

## Golden 151

### Chapter 151 The Follower

"Rat-a-tat... Rat-a-tat-tat... Die, senior brother, there are bandits behind you, at a 60-degree angle. Alright, headshot..."

From a villa not far from Yang Wei's house, bursts of gunfire and a girl's screams could be heard intermittently. If the villa hadn't been well-insulated, the security guards would probably have broken down the door long ago. Just listening to the gunfire, one might think they were in Iraq.

"You surnamed Zhuang, when I catch you next time, I'll definitely teach you a lesson. You're making me so angry."

Miao Feifei gritted her teeth and used her AK47 to accurately blow the head off a bandit who peeked out from around the corner. She said viciously, but her appearance was too weak. Even if Zhuang Rui saw her, she probably wouldn't be very intimidating.

"Thank you, seniors. I'm all set now. I'll log off now and we can play CS together another day."

Miao Feifei spoke into her headset and then exited the Counter-Strike game on her computer. The battle she had just fought had relieved a lot of her frustration, but she still harbored deep resentment towards Zhuang Rui. She was already plotting whether to use Yang Wei's traffic violation to make things difficult for Zhuang Rui. If Brother Wei knew that Miao Feifei had this idea, he would definitely sacrifice his friend for the greater good and hand Zhuang Rui over to Miao Feifei to do with as she pleased.

In fact, Miao Feifei has a very generous personality and doesn't have the typical petty and dramatic traits of a typical woman. However, what happened today really made her unable to swallow her anger. After staying at home all day, Miao Feifei arrived at the intersection Zhuang Rui had mentioned around 5 p.m. and started dialing Zhuang Rui's cell phone. Unexpectedly, from around 5:30 p.m. until 6:30 p.m., all she heard was a human voice saying, "The number you dialed is not answering. Please try again later."

This wasn't the first time Miao Feifei had asked a man out for a trip, nor was it the first time she'd been rejected. Back in Beijing, she and her fellow detectives would often get together in small groups to sing karaoke or drive to places like Daxing for outings. However, the work of a detective is somewhat special;

when a case comes in, they have to leave immediately, so it wasn't uncommon for her to break her promises.

However, this was the first time that someone had broken their promise without offering an explanation. After waiting for more than an hour, Miao Feifei was so angry that she didn't go anywhere. She turned around, drove home, and immediately called a group of her friends to play Counter-Strike with her for more than an hour before she could calm down.

Leaving her computer desk, Miao Feifei finally felt a bit hungry. She picked up her phone and checked the time, only to find three missed calls. She wasn't angry until she saw them, and the resentment of being stood up by Zhuang Rui resurfaced. "I called more than thirty times and he didn't answer, while you only called three times and then stopped," Miao Feifei thought, feeling extremely unbalanced.

Not to mention Miao Feifei was thinking of ways to torment Zhuang Rui in the future, Zhuang Rui ordered two takeout meals on his way home. He knew that his boss would still be staying at his place that night, so he also ordered a case of beer and some braised dishes. Just as his car entered the community and before it even entered the garage, he received a call from Wei Ge.

"Hey, I'm at your house. Where...where are you? Hurry...come back quickly." Wei Ge's voice seemed to tremble slightly on the phone.

"I'm parking the car, I'll be upstairs soon. Boss, even if we have money, we can't waste it on phone calls like this. I'm hanging up, I'll be right up."

Zhuang Rui parked the car, hung up the phone, and carried the food upstairs. He knocked on the door for a long time, but no one answered. Zhuang Rui took out his key and opened the door. The house was brightly lit, and his eldest brother was sitting on the sofa. Zhuang Rui said with dissatisfaction, "Hey, Wei-ge, I'm carrying so much stuff, why didn't you open the door?"

"Damn it, buddy, you left this Tibetan Mastiff in the house without telling me? I walked in and it pounced on me. If I hadn't been a good guy, I'd be dead already. Hurry up, tell this guy to stop staring at me, it's giving me the creeps..."

When Yang Wei saw Zhuang Rui enter, tears and snot streamed down his face. He had been terrified. The dog didn't bark when it saw someone enter the house; it just knocked Yang Wei to the ground.

However, after sniffing him, it didn't bite him and instead let him go. But its eyes remained fixed on Yang Wei, which terrified Yang Wei so much that he sat on the sofa, too scared to move. He had been in this position for more than 10 minutes since he entered the house.

"White Lion, come here. Let me tell you, this is my buddy. Don't scare him anymore. He's a coward. Also, without my orders, you absolutely cannot bite anyone, understand?"

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he started laughing himself. He knew that even a three-year-old wouldn't understand what he was saying, let alone a three-month-old puppy. However, the white lion's reaction surprised both Zhuang Rui and Yang Wei.

As soon as Zhuang Rui finished speaking, the white lion shook its big head and darted over to Wei Ge's side. It rubbed its head against Yang Wei's pants, showing a friendly attitude. Yang Wei was probably stunned. It wasn't until the white lion ran back to Zhuang Rui's side that he reacted. He stumbled backward and tripped on the sofa, falling flat on his back.

"Okay, no, don't come any closer. I'm going home to sleep right now. I'm scared of you."

Seeing the little white lion that seemed to want to come over and get affectionate with him, Wei Ge waved his hands repeatedly, looking helpless.

Not only Yang Wei was helpless, but Zhuang Rui was also having a headache with the white lion. This little guy... could no longer be called a little guy in terms of size. He was too clingy and wanted to follow him everywhere. It was fine in Pengcheng, where he was a little smaller, but it was no longer possible. Pets were prohibited from entering many places in Zhonghai. However, Zhuang Rui was reluctant to send the white lion to Liu Chuan's mastiff kennel. They had been inseparable for so long, which had created a very deep bond between the man and the dog.

"White Lion, come here."

Zhuang Rui went to the balcony, took out a small iron basin specially prepared for the white lion, poured the white porridge in his hand into it, which also contained some meat scraps. The little guy was also hungry, and before Zhuang Rui could call him, he began to wolf it down.

Back in the living room, Zhuang Rui saw the eldest brother setting out food and drinks on the coffee table. He opened a bottle of beer and handed it to Wei Ge to calm his nerves, as the eldest brother was always timid and he was probably really scared just now.

"Here you go. Sign the papers and transfer the money tomorrow, and the house will be yours. When the third brother called today, I mentioned this, and he cried and shouted that he wanted to come back to Zhonghai to rip you off. I said, 'Brother, you're the first among us brothers to earn money and buy a house on your own merit.'"

After the two finished eating, Yang Wei took out several documents from his bag and placed them on the coffee table. He also took out a box of inkpads, which made Zhuang Rui feel a little embarrassed. He had made his eldest brother run around for him when he bought the house, and even brought the contract home to sign it. He felt that his years of college friendships had not been in vain.

"One million three hundred thousand." Zhuang Rui glanced at the amount on the contract, didn't ask any more questions, picked up the pen and quickly signed his name. He figured that Wei Ge and he were from the same professional background, so he would handle these numbers very well.

"Alright, I'll transfer the rest of the money to your account tomorrow. I'm heading back now. Here, I'll give you your car keys. Oh well, never mind, I'll just take a taxi..."

Yang Wei finished packing up the contract Zhuang Rui had signed and was about to leave. He knew Zhuang Rui wouldn't be working tomorrow. He was originally going to ask for the car, but then he remembered that his driver's license had been taken away, so he reluctantly withdrew his hand.

"By the way, old man, you said on the phone that Officer Miao was looking for you. What's up?"

Yang Wei turned back after reaching the door. Curiosity isn't just a woman's trait; men can be even more gossipy.

"It's nothing. Officer Miao isn't very familiar with Zhonghai and wanted me to be his tour guide, but I was too busy with work today and forgot. When I called back later, no one answered," Zhuang Rui answered honestly, feeling a little guilty. If Officer Miao took his anger out on his boss, it would be his fault.

"You...you actually stood up the pretty girl? Damn it, you were too busy and didn't you know you could have sent me? Oh no, my driver's license is still with that girl. Hey, I'm going to fight you."

Viagra rushed towards Zhuang Rui with a look of grief and indignation. As a result, when he went out, he changed into one of Zhuang Rui's pants. His own pants had been torn by the white lion. The white lion was very obedient and did not bite anyone, but Zhuang Rui had not told it not to bite anyone's pants.

After seeing Yang Wei off, Zhuang Rui checked the time. It was not yet 10 o'clock. He turned on the TV and watched for a while, but the pretentious soap operas on it made him feel bored. Moreover, he kept thinking about Miao Feifei's reaction. She hadn't answered the phone since around 7 o'clock. Was she really going to take it out on Wei Ge?

"Dude, I'll call from a different phone, let's see if you answer..."

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment, took out his phone, looked at the number on it, and dialed it using the landline at home. It was answered after only two rings.

"Hello, who is this?" Miao Feifei's voice came from the other end of the phone.

"Officer Miao, this is Zhuang Rui. I'm so sorry about today. It's my first day at work. I put my phone on vibrate during the meeting this morning, and then I was looking at documents at the company until after 7 p.m. I forgot that I was going to treat you to dinner. I tried calling you later, but no one answered. I'm really sorry. It's all my fault. I apologize to you. Hello, hello, are you listening?"

Zhuang Rui was afraid Miao Feifei would hang up on him, so he spoke at length without pausing for breath. After he finished, he noticed there was no sound from the other end of the line and assumed Miao Feifei had hung up. Just as he was about to put down the receiver, Miao Feifei's voice came through: "So how are you going to apologize?"

"Brother, I'll repay you with my body..." Zhuang Rui swallowed those words abruptly. He'd made a bad choice in friends; Liu Chuan and Wei Ge both frequently said that, almost making Zhuang Rui blurt it out himself.

“I’m off tomorrow and the day after. Officer Miao, wherever you want to go, that’s where we’ll go. I’ll be the driver and tour guide, all meals and lodging included, completely free. How does that sound?”

Zhuang Rui has honed his verbal skills quite a bit during this time.

Miao Feifei wasn't a petty person. She had heard Zhuang Rui mention in the morning that today was his first day back at work in two months, so being busy was to be expected. After Zhuang Rui apologized, she wasn't angry anymore, but she did have the urge to tease him. So she asked, "Where are you planning to take me tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow...tomorrow..." Zhuang Rui couldn't think of anywhere to take Miao Feifei for a moment.

"Weren't you just spouting platitudes? You're obviously not being sincere. Are you afraid I'll make things difficult for your classmate and not give him his driver's license?" Miao Feifei's voice rang out, making Zhuang Rui's forehead break out in a cold sweat.

"Let's go to the City God Temple tomorrow. Their Nanxiang steamed buns are famous far and wide, and Yu Garden is right next to it. If we want to do shopping, it's not far from Nanjing Road. What do you think?"

