be there soon."

Song Jun's voice came through the phone. Zhuang Rui quickly swallowed the steamed bun in his mouth, returned to his room, took the leather case containing the "Li Duanduan Picture" in his hand, told his mother, and hurriedly went downstairs with the little white lion.

"Let's go, get in the car."

Just as they reached the intersection, a black Mercedes-Benz stopped in front of Zhuang Rui. Song Jun rolled down the window and greeted Zhuang Rui.

After opening the back door of the Mercedes and letting the little white lion get in, Zhuang Rui sat in the passenger seat. He glanced back and saw two little guys sitting side by side in the back seat. It turned out that Song Jun had also brought out the golden retriever puppy.

"Hey, do something about your dog, this is unreasonable."

Looking in the rearview mirror, Song Jun noticed that as soon as the white lion got into the car, it pushed his golden retriever aside and made threatening growling noises, which immediately made him very unhappy.

"White Lion, sit still."

Zhuang Rui called out towards the back door, but the little guy jumped onto Zhuang Rui from between the seats. Helpless, Zhuang Rui could only hug it.

"By the way, Brother Zhuang, let me tell you about the old man we're going to meet later. His surname is Fang, and he's a representative figure among Yangzhou mounters. He's originally from Pengcheng, and now he's returned to his roots to retire. This old man has a rather eccentric temper. He might mount the paintings and calligraphy he values for free, but if he doesn't like them, no matter how much money you offer, he won't pay any attention to you. Maybe he'll do it for my sake, but be prepared to be ripped off. This old man is ruthless."

While driving, Song Jun gave instructions to Zhuang Rui. Although he hadn't seen the painting in Zhuang Rui's hand yet, he could tell from his tone that he wasn't optimistic about the painting that Zhuang Rui had bought at the black market on the grassland.

"It's alright, Brother Song. As long as we can replace the scroll rod, it doesn't matter whether we reframe it or not. I brought 30,000 yuan with me, that should be enough, right?"

Zhuang Rui pretended to be very casual and replied casually that if this old man Fang was really a top figure in the mounting industry, he would naturally be able to see the trickery in this painting.

"You're quite generous, aren't you? You only spend a few thousand on a painting, but you're planning to spend thirty thousand on framing it. Are you planning to resell it to someone else for a higher price?"

As Song Jun spoke, the car had already headed towards the Guishan Han Tomb on the outskirts of the city. There were many building materials markets along this road, and Zhuang Rui saw that some market entrances were filled with people using electric saws to cut wood, making a loud roaring sound.

"Once it's framed, I'll sell it to someone else. Don't try to steal it, Brother Song."

Zhuang Rui looked at the chainsaw, and something seemed to come to mind. He casually chatted with Song Jun.

"By the way, I can look for one of those small, manual cutting machines."

Zhuang Rui cursed himself for being an idiot. Near his old house, there used to be a quarry that sold stone carvings. Back then, Zhuang Rui often saw stone carvers using small manual cutting machines to process the more delicate parts of the stone carvings. He figured that cutting a stone shouldn't be a problem.

"If it were an authentic work by Tang Bohu, I might be interested. But let me tell you, Zhuang Rui, that painting, 'Li Duanduan,' is safely in the Nanjing Museum. You can keep this one for yourself; if you hang it out, people will laugh at you."

As Song Jun spoke, he stopped the car. Only then did Zhuang Rui realize they had arrived at their destination. He opened the car door, picked up the little white lion, and got out.

"Zhuang Rui, leave the little white lion in the car. If Grandpa Fang agrees to frame it for you, he'll need some quiet time. These two little things are too noisy."

After hearing Song Jun's words, Zhuang Rui comforted the little guy, put him back in the car, and then, holding the scroll in his hand, walked with Song Jun towards a courtyard about 10 meters ahead.

Grandpa Fang's house is located in the urban-rural fringe of Pengcheng, nestled against the mountains and beside the water. A row of willow trees is planted in front of the courtyard, just as they are turning green. Upon entering the courtyard, Zhuang Rui saw two vegetable plots planted in the yard, and an elderly man with gray hair was hoeing the ground.

"Grandpa Fang, you're still so healthy!"

Upon seeing the old man, Song Jun quickly walked a few steps forward and took the hoe from his hand.

"That brat, he never comes here unless there's something wrong, but he always thinks of me. When I see Brother Song, I'll definitely tell on you. Alright, alright, stop showing off."

The old man watched Song Jun pretending to hoe the ground and kicked him. Song Jun didn't dare to dodge and took the kick on his buttocks. Song Jun was over forty years old, but he didn't seem embarrassed at all and kept smiling.

Only then did Zhuang Rui get a clear look at the old man's face. He had snow-white hair, a rosy complexion, and very delicate skin. It would not be an exaggeration to describe him as having white hair and a youthful face. At first glance, he did not look like an old man in his eighties at all. However, there was a hint of vicissitude in his eyes from time to time.

"How is your grandfather's health?"

The old man nodded to Zhuang Rui and asked Song Jun.

"Thanks to you, Grandpa is in good health. He's incredibly quick when he's disciplining my dad. By the way, when I went back to Beijing recently, Grandpa said he wanted to invite you to stay at his house for a while."

"I'm not going. This place is fine. Why should one be buried in one's hometown? There are green hills everywhere in life. I've been away from my hometown for decades. I've finally returned home after completing my studies. It's lucky that these old bones can be buried here now."

The old man sighed, glanced at the leather case in Zhuang Rui's hand, and then asked, "Brother Song, have you found another treasure? Come on, let's go inside and take a look."

The old man walked steadily. When he reached the door, he washed his hands and led the two into the living room. A middle-aged woman in her forties, who looked like the old man's caregiver, came up and served Song Jun and Zhuang Rui a cup of tea before leaving.

"Give it to me, let me take a look first."

The old man wasn't as difficult as Song Jun had described. After entering the house, he dried his hands and readily took the leather case from Zhuang Rui, unzipped it, and took out the scroll inside.

"Come on, young man, help me open this painting."

The old man probably mistook Zhuang Rui for a follower of Song Jun, and tossed him a pair of white gloves, gesturing for Zhuang Rui to put them on.

On the rectangular table in the living room, Zhuang Rui and Grandpa Fang each held one side of the scroll rod and spread the painting out to both sides. However, before the scroll was even half open, the old man's face already showed displeasure.

"You little brat, how dare you ask me to frame something like this? Do you think you can kill me because I'm a lazy old man with nothing better to do?"

When the scroll was fully unrolled, Old Master Fang was furious. He had handled more authentic paintings and calligraphy by famous artists in his life than any other collector in the world, so his eyesight was naturally exceptional. At a glance, he could tell the painting was genuine.