

Golden 122

Chapter 122 A Failed Attempt to Steal a Chicken Backfires (Part 3)

At this moment, Qian Yaosi appeared quite magnanimous, turning on all the lights in the shop, illuminating the more than thirty square meters space as bright as day, looking completely confident.

Seeing that the shop assistants had already taken all the porcelain off the shelf, Zhuang Rui walked over with an air of importance, taking out a magnifying glass about the size of a thumbnail from his pocket as he went.

Zhuang Rui obtained this thing from Song Jun when he was in Song Jun's shop. He did it not for any other reason than to pretend to be someone else in certain situations and to conceal the function of his eyes. It was small and he usually carried it with him. He never expected it to come in handy today.

When Qian Yaosi saw that Zhuang Rui actually carried a magnifying glass with him, he was first stunned, and then laughed to himself. He was not afraid that Zhuang Rui did not understand, but he was afraid that Zhuang Rui did not understand deeply. The more knowledgeable a person is, the more likely they are to have a vague understanding of these things.

Moreover, there are several high-quality porcelain replicas on the table. If Qian Yaosi didn't examine them carefully, he might have been fooled. Although these are high-quality replicas, they cost at least ten thousand to eight thousand. Qian Yaosi paid a high price to have them made using ancient techniques and formulas. Their shapes and glazes are almost indistinguishable from the real thing.

Those high-quality porcelain replicas were displayed on the top shelf. The shop assistant had to use a ladder to bring them down. They were specially prepared for officials who liked to show off their refined tastes or wealthy bosses. Just imagine displaying such a piece of porcelain in your office—whether it be antique and simple, or exquisite and gorgeous—it would certainly reflect the owner's status and taste.

Moreover... Manager Qian's eyes glanced casually to the side. He was absolutely certain that Zhuang Rui would not be able to find that obvious object. Although it was used for fishing, it just so happened that Manager Qian himself had used it today.

Zhuang Rui was currently holding a large blue-and-white porcelain bowl, pretending to examine it. From his perspective a month ago, this bowl wasn't much different from the large soup bowl he used at

home; the one at home also had blue-and-white decoration, and its design looked clearer and more beautiful than the one in his hand.

However, after getting to know Song Jun and others, and especially after returning to Pengcheng from Tibet and being able to distinguish different types of minerals, Zhuang Rui put a lot of effort into appreciating ceramics and jade. His skill level had improved significantly compared to before. However, this was his first time handling actual antique porcelain. When he first picked it up, he compared it to the porcelain bowls produced in Jingdezhen at home.

If Qian Yaosi knew what Zhuang Rui was thinking at this moment, he would definitely be so angry that he would vomit blood. This Kangxi blue and white bowl was specially commissioned by him. At that time, it followed the ancient firing process. From selecting materials to shaping the blank, applying glaze, and firing in the kiln, it cost Qian Yaosi a lot of money and resources to successfully fire it. It can be said that although this item is a fake, it is still very expensive.

However, when Zhuang Rui appraises objects, it's easy to determine whether they are genuine or fake, but difficult to understand the underlying principles. Even if you bring him a piece of Yuan blue and white porcelain, he can tell you whether it's genuine or fake, but to know the truth, it's like asking a blind person for directions.

Just as he was about to use his spiritual energy to distinguish them, Zhuang Rui suddenly had an idea. This was a rare opportunity to get hands-on experience. What Zhuang Rui lacked most right now was hands-on experience with antiques. Hearing the fat shopkeeper's confident words, he figured that even if these porcelain pieces were fake, they were fakes that looked very real. It would be perfect for Zhuang Rui to use them to verify the knowledge he had learned.

After having this thought, Zhuang Rui put aside his joking thoughts and began to seriously examine the blue and white porcelain bowl in his hand.

Blue and white porcelain, also known as white-ground blue and white porcelain, often simply called blue and white, is one of the mainstream varieties of Chinese porcelain. The origins of blue and white porcelain can be traced back to the Tang and Song dynasties, while mature blue and white porcelain appeared in the Hutian Kiln of Jingdezhen during the Yuan dynasty. Blue and white porcelain uses cobalt ore containing cobalt oxide as a raw material, drawing patterns on the ceramic body, then covering it with a layer of transparent glaze, and firing it once in a high-temperature reducing flame.

This is a large blue-and-white porcelain bowl with a figure design. The rim flares outwards, and the bottom has a ring foot. The porcelain body is fine and the walls are thin. The glaze of the entire bowl is creamy white. Zhuang Rui examined it carefully and concluded that the painting on the outer wall of the bowl should be the "Elegant Gathering at the Western Garden" scene. He had recently seen this painting in a book about fan paintings.

Zhuang Rui was thrilled to find that he had actually put his knowledge to use. That was the charm of antiques; the sense of accomplishment when you use your knowledge to distinguish between genuine and fake items was indescribable.

The painting "The Elegant Gathering at the Western Garden" depicts a gathering of 16 literati, led by Su Shi, at the Western Garden, where Wang Jinqing, the Imperial Son-in-Law and Commander-in-Chief, composed poems, painted, discussed Zen, and debated Taoism. Mi Fu's "Record of the Elegant Gathering at the Western Garden" documented this grand event. Subsequently, the theme of "The Elegant Gathering at the Western Garden" has been a popular subject for literati painters throughout the ages, thus becoming a classic theme for fan paintings and porcelain paintings.