In desperation, Zhuang Rui thought of this place. Actually, he had only been there once with his boss and a few others when he was in college. He didn't remember anything except that there were a lot of people there.

"Okay, if you stand me up again tomorrow, I'll... I'll..." Miao Feifei raised her little fist on the other end of the phone. Thinking that she didn't seem to have anything to threaten Zhuang Rui except for confiscating Yang Wei's driver's license, she couldn't help but feel a little deflated.

"Don't worry, Officer Miao. If I stand you up again tomorrow, I'll drive to the entrance of your traffic police squadron and commit a traffic violation to give you a chance to exercise your authority. Is that alright? It's late, I won't disturb your rest any longer. See you tomorrow."

After hearing the reply from the other end of the phone, Zhuang Rui hung up the phone with a smile. He still had a good impression of Miao Feifei. Putting aside her identity as a police officer, Miao Feifei did

not have the affectation of ordinary girls. She was straightforward, generous, and a very easy friend to get along with. However, that was all she was—friends. Zhuang Rui had never had any ulterior motives.

The next morning, Zhuang Rui first prepared food for the white lion. Although the white lion was not picky about food, no one dared to neglect such a Tibetan mastiff worth tens of millions. After cleaning up, Zhuang Rui drove straight to Yang Wei's villa area, because Miao Feifei also lived there.

"Can a junior traffic cop afford to live here?"

Zhuang Rui parked his car outside the gate and called Miao Feifei. Looking at the rows of private villas inside, he couldn't help but wonder about Miao Feifei's identity. A Beijing native came to work in Zhonghai and lived in a villa worth tens of millions of yuan. No one would believe she didn't have a background.

Miao Feifei arrived quickly. Zhuang Rui had just opened the car window and lit a cigarette when he saw a girl carrying a backpack walk out of the gate. When she got to the car, even Zhuang Rui, who was almost immune to beautiful women, couldn't help but be stunned for a moment.

Miao Feifei wasn't very tall, only about 1.67 meters. However, she wasn't wearing her police uniform today. Instead, she wore a tight-fitting gray wool sweater and jeans. Although she was wearing flat sneakers, her beautiful figure was still clearly visible.

What stunned Zhuang Rui was precisely this. He hadn't expected Miao Feifei, after taking off her police uniform, to have such a wonderful figure. Her slender waist, long legs, and delicate, beautiful face without any makeup made one want to hold her in their arms and protect her.

"Go ahead and smoke if you want, I'm used to it. Just open the car window."

Miao Feifei opened the passenger door and got in. She saw Zhuang Rui frantically trying to put out his cigarette, but she waved him off nonchalantly. Her former fellow detectives were all heavy smokers, and she had long since been influenced by them.

Zhuang Rui threw his cigarette butt out the window, feeling a little embarrassed, and started the car. "You dare to smoke with a traffic cop sitting next to you? You'll be charged with illegal driving later, and you won't even have a chance to argue with him."

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The Zhonghai City God Temple was first built during the Yongle period of the Ming Dynasty. At the time of its initial construction, it was still small in scale. It was expanded repeatedly during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and its area continued to grow. It is a Taoist temple of the Zhengyi sect, and often holds Taoist rituals with the aim of "helping the world and saving people". Today is the weekend, and there is a Taoist ritual. Zhuang Rui and Miao Feifei are holding the xiaolongbao and spiced beans they just bought. They are eating them while watching the Taoist priests set up the ritual with great interest.

Zhuang Rui was also seeing a Taoist ceremony being held for the first time. Dozens of Taoist priests walked back and forth around the open space in front of the City God Temple, chanting scriptures, singing praises and making wishes. They walked in circles and performed rituals, sending the wishes of believers to the heavens and inviting the gods to the altar. There were also many believers singing along on both sides. The scene was quite grand.

"This is pointless, it's like a shamanistic ritual. Let's go."

Miao Feifei got bored after watching for a while and pulled Zhuang Rui to leave.

"Shall we go to the flower, bird and antique market?" Zhuang Rui asked Miao Feifei for her opinion.

"Great! When I was in Beijing, I loved going to Liulichang. Let's go see what good stuff they have." Miao Feifei's words surprised Zhuang Rui. It turned out she was quite the expert.

The people of Zhonghai have turned antique collecting into a major folk tourism attraction, integrating it into a sprawling cluster. There are three or four antique markets near the City God Temple and Yu Garden, which, together with the scattered folk and antique shops on the old street, form a vast and spectacular antique collecting community.

Antique markets across the country are all pretty much the same. Stalls display both new and old Dongyang wood carvings, Tibetan antiques of all sizes such as Thangkas and Tibetan Buddhist implements, and calligraphy, paintings, jade, ceramics, and more. The only things that are somewhat unique are the old or newly printed calendar posters, old phonographs, old vinyl records, electric fans from the 1930s, old telephones, and so on. These items made Zhuang Rui and Miao Feifei linger for quite a while.

"Zhuang Rui, you're a professional, do you think this jade is an antique? The shopkeeper said it's from the Ming Dynasty, and it looks like it to me." Miao Feifei held a dragon-shaped jade pendant in her hand and asked Zhuang Rui excitedly. On the way here, Zhuang Rui had already told her about his workplace.

"Officer Miao, you actually believe him when he says it's from the Warring States period? The patina is obviously artificially aged..."

Zhuang Rui looked at Miao Feifei with some helplessness and said that he originally thought she was an expert, but after arriving at the antique market, Zhuang Rui found that Miao Feifei was a complete novice. Her level was about the same as Liu Chuan's, and she looked at everything as if it were real.

"Just call me Feifei, we're friends now." Miao Feifei wasn't angry at all. She put down the jade pendant in her hand and ran to the next stall, revealing the straightforwardness of a northern girl in her words.

Zhuang Rui shook his head and quickly followed. He realized that finding treasures at these stalls was like finding a needle in a haystack. They had passed thirty or forty stalls along the way, but there wasn't a single item that caught his eye.

"What are you doing? Why are you following us? Are you trying to steal something?"

"Ouch, grandma, be gentle, my arm is going to break! I'm not a thief, really not, this stall owner can vouch for me."

Zhuang Rui was squatting on the ground, looking at a pair of jade unicorn paperweights. Although the paperweights did not contain any spiritual energy, their design and craftsmanship were very beautiful, attracting Zhuang Rui's attention. Just as he was looking at them in a daze, he suddenly heard Miao Feifei's voice beside him, along with a man's cries of pain and begging for mercy.

"What happened?"

Zhuang Rui turned his head and saw Miao Feifei twist the arm of a young man in his twenties behind his back, her face full of anger.

"This guy has been following us since we came in. When you squatted down just now, I saw him walk behind you, acting suspiciously and not like a good person." Miao Feifei applied a little force to her hand, and the young man let out another pig-like scream.

"Sister, I'm really not a thief! Brother, please say something! We'll see each other again someday, you can't just watch me get framed!" the young man pleaded, looking at the stall owner next to him.

"Young man, he's not a thief, he's just trying to make a living in this market. Let him go," the stall owner in front of Zhuang Rui said, though his tone carried a hint of disdain.

"Really? Don't follow us anymore."

Miao Feifei noticed that several stall owners nearby seemed to recognize the young man, so she let him go. The young man, who was rendered immobile by Miao Feifei, a girl who looked delicate, was too embarrassed to stay there and lowered his head to disappear into the crowd.

Zhuang Rui smiled. He knew the young man's background; he was sure he had mistaken them for rich suckers. However, seeing that Miao Feifei was unaffected and was still happily browsing through the stalls, Zhuang Rui didn't say anything more. After turning a corner, Zhuang Rui had forgotten about what had just happened.

"Brother, I'm really sorry about earlier. My little brother here doesn't know how to do things properly."

Zhuang Rui suddenly felt someone tap his shoulder from behind. He quickly turned around and saw a kind-looking middle-aged man standing next to him. The young man who had just been reprimanded by Miao Feifei was standing next to him.

"What are you doing? Are you trying to get revenge?"

Miao Feifei also saw the two of them, and quickly put down the item she was looking at and walked over. The young man quickly took two steps back and said, "Gentlemen, please don't misunderstand. My brother has business to discuss with you."

The middle-aged man looked around mysteriously and said in a low voice, "It's not convenient to talk here. Let's find another place to talk. There are fewer people over there. Please, could you please move over there?"

Zhuang Rui grew impatient upon hearing this. This guy was practically in the same line of work as a monkey! His answers were even worse than a monkey's. Just as he was about to wave him away, Miao Feifei asked excitedly, "What kind of business?" She even pulled Zhuang Rui towards the place the man pointed to.

Arriving at the secluded spot the man had indicated—actually just a quiet place between two shops where no one else was setting up stalls—the middle-aged man approached Zhuang Rui and his companion with a serious expression and said, "Gentlemen, would you like some antiques? They were just dug out of a tomb, guaranteed to be genuine, and the earthy smell hasn't even been removed yet."

Zhuang Rui frowned upon hearing this, and was about to speak when Miao Feifei interrupted him, saying, "Where is it? Let's take it out and see. If it's real, we'll take it."

"Madam, it's not convenient here. The items unearthed from the tomb are being inspected very strictly. If you two really want to see them, just walk a few steps with me. It's not far away. I guarantee you two will have a worthwhile trip."

Upon hearing Miao Feifei's words, the middle-aged man became slightly excited and leaned forward again.

Zhuang Rui panicked and pulled Miao Feifei back, leaning forward and almost whispering in the middle-aged man's ear, "Get the hell out of here! If you try anything again, I'll take you all to the police station."

As soon as he finished speaking, the middle-aged man's expression changed drastically. He turned around, grabbed a bewildered young man standing beside him, and turned to leave. Miao Feifei called

out to him a few times, but the man didn't dare to stop and disappeared into the crowd in the blink of an eye.

"Zhuang Rui, are you deliberately causing trouble? That person said there were unearthed cultural relics. If I follow the clues and catch a tomb raiding gang, I can be transferred back to Beijing. Why did you drive them away?"

Watching the two disappear into the crowd, Miao Feifei stomped her feet in anger, venting all her resentment on Zhuang Rui. Although she majored in criminal investigation, she had never solved a case independently before, and this great opportunity had been ruined by Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui looked at Miao Feifei's angry face and couldn't help but smile wryly, saying, "Feifei..."

"Call me a police officer. We're not that close."

"Uh, Officer Miao, you said that when you were in Beijing, you often went to Liulichang and never encountered this kind of person? This is the first time I've heard this before?" Zhuang Rui thought that if he didn't explain this clearly, judging from Miao Feifei's expression, it would probably be even more serious than standing her up yesterday.

