

Golden 11

Chapter 11: Broken Book

When Zhuang Rui first graduated from university, Liu Chuan encouraged him to join the business. However, Zhuang Rui felt he shouldn't waste his four years of university education, and besides, Liu Chuan's business was already on track; joining would just be taking advantage of him, which wasn't very interesting. So, he consistently declined. Now that the pawnshop was offering him a promotion, he was even more determined and didn't respond to Liu Chuan's suggestion.

"You scoundrel, you're all warm and cozy inside, while an old lady outside is taking shelter from the snow. Why don't you let her come in and warm up? You grew up learning from Lei Feng, but now you've become like Huang Shiren. I'll tell my mom when we get back, and I guarantee you won't have a good New Year."

Through the glass door, Zhuang Rui saw the old woman shivering in the cold wind and felt a pang of pity, so he spoke up.

"Huh? There was no one at the door just now. I didn't know. Please don't tell Mom, or she'll scold me again. I'll invite her in right away." Although Liu Chuan looked fierce, he was actually kind-hearted. When he saw the old lady outside, he quickly pushed open the glass door.

"Auntie, come in and warm yourself up. Wait until the snow lightens a bit before you leave. It's too cold outside," Liu Chuan's voice rang out. However, perhaps because his face was quite distinctive, the old lady stared at Liu Chuan for a moment and then shook her head firmly.

Seeing this, Zhuang Rui also went outside and said, "Auntie, come in and warm up. The snow will continue to fall, and we're not bad people.

"Well... thank you."

When the old lady saw Zhuang Rui, the wary expression on her face relaxed a lot. After hesitating for a moment, she agreed. Liu Chuan was extremely annoyed. This shop was his, but Zhuang Rui was the one being thanked. This guy had always been the good guy since he was a child. It was really unfair.

With outsiders in the shop, Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan were no longer as unrestrained in their conversation as before. After leading the old lady to the stove to warm up, Liu Chuan started playing his Super Mario game again. His clenched teeth and furious expression made him look anything but a good person. The old lady clutched her package tightly and carefully moved her stool further away, as if she would only feel safe if she kept a distance from Liu Chuan.

"Auntie, what brings you here on such a cold day? Are you buying a pet for your child?" Zhuang Rui asked, noticing the old lady's somewhat reserved demeanor.

"Young man, don't joke around. We don't even have enough chickens and ducks to raise in our village. How can we have time to raise these things? Isn't this just a waste of money?" The old lady saw the pet pictures on the wall of the shop and knew what this place sold.

Upon hearing the old lady's words, Liu Chuan's lips twitched, as if he wanted to say something but didn't. He was definitely unhappy; if everyone thought like the old lady, he wouldn't be able to continue his business.

"Then what is this...?" Zhuang Rui poured a cup of hot tea and brought it to the old lady.

The old lady already had something on her mind, and now that she had met Zhuang Rui, she spilled her beans and told him everything.

This old lady was originally from Jiexiang, Shandong, and her surname was Wang. According to her, her family used to be a wealthy family, and her ancestors had produced high-ranking officials. However, they had declined in the past. In the 1970s, she married into Tongshan County, Pengcheng. Her husband was a skilled carpenter, and although the family was not rich, they were able to make a living.

The family's two sons are both promising. The elder son is a senior in Nanjing and will graduate in a few months after the New Year. The younger son also passed the college entrance examination this year. However, with two college students to support, the family's finances have become strained. They have accumulated a lot of debt to relatives and friends. They have managed to scrape together the tuition fees for both sons by borrowing from all sides. But in order to earn more money, her husband went up the mountain to steal timber. However, he was discovered by the forest rangers and fell down the mountain in a hurry, breaking his leg. Not only was he injured, but he also had to be fined 5,000 yuan, which plunged the family into distress.

When the old lady married into the family, her family didn't bring much as a dowry, only a few old books. They said these books would have been very valuable in prosperous times, so the old lady treasured them. She hadn't even taken them out when her sons were in school. Now that her husband is in the hospital and they don't have the money for treatment, he might lose a leg. That's why she secretly took out the few books that were hidden at the bottom of her trunk and came to Pengcheng to see if she could sell them.

After arriving in Pengcheng, she asked a few people and learned that the book should be sold in the antique market. The old lady braved the heavy snow to come, but she did not expect the market to be deserted. She went to several shops to ask, and after looking at the books, they all said that the books were not worth much, only five yuan a copy, take it or leave it.

The antique market is covered in snow, so you can't set up a stall. The old lady didn't know what to do. It was already afternoon, and she was thinking of finding a car to go back to Tongshan County in a while. Just now, she was standing in front of Liu Chuan's shop, blaming herself for not getting things done and spending more than ten yuan on a bus ticket.

Upon hearing that the books were family heirlooms, Zhuang Rui's heart stirred. His own couplet was also a family heirloom. So he said, "Auntie, may I take a look at your books?"

The old lady was there to sell books. After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, she opened the package in her hand, took out two books with yellowed pages and worn edges, and handed them to Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui carefully took the book. To prevent the old lady from seeing the strange phenomenon in his eyes, he held the book up to his eyes to block her view. He then focused on the book, but to his disappointment, there was no unusual movement of spiritual energy. He withdrew the spiritual energy from his eyes and then began to examine the contents of the book.

The two books were a set of two volumes, titled "On the Thought of the Wei and Jin Dynasties," and written by Liu Dajie. Zhuang Rui glanced at the publication date; it was published by Zhonghua Book Company in December 1939. They weren't rare or valuable ancient books; at best, they were just early printed editions. Some large libraries had them in their possession. Zhuang Rui wasn't interested in these kinds of books. Since they couldn't enhance his understanding of spirituality, they were useless. Shaking his head, Zhuang Rui prepared to return the two books.

"Young man, I have another one here. Those people were being unreasonable, so I didn't show it to them. Do you think this one is valuable..." Seeing Zhuang Rui carefully examining the book in his hand, a

glimmer of hope appeared in the old lady's eyes. She carefully took another book out of her bundle and handed it to Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui first placed the two books he was holding on the table before taking the book the old lady handed him. He frowned before even looking at it, because the book was so worn out that the words on the cover were almost illegible. Zhuang Rui could only vaguely make out the four characters "Xiang Zu Bi Yan," which should have been handwritten with a brush. There was no signature on it. It was quite like the scene in the TV show where "insects and rats have chewed up the tattered book."

Since looking at it wouldn't consume any spiritual energy in his eyes, Zhuang Rui didn't open the book. He simply focused on reading it, though he didn't have much hope.