The painting on the exterior of this large blue-and-white bowl depicts only selected scenes, executed with skillful brushwork, vibrant blue glaze, and an elegant, antique style. At the bottom of the bowl is a six-character mark in underglaze blue, encircled by a double circle, reading "Made in the Kangxi Reign of the Great Qing Dynasty." The characters are dignified, neat, and powerful, with ample spacing between them. Based on Zhuang Rui's understanding of blue-and-white porcelain, this should be a genuine Kangxi piece.

Zhuang Rui recalled what he had read in the book: Kangxi blue and white porcelain was renowned for its fine body and glaze, vibrant blue color, simple and diverse shapes, and beautiful decorations. The glaze of this blue and white bowl was rich and lustrous, and under the light, it gave a subtle, moist feeling. Comparing the two, Zhuang Rui believed that even if this blue and white bowl was not made in the Kangxi imperial kiln, it should still be an antique.

"Brother Zhuang, this Kangxi blue and white porcelain bowl, although it was made in a folk kiln during the Kangxi period, is a rare and genuine masterpiece among folk kilns. It is rare to find an authentic Kangxi porcelain piece that is as good as new. Its value is no less than that of an ordinary official kiln piece. Brother Zhuang has a good eye. Is this the one you've set your sights on?"

Just as Zhuang Rui had made a decision about the blue and white bowl in his mind, he heard Qian Yaosi's voice. Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui's old face involuntarily turned red. Fortunately, he was not fair-skinned to begin with, so the redness was not very noticeable. The reason why Zhuang Rui thought it

was a Kangxi official kiln porcelain was because most folk kiln blue and white porcelain did not have a reign mark, but often had a hall name mark, also known as a studio mark.

"Manager Qian, the marks used for Kangxi folk kiln blue and white porcelain are not the 'Made in the Kangxi period of the Great Qing Dynasty' mark. You're trying to fool me. This is a modern imitation, just a pretty good one."

After hearing Qian Yaosi's words, Zhuang Rui's heart stirred. If this old fox spoke like that, the object in his hand was probably fake. He took a closer look and sure enough, there was no spiritual energy in it. It was probably not even from the Republic of China era, let alone the Kangxi era. It was a modern imitation that had been artificially aged.

"Brother Zhuang, that's not how it works. Although there are relatively few pieces of Kangxi folk kiln porcelain with the mark 'Made in the Kangxi Reign of the Great Qing Dynasty,' they do exist. There are at least a dozen pieces of folk kiln blue and white porcelain with the reign mark that have been verified and passed down. How do you know that mine is not one of them?"

Upon hearing this, Qian Yaosi became anxious and hurriedly tried to explain. Little did he know that it was his mention of folk kiln blue and white porcelain that caused Zhuang Rui to use his spiritual energy. Of course, even if he hadn't said anything, Zhuang Rui would still have used his spiritual energy to verify its authenticity after he had finished handling it.

"It's fake, definitely fake. I haven't read any books that mention this kind of folk kiln blue and white porcelain. I'd better look at the next one."

Zhuang Rui put on a "don't bully me because I don't know anything" look on his face, insisting that the blue and white bowl was fake, because folk kilns don't have year marks. Qian Yaosi was both amused and exasperated, but there was nothing he could do. Besides, he naturally knew whether it was real or fake. He just wanted to fool Zhuang Rui with his almost indistinguishable forgery skills.

"If I had known, I would have just copied an official kiln piece and put it here."

Seeing Zhuang Rui touch the next piece of porcelain, the old shrewd merchant thought to himself with resentment.

"Wood, all these things are the same, can you tell the difference? If you ask me, let's stop dawdling here, take a walk around and go back to the hotel. Lei Lei and the others need to go back soon."

Liu Chuan was getting impatient. He was already annoyed that he couldn't get close to Zhuang Rui today, and now that Zhuang Rui was staring blankly at a large pile of porcelain, he was even more bored.

"Hehe, young man, it's not past midnight yet, there's still plenty of time. The spring night is short, there's no rush."

Qian Yaosi chuckled beside her, which made Lei Lei stomp her feet in exasperation. She pinched Liu Chuan's waist hard, making him beg for mercy in a low voice.

"Grandpa, you're not an antique dealer, how would you know the fun in it?" Liu Chuan muttered resentfully as he finally managed to shake off Lei Lei's fingers, but he was too embarrassed to say anything about leaving.

Actually, he was wronging Manager Qian. Ever since Qian Yaosi started collecting scrap in the early 1980s, his wife felt ashamed and divorced him. For the past twenty years, Qian Yaosi has never remarried, but he has had many women. To this day, he still keeps four or five young, beautiful women with slim waists and round hips. Just two years ago, when Qian Yaosi was fifty-eight years old, one of the women gave birth to a son for him.

Zhuang Rui was now fully absorbed in appreciating the porcelain. Of the twenty-odd pieces, he had already examined sixteen or seventeen. He could immediately tell the authenticity of eight or nine of them, but he couldn't decide on the other seven or eight. He had to use his spiritual energy to investigate, but they were all fake.

"You're so greedy! We're not selling you those counterfeit goods today? Closing up so early..."

Just as Zhuang Rui's attention was entirely focused on the porcelain on the table, a sound came from the half-closed roller shutter door outside the shop. An elderly man with white hair and beard and a ruddy complexion strode in, followed by a young man carrying a box in his right hand.