"No, when I went to Liulichang before, no one followed me. What does that have to do with today's events?" Miao Feifei was confused by Zhuang Rui's question.

"When you went to Liulichang back then, you were always wearing a police uniform, right?"

Zhuang Rui thought of a possibility and asked, and after seeing Miao Feifei nod, he continued, "That's right. In Beijing slang, these people are called 'tagalongs.' We're here to find treasures, but they're here to rip people off. They specialize in selling fake items to deceive tourists. The antiques they talk about are indeed unearthed, but those things were buried by themselves and then dug out by themselves. If you want to catch tomb raiders, wander around the wilderness of Shaanxi and Henan. You'll have a better chance of finding clues from them than from them."

"Is everything you're saying true?" Miao Feifei looked at Zhuang Rui with suspicion.

Chapter 152 Chenghua Doucai (Part 1)

"Officer Miao..."

"Call her Feifei..."

"No, please. I'll still call you Officer Miao. If I bother you again later, I won't have to change how I address you."

Zhuang Rui's words made Miao Feifei laugh, but she was still a little skeptical of what Zhuang Rui had just said. The middle-aged man had shifty eyes and smelled of dirt. In Miao Feifei's opinion, he was most likely a burrowing rat. If they really caught a tomb raiding gang, that would be a great achievement.

"Officer Miao, we've been walking around for over two hours now. Let's go sit in that teahouse. I'll explain it to you later, and you'll understand." Zhuang Rui looked around. The two of them standing in the corner were quite conspicuous, and passersby would glance at them. So he pulled Miao Feifei into a teahouse next door.

Like the buildings along the street, this teahouse was an imitation of ancient architecture. The waiters inside were dressed in incongruous ancient costumes. When someone came in, a waiter at the door immediately called out in a drawn-out voice, "A customer has arrived..." A girl in her early twenties wearing a cheongsam immediately came over, but the sneakers she was wearing were rather unsightly, which made Zhuang Rui chuckle inwardly.

The two went up to the second floor and found a window seat. Zhuang Rui ordered a pot of Pu'er tea and some snacks. Although the first time you drink Pu'er tea, it may feel a little strange, but once you get used to it, you can appreciate its flavor. It also has the benefit of lowering blood lipids.

The Pu'er tea served in this teahouse was slightly bitter and lacked a rich, mellow aroma, making it far inferior to the tea cake that Uncle De had yesterday.

"Zhuang Rui, you still haven't explained what happened earlier. How do you know those two weren't tomb raiders?"

Whether the tea was good or bad didn't matter to Miao Feifei. Northerners are used to drinking tea in a large teacup, and those who prefer strong flavors will put in only half a cup of tea leaves and let it steep all day. They rarely have the same meticulous approach to tea drinking as Southerners. Miao Feifei was no exception. While eating snacks and drinking Pu'er tea, her eyes were fixed on Zhuang Rui.

Seeing Miao Feifei's persistence, Zhuang Rui sighed and said, "Officer Miao, let me tell you a story that happened in this antique market. However, I'm not sure if those two people from earlier are in the story."

"Okay, okay, tell me quickly."

Miao Feifei looked nothing like a policewoman at this moment. She was stuffing a steamed bun into her mouth with one hand and holding a teacup with the other. Her eyes were shining as she looked at Zhuang Rui, and she looked more like a child ready to listen to an adult tell a story.

"This matter involves an elder of mine. I won't mention his name now. My elder is a successful person in the business world. He has a very large business. In recent years, I don't know why, he has taken a liking to collecting. As you know, with strong financial backing, he has a much higher starting point than the average person when it comes to this business."

However, my elder has high aspirations. He has read many books and read many pictures about antique appraisal. When he entered the industry, he declared that he would rely on his skills to find bargains and treasures. So he has been to many antique markets such as Zhonghai City God Temple, Cangbaolou, and Huabaolou. He bought a whole room full of things, but there were very few genuine items. Last year, he wandered into the City God Temple.

Like us, my elder was also approached by two men while browsing a street stall. They claimed to have recently unearthed antiques. Having spent many years in the business world, he was quite knowledgeable about people, and judging from their words and actions, they did seem like they were up to no good. They might actually have some valuable items. Plus, he's easily persuaded, and after their persuasion, he went along. Guess what happened next?

Zhuang Rui paused here, then poured himself another cup of tea.

"How's it going? Could it be that the tomb-raiding gang has switched to kidnapping and kidnapped your elder?" Miao Feifei thought seriously for a moment, then said with an air of importance. Zhuang Rui was speechless; his senior sister's imagination was a bit too vivid.

"What are you talking about? My elder followed the two men and went through a maze of twists and turns to a small hotel that wasn't far from here. However, the environment inside was terrible. The smell inside almost made him faint. Later, when he entered a room, there were already two people waiting for him."

The two people waiting in the room were very thin and small. More importantly, they reeked of dirt, like coal miners. It was obvious at a glance, so my elder was already quite convinced. When the item was brought out, his eyes lit up. It was a Xuande incense burner, probably recently unearthed, covered in mud.

"What is a Xuande incense burner? Is it used for burning incense?" Miao Feifei interrupted Zhuang Rui.

"You, who often goes to Liulichang? If you weren't wearing a police uniform, you probably would have been swindled out of your life long ago."

Zhuang Rui muttered a curse to himself, then explained, "What you said is not wrong. Xuande incense burners were indeed used for burning incense in ancient times, but their origins are quite remarkable."

It is said that during the reign of Emperor Xuande of the Ming Dynasty, in order to satisfy his personal hobby of appreciating incense burners, he ordered a batch of red copper to be imported from Siam (present-day Thailand). He then commissioned the court craftsman Lü Zhen and the Vice Minister of Works Wu Bangzuo to design and supervise the production of incense burners, referring to the styles of famous porcelains from the Chai, Ru, Guan, Ge, Jun, and Ding kilns in the imperial collection, as well as historical records such as the "Xuanhe Bogu Tulu" and "Kaogu Tu".

To ensure the quality of the incense burners, the most skilled craftsmen of the time selected dozens of precious metals such as gold and silver, and carefully cast them together with red copper more than ten times. The finished copper incense burners had a crystal-clear and warm color, and were treasures among the handicrafts of the Ming Dynasty. The successful casting of the Xuande incense burner opened the way for copper incense burners in later generations. For a long period of history, the Xuande incense burner became the general term for copper incense burners.

However, the amount of imported red copper was limited at the time. In the third year of the Xuande reign, five thousand incense burners were cast using this batch of red copper. No more were produced after that. These Xuande incense burners were kept deep within the Forbidden City. Ordinary people like us only knew their names but never saw them. After the change of dynasties and the vicissitudes of the past few hundred years, the bronze incense burners cast in the third year of the Xuande reign are extremely rare.

As the saying goes, rarity increases value. With such a limited number of Xuande censers, their prices are naturally extremely high. Driven by greed, antique dealers continuously imitated Xuande censers from the Xuande period of the Ming Dynasty to the Republic of China era. Even after the production of Xuande censers ceased, some officials in charge of casting immediately summoned the original craftsmen to replicate them according to the blueprints and processes. These meticulously crafted imitations were comparable to the genuine articles, and even experts could not distinguish them. To this day, among the many Xuande censers held in major museums across China, not a single one can be universally recognized by experts as a genuine Xuande censor.

"So you mean the Xuande incense burner that the elder saw was fake? You never know. Hundreds of years have passed since the Xuande period of the Ming Dynasty. Maybe those tomb raiders dug up a real one from someone's tomb." Miao Feifei interjected, completely convinced that the group was tomb raiders.

Zhuang Rui rolled his eyes at Miao Feifei and said irritably, "Xuande censers are made with exquisite materials and are extremely well-crafted. In the early years of the Republic of China, a fine Xuande censor could fetch hundreds of thousands of dollars, making it a priceless treasure. If it were around today, a genuine Xuande censor could easily sell for tens of millions of dollars. Do you think those things are like cabbages, found everywhere, or something you can just dig up in an ancient tomb?"

From the Xuande period onward, "Xuande censor" no longer refers solely to incense burners cast in the third year of the Xuande reign (1420), but rather to all bronze censers bearing the Xuande mark. It can also broadly refer to bronze censers of similar shape but without a mark, or with other marks. The true censers from the third year of the Xuande reign have become a mystery; the vast majority of Xuande censers we see today are not actually from the Xuande period.

"Even if it was fake, what happened afterward? Was your elder killed?" Miao Feifei finally stopped dwelling on whether it was true or false and asked.

Zhuang Rui nodded and said, "In that environment, the lighting wasn't very bright to begin with. While my elder was looking around, two more people came and said they also wanted to see if there were any

unearthed antiques. At that time, the elder got anxious and asked the tomb raiders how much the Xuande incense burner was worth. Those two short guys immediately asked for 500,000."

Five hundred thousand was nothing to him, but when he heard the price, it seemed a bit sinister. However, he had his eye on the censer and was about 90 percent sure it was a Xuande censer. He immediately offered 50,000 yuan, ready to sell or leave immediately.

Who knew that the two people who came later would ask for 80,000 yuan? The tomb raiders then ignored my elder and discussed going with the two to collect the money. My elder got anxious. He couldn't let this easy money slip away. He immediately asked for 100,000 yuan and went to the bank to withdraw the money. He then took this precious Xuande incense burner home.

After returning home, the elder had a cabinet specially made, complete with a glass cover and four spotlights. He cleaned the Xuande incense burner and placed it inside. He then boasted to everyone that he had found a great bargain. However, later an expert examined it and determined that the object had been buried for no more than two months and unearthed for no more than two weeks, making it a modern imitation.

The expert's words immediately deflated the man, who angrily went back to look for those so-called tomb raiders. However, after wandering around for half a year, he hadn't run into them. There are so many antique markets across the country; who knows where those guys have gone to scam people now? In fact, even if he did find them, there was nothing he could do. They had neither invoices nor witnesses. He could only accept his loss. "I didn't let you come along earlier because I didn't want to cause this trouble and waste your time."

"I see. This kind of behavior is indeed difficult to prosecute. It's a matter of mutual consent, but your elder is quite unlucky to have been swindled out of 100,000 yuan just like that." Miao Feifei said thoughtfully after listening.

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to reply to Miao Feifei, his phone rang. When he answered, Wei Ge's voice came through: "Hey, Mom, why don't you take the day off? Let's have lunch together. Come pick me up from the driving school later. Damn it, this instructor is really messing with me. He gave me a Dongfeng 141 and made me practice driving in and out of the garage in one spot all morning. My shoulders are almost numb."

"I need to familiarize myself with the work since I just started, so I won't be available these next couple of days. You'll have to figure it out yourself. Make up for the points you lost during your driving lessons

as soon as possible so you can get your driver's license back from Officer Miao. Okay, that's settled then, I'll hang up now." Zhuang Rui said, looking at Miao Feifei with a smile in his eyes.

"My elder's son was even more unlucky. He squeezed into a female police officer's seat while driving the other day and lost his driver's license."

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui cheerfully said to Miao Feifei that the elder he was referring to was naturally Wei Ge's father. This kind of thing had happened to him countless times. Yang's father still adhered to the idea of finding a great bargain and relentlessly went around various antique markets. However, now he made fewer purchases and the chances of being fooled had also decreased a lot.

At least when Zhuang Rui went to Wei Ge's house a few days ago, he found that not many items had been added to Yang's father's treasure room. Zhuang Rui used his spiritual energy to look around the room and found that only a few items contained some thin white spiritual energy, and they didn't seem to be very old. As for the others, they were probably all fake.

"You mean your classmate's father?"

Miao Feifei laughed upon hearing this, but immediately straightened her face and said to Zhuang Rui, "Don't even think about pleading for him. If his driving skills are up to par, I will naturally return the money to him. Otherwise, don't even think about getting through me."

"That's right, that's right. Wei Ge was still struggling with Dongfeng 141 at the driving school this morning. Officer Miao, don't worry, we absolutely won't plead for him. But since he passed his driving test, do you think we can return his driver's license to him?"

Zhuang Rui had no intention of pleading with Wei Ge to get his driver's license back early. He just hoped that the guy opposite him wouldn't make things difficult for Wei Ge. The longer it took to get the license back, the safer his car would be for a few more days. Zhuang Rui was already quite disappointed with his boss's driving skills. He had been driving for seven or eight years and was still at the same level. Expecting to see results in just a few days at driving school was out of the question.

"It's good that you don't have that thought. Giving him his driver's license in advance wouldn't be helping him, it would be harming him. Let's go, let's walk around some more. I'll treat you to dinner tonight, and tomorrow we'll go to Zhouzhuang. I've heard the scenery of the Jiangnan water towns

there is really beautiful, but I've never had a chance to go." Miao Feifei stood up and said casually. At this moment, in her heart, Zhuang Rui was already a buddy she could make friends with.

"Alright, Zhouzhuang it is. Who told me to offend you? As the ancients said, 'Women and petty men are the most difficult to deal with.'"

Zhuang Rui chuckled and said that he didn't know why, but he felt very relaxed being with this cheerful policewoman. He wouldn't have been able to make such a joke with anyone else.

"You're asking for it! I'm a sixth-degree black belt, cutting you down is like child's play." Miao Feifei glared at Zhuang Rui upon hearing this, but her appearance was too deceptive, and her gaze seemed more like flirting.

Zhuang Rui smiled, didn't retort, and beckoned the waiter to pay the bill. Miao Feifei appreciated his behavior. You see, not long ago, the son of one of Miao Feifei's elders, a so-called elite in the Zhonghai IT industry, treated her to dinner. The meal cost over three hundred yuan, and after finishing, the elite actually took out one hundred and twenty yuan to pay for the dishes he ordered, and then handed the bill to Miao Feifei, saying that the AA system was popular now. Miao Feifei didn't say anything at the time and took out her money to pay the bill.

After declining the elite's invitation to go to the movies, Miao Feifei almost threw up what she had just eaten when she got home. To make matters worse, the elite called, saying he admired Miao Feifei and wanted to get to know her better and start a romantic relationship. Miao Feifei was so frightened that she immediately blocked the man's number.

...

"Xiao Huan, if it doesn't work out, let's just sell this to that shop. We're out of money right now. We have 50,000 yuan, which is enough for Dad to have seven or eight rounds of chemotherapy. Don't be so stubborn, kid."

Next to a shop in a very bad location near the City God Temple, there was a street stall. Compared to other street stalls, which ranged from four or five meters in size to two or three meters in size, this stall was much simpler. It consisted of just a copy of the Zhonghai Daily spread on the ground, with two porcelain items on top of the newspaper.

There were quite a few people coming and going, but very few stopped at this stall for more than three minutes. They would stop, say a few words, and then turn around and leave. It wasn't because the items were few and unattractive to tourists, but because the stall owner was really a bit strange.

Whenever someone took a liking to these two porcelain pieces and asked the price, the very young stall owner would immediately quote 300,000 yuan, without any room for negotiation. At a street stall, such a price was simply not enough to retain customers. Even if someone was interested, they couldn't afford it and could only shake their head and leave.

At this moment, next to the young stall owner, a young girl of about twenty-three or twenty-four years old was half-squatting. Watching her younger brother wolf down the food she had brought, she couldn't help but feel a little sorry for him.

"Sister, stop talking. That guy is a swindler. Dad said he won't sell this for less than 300,000. I earned a few thousand yuan working at university last year, and with your salary, it's enough for Dad to have three rounds of chemotherapy. I'd rather find a place to wash dishes than sell this to those swindlers. Tomorrow I'll go to those auction houses and see if I can get it auctioned off."

The young man sitting in front of the stall was eating and talking incoherently. He had taken the two porcelain pieces to several shops that morning. The first shop offered 50,000 yuan and boasted that no one in the antique market could offer a higher price than him. The young man didn't believe it and went to several more shops, only to find that, just as the man had said, each shop offered between 30,000 and 50,000 yuan, none of which exceeded the first one.

A good horse doesn't turn back to eat the grass it already grazed. This young man also had a stubborn streak, so he simply spread out a newspaper and set up a stall. He was determined that if he couldn't sell them today, he would go to an auction house tomorrow and auction them off. He would never go to those antique shops again.

"Xiao Zhuangzi, is this antique market in Zhonghai really that fake? We've been walking around for so long, and there's not a single genuine antique? Every time I pick one up, you say it's fake. Are you afraid I'll spend your money to buy it? I haven't asked you to pay for any of these things."

"Hey, Princess, what are you holding here? Aren't they all real? Why do you insist on buying those fake items? If I let you buy them, and then you come after me later, wouldn't I be at a disadvantage?"

Miao Feifei's words left Zhuang Rui both amused and exasperated. He had only invited her for tea, not even having a proper meal, yet Miao Feifei had already upgraded him from Zhuang Rui to Little Zhuangzi. Throughout the journey, she kept calling him Little Zhuangzi, which reminded Zhuang Rui of Little Li and Little Anzi, among others, from the perspective of a certain old empress dowager.

"These things are hardly antiques; they're just movie posters. I'm taking them back to Beijing for my oldest, most stubborn husband to remember history. He loves watching those black and white movies and often uses the characters in them to lecture people."

Miao Feifei waved the roll of old, yellowed posters in her hand. Although these things were only thirty or forty years old, they cost Miao Feifei more than a thousand yuan. In particular, the poster for the movie "Southward and Northward" cost the stall owner six hundred yuan. He said it was the first war film since the founding of the People's Republic of China, and there were definitely no more than 100 posters in good condition in the whole country.

"Hey, Xiao Zhuangzi, come and take a look. There are two porcelain pieces here, both broken. Why are you selling them?"

Miao Feifei was squatting next to a stall, picking up a bowl-shaped porcelain piece and examining it, while loudly calling out Zhuang Rui's name.

"Excuse me, miss, this isn't broken porcelain, it's just been repaired. If you don't want it, please move aside."

The young stall owner, who had just finished eating, said to Miao Feifei in an annoyed tone that his father's illness had been tormenting the two siblings these past few days, and even though Miao Feifei was a young and pretty girl, the young man hadn't shown her any interest.

"I haven't even looked at it yet, how do you know I don't want it? Zhuang Rui, hurry up, this young man is pretty arrogant, come and see if this thing is real or fake?" Miao Feifei wasn't angry, and handed the porcelain in her hand to Zhuang Rui, who had just squatted down.

"Hey, be careful, who's going to pay for it if you break it? Put it down, I'm not selling it to you anymore."

The young man got anxious. Porcelain is very fragile; if it were accidentally dropped, it would definitely break. While he was speaking, he didn't notice that his sister, who was tidying up the lunchbox, immediately looked at the man who had just walked over after hearing the name Zhuang Rui, her eyes full of surprise.

"It's okay, I'll take a look first. If it's good, I'll pay for it if it breaks. If I like it, I'll buy it. You don't need to worry."

Zhuang Rui also knew the rule that things should not be handled by others, but he couldn't explain it to Miao Feifei, who was an outsider.

After calming the stall owner, who was about to jump up, Zhuang Rui was about to examine the porcelain more closely when he felt a gaze fixed on his face. He followed the gaze and found a girl who wasn't very old sitting next to the boy. However, when their eyes met, the girl hurriedly looked away from Zhuang Rui.

Chapter 153 Chenghua Doucai (Part Two)

Zhuang Rui glanced at the girl before looking away. Although she was pretty, she paled in comparison to Qin Xuanbing and Miao Feifei beside her. Zhuang Rui was certain he had never seen her before. However, the bowl-shaped porcelain in front of him seemed rather strange to him.

The newspaper originally displayed two porcelain items, one large and one small. The larger one was a jade pen holder, likely made of celadon jade, with a hollowed-out carving in the center depicting a shepherd boy riding an ox. The shepherd boy on the pen holder held a whip in one hand, gazing into the distance with a leisurely air, while the water buffalo slowly moved forward, accompanied by green willows and trees, and a bright red sun. The design was beautiful, and the carving was extremely exquisite, clearly the work of a master craftsman.

However, Zhuang Rui's gaze was not fixed on the pen holder at this moment, but was completely drawn to the small bowl-shaped porcelain in his hand. It was more like a cup than a bowl, because it was really small. Zhuang Rui carefully measured it and estimated that the diameter of the porcelain cup was about 2 centimeters, the diameter of the base was about 8.5 to 4 centimeters, and the height was about 3 centimeters. It was about the same size as a small wine cup.

This cup has a wide mouth, an extremely thin lip, and a flat foot. The thin body is pure white and delicate, and the glaze is soft, warm, and elegantly yellow. It is smooth and dense without any brown spots. The inside of the cup is plain and smooth, but the outer wall is painted with a delicate and elegant rock and peony, as well as a mother hen and chicks that seem to be eager to move. The peony flowers and leaves are arranged in a pleasing manner, and the chicks are plump and cute, all in a joyful and happy posture with their wings outstretched. One of the two roosters is crowing, and the other is looking back at the mother hen foraging for food. The whole scene is lively and vivid.

This book was first published on the Taiwanese novel website, *twkan.com*, offering a super smooth reading experience with error-free and disordered chapters.

Turn the cup over, and you'll see a six-character inscription in regular script with a double blue frame that reads "Made in the Chenghua period of the Ming Dynasty." The characters are square, the strokes are straight, and they are extremely clear.

If there's any flaw in this cup, it's that there's a coin-sized patch above the rim that clearly shows signs of repair. The repair work isn't very good, making it immediately obvious that the piece was once damaged. Porcelain is fragile and easily broken, and repairing porcelain, like mounting paintings and calligraphy, is a skilled craft.

Some precious porcelain pieces inevitably suffer some damage after hundreds or even thousands of years. However, after being repaired by a skilled craftsman, the repair marks are impossible to detect without careful observation. In some cases, instruments are needed to see them. This cup, on the other hand, was repaired clumsily, clearly the work of an amateur.

"Zhuang Rui, what's so interesting about this little wine cup? Let me play with it."

Seeing Zhuang Rui holding that small, broken porcelain piece for a long time, Miao Feifei, curious, reached out to snatch it.

"No... this thing is very precious. If it gets broken, you'll lose at least eight or ten years' worth of allowance, Princess."

Zhuang Rui quickly moved Miao Feifei's hand away, while tightly gripping the small cup, afraid of accidentally dropping it. Judging from the boy's expression, he knew the cup was valuable; it seemed he wouldn't be able to salvage it today.

"Really? Do you know how much pocket money I get in a year? Xiao Zhuangzi, aren't porcelain pieces supposed to be bigger and prettier? How much is this little thing worth? Young man, how much is this pen holder for?" Miao Feifei was quite dismissive of Zhuang Rui's words. In her opinion, the pen holder was quite nice, with exquisite openwork carving, and she could consider buying it to put on her desk.

"I don't sell them separately. The two items together cost 300,000. If you two are interested in buying them, I'll explain their origins. If you're not interested, please don't delay my business..."

The older boy noticed Zhuang Rui's expression and seemed to recognize the cup. His face wasn't so grim anymore, but he wondered if the two of them could afford it. After all, 300,000 RMB was a huge sum for most people.

"Oh? You know the origin of this cup? Then tell me first." Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this. He hadn't used his spiritual energy to examine it yet, because he wanted to test his own judgment.

"Our ancestors served as the Daotai of Zhonghai during the Qing Dynasty, which is considered a high-ranking official of the third rank. These two items were passed down from our ancestors. If my father hadn't fallen ill, we wouldn't be selling them." The young man said as he took the cup Zhuang Rui handed him and carefully placed it on the newspaper.

"But you haven't told me what kind of object this cup is, so how can it be worth 300,000 yuan?"

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Miao Feifei was somewhat skeptical of the stories told by the stall owners at the antique market. Moreover, the young man's story was so crudely fabricated that it was incomparable to the stories she had heard at other stalls.

"This is porcelain from the Ming Dynasty. If you don't understand it, don't buy it. Anyway, it's worth 300,000 yuan. I won't sell it for a penny less."

The young man was enraged by Miao Feifei's words. In fact, he knew nothing about porcelain. He had only heard his father say that the porcelain was a family heirloom and could be worth at least 300,000 yuan if sold. That's why he secretly took the porcelain out of the house without telling his seriously ill father, intending to sell it to pay for his father's medical treatment.

"Xiao Huan, speak properly, why are you getting angry? Miss, I'm sorry, please don't be angry, my brother has a short temper..."

The boy's older sister pulled her brother aside and said apologetically to Miao Feifei, but her eyes were fixed on Zhuang Rui.

"Sis, they're not buying, they're just here to cause trouble. Why bother with them..." The boy muttered to himself, clearly unconvinced.

Zhuang Rui paused for a moment after hearing the boy's sister's voice. The voice sounded so familiar, as if he had heard it somewhere before. Zhuang Rui looked at the girl again, but still couldn't place her. He was certain that he had never seen this girl before.

"Hey, if you want to buy it, buy it. If not, leave. What are you staring at my sister for? I'll beat you up if you don't want to."

The boy had a really fiery temper. When he saw Zhuang Rui looking his sister up and down, he immediately stood up and put on a fierce look. The girl's sister blushed with embarrassment at his words and tried to pull her brother back.

"Xiao Zhuangzi, what they say is right. What's wrong with staring at a girl? If she calls the police for harassment, I'll drag you back to the station right now." Miao Feifei chimed in, making Zhuang Rui both amused and exasperated. He couldn't very well say that he just looked at the girl because her voice sounded familiar; that would be too cliché.

"Zhuang Rui, don't be angry, my brother is just a hothead..."

The boy's sister called out Zhuang Rui's name, which stunned everyone.

"Sis, do you know him?"

"Are you Nurse Song? Your voice sounds familiar."

Zhuang Rui disregarded the boundaries between men and women and grabbed Nurse Song's hand, shaking it repeatedly. The darkest time of Zhuang Rui's life was the two weeks or so after his eye injury. You must know that Zhuang Rui was under immense pressure of losing his sight, perhaps never to see again. During that time, the voices he heard most often, besides his mother's, were those of Nurse Song. So when he heard Nurse Song call his name, Zhuang Rui immediately recognized her.

"Zhuang Rui, congratulations, your eyes are completely healed."

Song Xingjun felt a little uncomfortable as Zhuang Rui grabbed her hand, and pulled it away while talking.

"Yes, Nurse Song, I really want to thank you for taking care of me and encouraging me those days. I went to see you the day I was discharged, but your colleagues said you were on leave. I didn't expect to run into you today."

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he couldn't help but recall the two large, white, soft mounds of flesh he had seen when his vision had just returned. He became somewhat distracted and didn't notice that Song Xingjun had already withdrawn her hand.

"Zhuang Rui, what's going on? You two actually know each other? Then why did you ignore everyone else just now?"

Miao Feifei asked curiously from the side, "These two have met several times already. Logically speaking, if they knew each other, they wouldn't act like strangers."

"It's like this, two months ago, at work..."

Looking at the curious child in front of him, Zhuang Rui had no choice but to tell Miao Feifei what had happened.

"Oh, I remember now. No wonder your name seemed familiar. When I first arrived in Zhonghai, there was an announcement within our system about the robbery at the Zhonghai Pawnshop. A hero emerged from it, named Zhuang Rui. I didn't expect it to be you, little Zhuangzi. That person wouldn't happen to share your name, would he?"

Miao Feifei had indeed heard of Zhuang Rui's name. Back then, she had just arrived in Zhonghai and, being a criminal investigation major, she paid close attention to some serious and heinous criminal cases. That's why she had seen Zhuang Rui's name in the documents. However, more than two months had passed, and she couldn't possibly connect that perfect image with the man in front of her.

"I almost got shot, would I really risk my life for that..."

Zhuang Rui glared at Miao Feifei, annoyed. He didn't know the criminals had guns. If he had known, he wouldn't have wasted so much time talking and would have just lay down and pressed the alarm.

"Nurse Song, stop setting up this stall. This is your brother, right? Put the things away and let's find a place to eat first. You took care of me for more than ten days when I was injured, and I haven't properly thanked you yet. If you trust me, I'll help you deal with these items."

Zhuang Rui took out his phone and checked the time. It was already past noon. He and Miao Feifei had only eaten some snacks earlier, and now they were feeling hungry.

"No, no need, we just ate..."

For some reason, Song Xingjun always felt somewhat unnatural when facing Zhuang Rui.

"I've already eaten, but you haven't eaten yet, sis..." Song Huan muttered softly.

Zhuang Rui glanced at the lunchbox in Song Xingjun's hand and said, "Let's go, don't be shy, you still want to sell this stuff, right?"

Chapter 154 Chenghua Doucai (Part 3)

Song Xingjun knew about Zhuang Rui's job. She figured pawnshops must have plenty of opportunities to deal with antiques, and maybe he could find a way in. So she stopped insisting and waited until her younger brother had wrapped the two items in several layers of newspaper before following Zhuang Rui out of the antique market.

Inside the antique market at the City God Temple, there are a few decent restaurants, but since it's the weekend and there are many tourists, Zhuang Rui asked at two of them, but neither had private rooms available. So he simply left the City God Temple and drove the group to a five-star hotel next to Nanjing Road.

Song Xingjun was somewhat surprised by Zhuang Rui's change. In her memory, Zhuang Rui was a shy young man. She had also met Zhuang Rui's mother and sister, and judging from their clothes and conversation, they did not seem to be from a wealthy family. Now, seeing Zhuang Rui driving a car and exuding confidence, Song Xingjun even doubted whether she had mistaken him for someone else.

"Nurse Song, please make yourselves at home. Miss Miao, please don't stand on ceremony. It's an honor to have two beautiful ladies here for dinner today."

After entering the hotel's private room, Zhuang Rui repeatedly invited everyone to sit down and handed the menu to Miao Feifei and Song Xingjun.

"I'd like a shark fin and bird's nest soup, and a ribbonfish, too. Ribbonfish come out of the spring mist, it's perfect to eat this month. Oh, and two servings of bird's nest soup, and one for this lady as well." Miao Feifei didn't stand on ceremony at all, and started ordering from the menu.

"No...no, no, just order a few dishes." Song Xingjun waved her hands repeatedly after hearing Miao Feifei's words. Although she didn't know the price of the shark fin and bird's nest soup, judging from the name, it probably wouldn't be cheap.

"It's alright, bird's nest soup is good for your skin. If that stingy guy doesn't treat us, I'll treat him this time."

Miao Feifei's words left Zhuang Rui speechless. "I didn't say I wouldn't invite you. Besides, with your lowly policeman's salary, can you afford to eat here? You're just a freeloader." However, Zhuang Rui only dared to think these words to himself.

Song Huan seemed to have never been to such a high-end hotel before. After entering, he looked around, while still tightly holding his two treasures in his arms.

After everyone sat down, Zhuang Rui asked Song Xingjun and learned that her parents were ordinary workers in Zhonghai. Her father had retired and was recently diagnosed with stomach cancer. In just over a month, the treatment alone had cost 80,000 to 90,000 yuan, almost depleting the family's savings. As a result, Song Huan had no choice but to steal the two family heirlooms to sell.

Song Huan was sitting with Zhuang Rui. After sitting down, she stared at Miao Feifei for a while, then looked at her sister, and finally nudged Zhuang Rui's arm, asking softly, "Brother Zhuang, did you and my sister really meet at the hospital? What was wrong with my sister just now? She clearly knew you, but she pretended not to.

"I had an eye injury, and when it was bandaged, most of my face was covered. Maybe your sister didn't recognize me just now. I only recognized her because I heard her voice." Zhuang Rui's answer satisfied Song Huan, and she carefully placed the two antiques wrapped in newspaper on the table next to her.

Seeing Song Huan's cautious look, Zhuang Rui smiled. If it were him, he would probably be even more careful. In fact, when Zhuang Rui handed the chicken cup back to Song Huan, he had already examined it with his spiritual energy. It was indeed an old object with a long history, and judging from the purple spiritual energy contained in the cup, it was very likely the Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup, which had been famous in various periods since the Ming Dynasty.

To talk about Chenghua Doucai porcelain, we must first introduce the history before the Chenghua era of the Ming Dynasty. There was a very famous emperor in the Ming Dynasty, namely Emperor Yingzong Zhu Qizhen. Although his reign title contained the words "brilliant," Zhu Qizhen, who ascended the throne at the age of nine, was a completely incompetent ruler.

After Zhu Qizhen ascended the throne, with the successive deaths and retirements of the "Three Yangs," important ministers of the Renxuan era, and the rapid rise of the power of eunuchs in the harem, the court's politics became increasingly corrupt. The famous Grand Eunuch Wang Zhen was a representative figure of eunuch dictatorship during the Zhengtong era. Emperor Yingzong listened to him attentively, and Wang Zhen relied on the emperor's authority to eliminate dissidents and establish factions.

At that time, the Yuan Dynasty's power in the Mongolian Plateau had been divided into two: the Oirat and the Tatars. The two tribes fought each other. By the time of Emperor Yingzong, the Oirat had become powerful and constantly harassed the northern border of the Ming Dynasty. The real power of the Oirat tribe was in the hands of Taishi Esen. He often sent people to the court under the pretense of paying tribute to the court in order to obtain rewards.

At that time, the Ming Dynasty always gave very generous rewards to envoys from tributary states, regardless of the quality of the tribute, and these rewards were distributed per person. Esen also took advantage of this and kept increasing the number of envoys he sent, eventually reaching more than 3,000.

Wang Zhen, unable to tolerate this any longer, ordered a reduction in rewards. Esen used this as a pretext to launch a war against the Ming Dynasty. Emperor Yingzong, young and impetuous at the time, wanted to personally lead the campaign. Wang Zhen, also eager to display his military might and make a name for himself in history, strongly urged Yingzong to do so. However, because the main force of the Ming court was fighting in other regions and could not be recalled quickly, court officials advised Yingzong against it. Ultimately, however, Yingzong's resolve remained unchanged. A hastily assembled army of 500,000 men was assembled from the vicinity of the capital, and under Yingzong's command, the massive campaign began.

Due to continuous heavy rains and a lack of supplies, the army's morale was extremely low. Upon reaching the vicinity of Datong, seeing the corpses of Ming soldiers killed by Esen strewn across the fields, Emperor Yingzong and Wang Zhen wavered and decided to retreat. However, Wang Zhen's hometown was in Weizhou, very close to Datong, so he decided to have the army detour through Weizhou during the retreat. Wang Zhen's proposal was immediately opposed by the court officials, who believed it would delay the retreat. But Wang Zhen wouldn't listen, and Emperor Yingzong also wanted to give Wang Zhen a chance to return home in glory. Therefore, the army began to move towards Weizhou.

At this point, Wang Zhen had another sudden thought: fearing that the army's passage would damage the crops in his hometown and bring him infamy, he suggested retreating along the original route. Thus, precious time was wasted. When the army reached the vicinity of Huailai, since the supplies had not yet arrived, Wang Zhen ordered them to camp and wait.

If Emperor Yingzong had been able to enter Huailai City and garrison it at that time, history would have been rewritten. However, history is history, and there are no "what ifs." Right outside Huailai City at Tumu Fortress, the Ming army was overtaken and surrounded by Esen's army. Esen cut off the Ming army's water supply, trapping them in a desperate situation. Esen feigned peace talks, then launched a general offensive while the Ming army was off guard. The Ming army was completely annihilated,

Emperor Yingzong was captured, Wang Zhen was killed by the Ming general Fan Zhong, and ministers such as Duke Zhang Fu of Yingguo and Minister of War Kuang Ye died in battle. This is the famous Tumu Crisis. Emperor Yingzong then began his year-long captivity in the north.

From that time onward, the Ming Dynasty began its decline.

Zhuang Rui first learned about this history from Liang Yusheng's martial arts novel "The Legend of the Condor Heroes," which was set against the backdrop of the historical event of Emperor Yingzong's capture.

After Emperor Yingzong was captured, in order to stabilize public sentiment, the Ming Dynasty officials in Beijing, led by Yu Qian, installed Emperor Yingzong's younger brother Zhu Qiyu as emperor, known as Emperor Jingzong. After Emperor Yingzong was released by the Oirat Mongols, he was imprisoned in Beijing by Emperor Jingzong for eight years. In 1457, Zhu Qizhen took advantage of Emperor Jingzong's critical illness to launch the "Tumu Crisis" and ascended the throne again, changing the era name to Tianshun.

Emperor Chenghua, Zhu Jianshen, was the eldest son of Emperor Yingzong, Zhu Qizhen. After Zhu Qizhen's restoration, he was reinstated as crown prince. At the age of 18, Zhu Jianshen succeeded his father to the throne and began his 23-year reign, with the reign title Chenghua.

Unlike his father, Zhu Jianshen was not passionate or adventurous. He was quiet, cautious, and tolerant, and trusted his ministers. It is said that great chaos is followed by great order. In the end, during the Chenghua reign, apart from the Yao rebellion in Guangxi and the refugees in the Jingxiang and Yunyang mountainous areas, the political situation was relatively stable. Therefore, the people of the Ming Dynasty called the Chenghua era a golden age of peace and prosperity.

Due to political stability, the production of handicrafts reached its peak during the Chenghua period. Doucai porcelain is a masterpiece of the Chenghua period and a major contribution made by the Chenghua court to enrich the variety of colored porcelain. Chenghua Doucai uses blue and white as the outline of the decoration, or as a partial pattern, and then fills it with color, and fires it twice at a low temperature.

Zhuang Rui knew that Chenghua doucai porcelain was characterized by its transparent and bright colors, especially the red, which was so vivid and dazzling that later imitators could hardly match it. The yellow had many variations, the green had different shades, and the purple was often like the dark purple of ripe grapes or the light purple of eggplant skin. The most special one was the cha zi, which was the color

of red iron and had a dry and dull surface. All of these points could be used as special criteria for identifying Chenghua doucai porcelain.

If Zhuang Rui was not mistaken, the cup in Song Huan's hand should be a genuine Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup. Very few of these items have survived to the public, and even if the cup was damaged, its price was beyond Zhuang Rui's estimation.

“Nurse Song, if I’m not mistaken, your chicken cup should be a Chenghua Doucai chicken cup. This thing sold for a sky-high price of HK\$29.17 million at a Sotheby’s auction in Hong Kong in 1999. Although yours is a bit damaged, selling it for only HK\$300,000 is still too low.”

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and then voiced his opinion. If it were someone else, Zhuang Rui might have immediately pulled out 300,000 yuan to buy the chicken cup. However, ever since Zhuang Rui accidentally saw Song Xingjun's chest last time, he felt really guilty towards the nurse who had taken care of him for more than ten days, so he didn't think about taking advantage of her.

"This is the Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup? I know this thing, it's quite expensive. Xiaozhuangzi is good, he didn't take advantage of my situation..." Miao Feifei seemed to have heard of the Chicken Cup's reputation. Upon hearing this, she immediately turned her gaze to the crumpled newspaper.

After Zhuang Rui said this, Song Xingjun and Song Huan were both stunned. The siblings had not expected the cup to be so valuable. Of course, Zhuang Rui was referring to a well-preserved Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup. As for its exact value, Zhuang Rui had no idea, but he figured it would be worth more than 300,000.

"Princess Miao, how did you come to know about this Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup?"

Just now, Miao Feifei had also held the chicken cup in her hand and played with it for a while, but she didn't recognize it. Now she actually said she had heard of it. Zhuang Rui couldn't help but feel a little strange. He now understood that Miao Feifei was a complete novice when it came to antiques.

"Oh, I heard about it from a friend in Beijing. This year, a TV series was filmed in Beijing with antiques as its background. Some of the props were provided by my friend, including this Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup. He said it's worth 30 to 40 million yuan. Hehe, a lot of fun things happened back then."

Zhuang Rui rolled his eyes upon hearing this. It turned out that this young lady's knowledge of antiques all came from stories.

"Sister Feifei, what's the story? Tell us about it."

Song Xingjun and Miao Feifei were getting along really well right now, and while Zhuang Rui was still in a daze, they were already calling each other sisters. But considering Miao Feifei's personality, it's understandable.

"My friend said that the 'guest appearance' of his antiques almost overshadowed the three main actors, Zhang Tielin (the Emperor), Li Chengru (the Police Chief), and Li Liqun (Professor Tian)."

Each time these antiques are presented, they are escorted by two dedicated prop masters. Other staff members hold their breath and discreetly keep their distance. One of the prop masters said that he almost had a heart attack from having to handle them so carefully every time.

Regarding the "antique-induced heart disease," there's an interesting anecdote circulating in the production crew. Ge Cunzhuang, who played the antique shop owner, once had a scene with this precious Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup. At the time, Mr. Ge didn't know that this small cup, only 2 inches tall, was a priceless antique. He held it in his hands, turning it over and over to examine it, asking, "How much is this little cup worth?"

Li Chengru, who had genuine experience in collecting antiques, told him in a serious tone, "Professor Ge, the auction price for this cup is 30 million RMB." Mr. Ge's hand trembled at that moment, and he quickly put the cup on the table. It is said that after this scene was over, the old man secretly took several nitroglycerin pills.

"Well, this TV series doesn't seem to have started airing yet. It'll probably be around June or July, then you'll be able to see it."

Miao Feifei's words prompted Song Huan to push the two items on the edge of the table further towards the center, presumably to prevent them from accidentally knocking them to the ground.

After hearing Miao Feifei's words, Zhuang Rui thought to himself, "Once this TV series airs, it will probably spark a collecting craze across the country. The chances of finding a bargain on Taobao will be even slimmer." With only a few months left, Zhuang Rui even considered quitting his job and traveling to antique markets in several cities to make a fortune first.

Zhuang Rui's guess was correct. After the TV series was released, it did indeed become a sensation across the country. For a time, everyone paid attention to the antique collecting industry. Even some old ladies in the countryside would take a car for dozens of kilometers to the county town to have an expert appraise their ceramic basins used for feeding pigs. There were countless similar incidents that occurred after that.

"Brother Zhuang, what do you think we should do with this? We definitely have to sell it. Can you help us find a buyer?"

Although Song Huan was a bit impulsive, he was still quite clever. From Zhuang Rui and Miao Feifei's description of the chicken cup, he knew that Zhuang Rui did not intend to deceive him, so he wanted to ask Zhuang Rui to help them sell it.

Chapter 155 Picking up a bargain

"Let's eat first. Let me think about it. This Chenghua Doucai chicken cup is a bit damaged, and I'm not sure how much it's worth. Everyone, please eat first..."

Seeing that all the ordered dishes had arrived, Zhuang Rui quickly urged everyone to eat. Miao Feifei, despite her seemingly delicate appearance, was actually a gourmet; every dish she ordered was an expensive, high-quality delicacy made with exquisite ingredients. Just the Yangtze River spring knife fish alone was quite valuable, not to mention shark fin and bird's nest soup, which were priced per bowl.

"Song Huan, you should eat too. You're still growing, so it's okay to eat more. I'm going out to make a phone call."

Zhuang Rui saw Song Huan sitting next to him, his eyes fixed on the dishes on the table, but he was a little embarrassed to pick up his chopsticks. He smiled and greeted him, then stood up and walked out of the private room, took out his phone and dialed Uncle De's number.

"Hey, Xiao Zhuang, what's up with calling this old man on the weekend? Do you want to cover my shift?"

Uncle De's cheerful voice came from the phone. The pawn shop was open on weekends, but since Zhuang Rui had just arrived in Zhonghai, Uncle De intended to let him rest for two days. It just so happened that an old friend from out of town was visiting him today, and Zhuang Rui's set of purple clay teaware came in handy.

"Uncle De, I was strolling around the City God Temple with a friend today and saw a Chenghua doucai chicken cup. Are you interested...?"

"I'm not interested, Xiao Zhuang. Chenghua doucai porcelain rarely circulates among the common people. The item you saw is definitely fake. Don't waste your time. Have fun for a couple of days and come to work the day after tomorrow."

Uncle De interrupted Zhuang Rui before he could finish speaking, saying that there were very few Chenghua Doucai pieces left in the Palace Museum, and that they were the kind of pieces you could just find by strolling around the City God Temple.

"No, Uncle De, don't hang up yet. Let me tell you, this item is most likely genuine. From the body, glaze, shape, decoration, and style, it's exactly the same as the real thing. Please take a look first." Zhuang Rui quickly praised the chicken cup after hearing that Uncle De was about to hang up.

"You brat, you've only been playing with porcelain for a few days, and you're already showing off to this old man? Let me tell you, the Chenghua chicken cup is the most imitated in later generations, especially during the Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong reigns. Many of the imitations are so realistic that they're almost indistinguishable from the real thing. If you could tell the difference, those counterfeiters would have been out of business long ago."

Uncle De chuckled and scolded Zhuang Rui over the phone, but hearing Zhuang Rui's certainty, he hesitated for a moment before continuing, "However, if they are official kiln imitations from these dynasties, they are worth some money. How much are you asking for, stall owner?"

"Uncle De, that stall owner is a friend of mine. You might have met him; he's Nurse Song, the one I met when I was hospitalized. Her family is going through some difficulties, so she's selling her family heirloom. It's definitely not a scam by those sycophants at the antique market." Hearing that Uncle De had relented, Zhuang Rui quickly explained the origin of the item and also expressed his desire to help Nurse Song.

"Oh, is that so? Here's what we'll do, Xiao Zhuang, bring them to the company later. I'll take a look at the items and then we'll talk. If they're genuine, they'll be in high demand. Don't worry about them not selling."

Uncle De hesitated for a moment on the other end of the phone, but decided to take a look at the item first. He didn't really trust Zhuang Rui's appraisal skills, just like Zhuang Rui's driving skills with Viagra.

"Okay, Uncle De, it's settled then. I'll be there right away."

Zhuang Rui hung up the phone, feeling a huge weight lifted from his heart. Although he had assured Song Xingjun and her brother, with his connections, he really didn't know where to sell it unless he went to Yang Wei's father. Now that Uncle De had agreed to take a look, there was absolutely no problem. As for whether the cup was real or fake, Zhuang Rui wasn't worried at all.

Back in the private room, Song Xingjun and her brother were preoccupied and didn't eat much. Miao Feifei, on the other hand, ate the two ribbonfish until only the bones remained. After Zhuang Rui sat down and ate a bowl of rice, he said to Miao Feifei with a slight apology, "Princess Miao, I can't go shopping with you this afternoon. I need to go back to the pawnshop and take this item to the master craftsman for a look."

When Zhuang Rui saw Song Xingjun and her brother's expression change slightly as he spoke, he quickly added, "You two are coming with me. I'm doing this just to be on the safe side. If this Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup is genuine, I guarantee it will fetch a good price."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Song Xingjun nodded. Although she knew that Zhuang Rui was a kind and honest person, this involved hundreds of thousands of yuan. If she rashly handed it over to Zhuang Rui, not only would her younger brother not agree, but she herself would not feel at ease either.

"I'll go with you guys, I'm on vacation these days anyway."

Miao Feifei also wanted to join in the fun. She had found a Chenghua Doucai chicken cup at the street stall. If it was real, it would be a great topic of conversation with her friends when she returned to Beijing.

"Let's go together then."

Seeing that everyone had almost finished eating, Zhuang Rui went out to pay the bill. This meal actually cost him more than five thousand yuan. It seems that this five-star hotel is really not something that ordinary people can afford.

...

"Xiao Zhuang, this is Boss Cheng, a specialist in chicken-blood stone, and also an old friend of mine. You two should get to know each other better.

After Zhuang Rui led the three to the pawnshop, he directly knocked on Uncle De's office door. Inside, besides Uncle De, was an elderly man in his sixties. Upon seeing Zhuang Rui enter, Uncle De introduced them to each other.

"What I do is nothing special, brother, please don't laugh at me. But I heard that Manager Zhuang met a treasure today, why don't you show it to us?"

Mr. Cheng just heard from Uncle De that the young Manager Zhuang found a Chenghua doucai porcelain piece at the City God Temple. Not only did Uncle De not believe it, but even Mr. Cheng, who didn't know much about porcelain, didn't believe it.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui took the two items from Song Huan. After unfolding the newspaper outside, he placed the Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup on the coffee table. As for the pen holder, Zhuang Rui casually handed it back to Song Huan. He had examined it with his spiritual energy and found that although the pen holder was well-carved, it contained no spiritual energy whatsoever, suggesting it was a modern artifact.

"Hehe, this is not in very good condition. Who repaired it? Isn't this just a waste?"

Uncle De casually picked up the chicken cup that Zhuang Rui had placed on the coffee table. After examining it for a while, he noticed the broken rim and frowned. Normally, even if a piece of valuable porcelain isn't in perfect condition, a well-repaired piece would still command a high price. But regardless of whether this piece was genuine or not, the repair work was simply appalling.

"Uncle De, let's put that aside for now. Please take a look at this and see if it is indeed Chenghua Doucai porcelain."

Zhuang Rui's words drew Uncle De's attention back to the chicken cup. His expression slowly changed, from nonchalant to serious. He then took the chicken cup and strode to his desk, turned on a bright light above it, and took out a magnifying glass from a drawer to examine it closely.

Apart from Zhuang Rui, the others also held their breath, watching Uncle De making the appraisal with bated breath. Boss Cheng looked on incredulously. For Uncle De to react like this, even if the cup wasn't Chenghua Doucai, it must still be a very precious antique.

"Good stuff, good stuff, alas, what a pity, what a pity."

More than ten minutes later, Uncle De turned off the bright light, walked back to his sandalwood coffee table, carefully placed the cup in his hand on the table, and looked at him with regret.

"Uncle De, is this true or false? Please give me a definite answer." Zhuang Rui was pretending to be confused even though he knew the truth.

"It's a genuine Chenghua doucai porcelain, but its condition is such a pity. If it hadn't been chipped or damaged, this small cup would be worth at least 30 million if auctioned off now." Uncle De shook his head repeatedly, looking at the chicken cup with great regret.

"Uncle De, how much can this cup sell for now? My friend urgently needs the money." Zhuang Rui knew that this was the question that Song Xingjun and her brother were most concerned about, so he asked it.

"Look at the condition now, tsk tsk, if it were auctioned, it would fetch between eighty and one million RMB. If someone in our circle were to buy it, it would be around five hundred thousand." Uncle De clicked his tongue, seemingly quite dissatisfied with the price he had quoted.

"You can sell so many?"

Song Huan, standing to the side, gaped in astonishment. He had never imagined that 30 million could be exchanged for 300,000, and he would be satisfied.

"You guys are lucky to have run into Xiao Zhuang. Besides, not many good items have come from the City God Temple, and fewer old players go there anymore. Otherwise, if you had really sold this chicken cup for 300,000, kid, you'd regret it."

Uncle De paused for a moment and then continued, "If I were to come across one, I'd consider it a steal at 300,000. By the way, let me tell you a story about this chicken cup. It happened before the liberation."

It seems to have happened around 1939. Wang Dianchen, the owner of the Xianghecheng secondhand goods store on Qianmen Street in Beijing, went to Huangxian County, Shandong Province to buy secondhand goods. One day, he saw a brightly colored small cup filled with soapberry water on a middle-aged woman's dressing table in a courtyard. He couldn't help but go in and ask the woman to take the cup out so he could take a look.

The cup was 11 centimeters tall and about 5 centimeters in diameter, exquisitely crafted, and a genuine Chenghua doucai porcelain. He wanted to buy it, and the woman, seeing that he really wanted it, asked for a silver dollar. At that time, it only cost 30 silver dollars to buy an acre of land. To his surprise, Wang Dianchen, without saying a word, took out a silver dollar with a portrait of Sun Yat-sen and gave it to her.

When Wang Dianchen returned to Beijing, he hurriedly worked with his colleagues to estimate the price. They boldly set the price at 800 silver dollars, which was 800 times higher than the purchase price.

This item was displayed for only two days before Zhou Jiechen, the owner of Jian Gu Zhai, took a liking to it and immediately started negotiating the price with Wang Dianchen.

At that time, Wang Dianchen put on a long-sleeved gown, just like you saw on TV. Zhou Jiechen from Jianguzhai put his hand into Wang Dianchen's sleeve, and Wang Dianchen held out an eight gesture. Zhou Jiechen asked, "Ten, hundred, thousand?" Wang answered, "hundred." Zhou pulled his hand out and said, "I want it."

Upon hearing this, Wang Dianchen immediately understood. He had set the price too low, and an expert had snagged the bargain. However, he was already satisfied with the 799 yuan he had earned.

After returning home, Zhou Jiechen carefully examined the small cup and confirmed it was indeed a superior Chenghua doucai porcelain. Its shape was light and elegant, the porcelain body delicate and pure, the white glaze lustrous like cream, and the colors soft and harmonious. It depicted a squirrel stealing grapes, with abundant fruit and leaves, meticulously painted and lifelike. Such a treasure, acquired for only 800 yuan—how could he not be delighted?

Everyone in the antique trade knew Zhou Jiechen had acquired a valuable item, but no one was willing to pay a high price. Finally, Zhou Jiechen approached Wu Qizhou of Lu Wu Company. Wu initially offered 3500 yuan, but after some haggling, the price was raised to 4000 yuan. Zhou Jiechen made a profit of 3200 yuan in one transaction, and was naturally overjoyed. However, Wu Qizhou later resold the cup to the United States, making a profit of over 10,000 yuan. Only then did Zhou Jiechen realize that he had gotten a much bigger bargain.

Therefore, for genuine Chenghua doucai porcelain, the price is unpredictable. Take this chicken cup for example; if it's in perfect condition, and you ask for 300,000 yuan, someone else might offer 3 million or 9 million yuan to buy it, which would be a huge bargain.

"Uncle De, when Song Huan took this thing to the antique shop, why were they only willing to offer 30,000 to 50,000? Could it be that they couldn't tell it was Chenghua Doucai?" Zhuang Rui asked, voicing Song Huan's question.

Uncle De glanced at Zhuang Rui and said with a disdainful look, "They don't know anything. Let alone genuine Chenghua doucai pieces, those people have never even seen a broken piece of Chenghua doucai porcelain. At most, they've handled imitations from the three Qing dynasties. They probably think this is an imitation from that time. It's already pretty good that they can offer 30,000 to 50,000 yuan. With this condition, even if it were an official kiln imitation from the Qing dynasty, it would only be worth a hundred thousand or so at most."

Everyone then realized that the imitations of Chenghua doucai porcelain had become so famous that they could be mistaken for the real thing. When the genuine article was placed in front of them, no one recognized it.

"Uncle De, what do you think we should do with this chicken cup?"

Zhuang Rui could see the anxious expressions on Song Xingjun and her brother's faces, and he understood their thoughts. They both wanted to exchange the cup for cash as soon as possible to help treat their father.

"There are two options. The first is to put it up for auction. Given my relationship with the auction house, I estimate that we can arrange for it to be auctioned within a week. As for the price, it's between 800,000 and 1.2 million RMB, as I just mentioned. After deducting the auction house's pre-event promotion and 15% commission, you should receive around 700,000 to 1 million RMB."

The second method will take longer. I have some experience in repairing porcelain, so I can repair this cup. I estimate that the auction price will rise to around two million. However, it will take at least half a month, as repairing porcelain is a delicate job.

"You can choose either of these two methods. I suggest waiting a few days until the repairs are complete before putting it up for auction. I'm only doing this because of Xiao Zhuang's sake. Please think it over carefully."

Uncle De's words made Song Xingjun and her brother hesitate, so they stood up and went to the door to discuss it.

#### Chapter 156 Question

About ten minutes later, Song Xingjun and her brother seemed to have made up their minds and came back. They both looked a little hesitant to speak, but in the end, Song Huan spoke up to Uncle De and said, "Could we sell this porcelain to your pawn shop? It doesn't have to be two million, one million five hundred thousand will do. As for whether you repair it and put it up for auction or keep it for yourselves, we don't care. Is that alright?"

Song Huan knew her suggestion was somewhat unreasonable, and after speaking, she lowered her gaze somewhat embarrassed.

Song Huan's words made Zhuang Rui and Uncle De exchange bewildered glances. They hadn't expected Song Huan to come up with such an idea. It wasn't impossible, but it would place all the risks on the pawnshop.

"Xiao Zhuang, why don't you buy this item yourself? Keep it for a few years, and even if you don't sell it, you won't lose out."

Uncle De thought for a moment and realized that following Song Huan's approach would be against the rules, because if the chicken cup were to be pawned, the pawnshop could only offer around 200,000 RMB at most, which was far from the 1.5 million RMB that Song Huan had mentioned.

You might be wondering, this chicken cup is clearly worth over a million, so why did the pawnshop only offer a maximum of two hundred thousand? That's the rule of pawnshops. No matter how good your item is, once it's brought in, it'll likely be damaged by insects or rats, or be a broken piece of porcelain. This is a tradition passed down from pawnshops in the past. Although this saying isn't used anymore, pawnshops generally offer about one-fifth of the item's original value.

"I'd like to accept it, but I just bought a house and don't have that much money on hand."

After listening to Uncle De's words, Zhuang Rui said helplessly, "If this matter had been brought up yesterday, I would still have that check in my hand. As for now, the boss would probably have already transferred the check into cash and bought that house."

Uncle De's words were meant to let Zhuang Rui take advantage of the situation. He was confident he could repair the porcelain and sell it for a good price, easily making three to five hundred thousand yuan in profit. However, he didn't know that Zhuang Rui only had three to five hundred thousand yuan left in his pocket.

Uncle De had considered buying the chicken cup himself, but Song Huan's asking price was a bit too high. The item would probably only fetch a little over two million at auction, and after deducting various expenses, he would only have a little over one million left. Nothing in this world is absolute, and if it failed to sell or the final price wasn't ideal, it would be a losing proposition. Besides, this was Zhuang Rui's private matter, so Uncle De didn't offer to take it upon himself.

"Hey, Uncle De, how could we forget about the King of Bargains?"

Seeing the embarrassed expressions on Song Xingjun and her brother's faces, Zhuang Rui's eyes suddenly lit up. How could he have forgotten about this person?

"You mean Lao Yang? Yeah, he'll definitely want it. Why don't you give him a call and ask?"

As soon as Uncle De heard Zhuang Rui's words, he knew who he was talking about. Yang's father had been trying to find a great bargain for the past few years, but he only had a house full of scrap metal and few real treasures. Over time, people in the circle called him the King of Bargains.

After the family business got on track in recent years, Yang's father hired a professional manager to manage it. He usually didn't have much to do, mostly just drinking tea with old friends or strolling around the antique market. He had just finished lunch and was about to take a nap when he received Zhuang Rui's call. He immediately perked up and told Zhuang Rui not to sell to anyone and that he would be there right away.

Within half an hour, Yang's father arrived. After listening to Zhuang Rui's introduction, he patted Zhuang Rui on the shoulder happily and said, "Not bad, Zhuang. Uncle Yang has been spoiling you all this time. He even thought of me when he got something nice."

"Uncle Yang, these two are my friends. I'm just helping them out. What do you think of the price..."

Zhuang Rui actually regarded Yang's father as a firefighter and felt unworthy of the praise.

"One and a half million, right? That's no problem, but..."

Yang's father's eyes darted around before landing on Uncle De, and he continued, "Brother De, I have no problem accepting this, the price is what you agreed on, but you have to agree to two conditions.

Uncle De and Yang's father were very familiar with each other and often joked around. He laughed and said, "Oh, take it or leave it. Do you think I can't sell this item? It's only because Xiao Zhuang was thinking of saving it for you that you, you old rascal, are making demands."

Yang's father didn't take Uncle De's words to heart. Pointing to the Chenghua chicken cup, he said, "First, brother, you have to help me repair this cup. Second..." Yang's father was over fifty years old, and he became hesitant as he spoke, looking at the people in the room with some embarrassment.

"Don't take big breaths when you speak, just say it all in one breath." Uncle De was also curious about Yang's father's second condition when he saw his father's appearance.

"Secondly, you mustn't spread the word about how much I paid for this item. If you agree, I'll buy it." Yang's father finally stated his conditions. Upon hearing this, Uncle De, Zhuang Rui, and Boss Cheng exchanged glances and then burst into laughter.

"You old rascal, you're almost 60 and you still have these thoughts, haha. Okay, I promise you. And you guys, don't spread this around today."

Uncle De laughed as he spoke to the somewhat bewildered Song Xingjun and his sister, as well as Miao Feifei. The group nodded in agreement, assuming that Boss Yang must not want his wealth to be flaunted, which was why he asked them to keep it a secret.

Zhuang Rui and Uncle De knew that Yang's father's request was actually to satisfy his desire to find bargains. Over the years, he had collected quite a few items and spent a lot of money, but he had not found a single high-quality item.

Every city has its own circle of collectors. Within this circle, whoever has the most or the finest collection has the loudest voice and the most authority. Although Yang's father is a big boss outside, he has repeatedly made mistakes and paid his dues in the collecting world, so he is often ridiculed by people in the circle. His second condition is probably to use this Chenghua Doucai Chicken Cup as a bargain he found to brag about in the circle, which is why Uncle De and Zhuang Rui laughed out loud.

"Hey bro, you still haven't thrown away that cabinet you had made last time, have you? After I fix this porcelain piece, you can put it in there. Hey, that would be so prestigious, haha."

Uncle De didn't care that the younger generation was present and joked with Yang's father. The cabinet he mentioned was specially made by Yang's father last year for the Xuande incense burner that he bought from the tagalong. It even had several spotlights installed on it.

Seeing the group catching up, Zhuang Rui quietly told Miao Feifei and the others about Yang's father. They smiled to themselves as they listened. Song Xingjun and her brother also smiled because the medical expenses that had been troubling them would soon be resolved.

"Alright, alright. I've already paid quite a bit of tuition, so don't embarrass me in front of the younger generation. Xiao Zhuang, ask them if they want a bank transfer or a cash check. If they want a transfer, I'll have someone go with you to do it."

Having suffered many losses, Yang's father didn't care about Uncle De's criticism and turned to ask Zhuang Rui what kind of transaction they wanted to make.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui glanced at Song Xingjun and her brother and said, "Let's just use cash or checks, then we won't trouble you, Uncle Yang."

"Okay, next time you have something good, remember to save some for me. You're much better than my little brat. He takes out a few things from my whole house and sells them every now and then. He's such a spendthrift."

Zhuang Rui laughed at Yang's father's words. Yang Wei did indeed take out a few items from his collection room, but after Uncle De appraised them, they were all fake. Wei was so angry that he refused to enter his father's so-called treasure room again.

Zhuang Rui took the check from Yang's father, who had already written the amount, glanced at it, and handed it to Song Huan. Seeing that Song Huan was about to fold it up and put it in her pocket after looking at it for a while, Zhuang Rui quickly stopped her, saying, "Don't fold this check, otherwise the bank might refuse to accept it. Go to the Bank of China now, open an account, and then transfer the money on this check into your account."

"Zhuang Rui, thank you!"

Zhuang Rui's words startled Song Huan, who quickly handed the check to her sister. Song Xingjun took it, carefully put it in her handbag, and pulled her brother to stand up, bowing deeply to Zhuang Rui.

"No, what are you doing, Nurse Song? If you want to thank someone, I should be thanking you. If it weren't for your comforting words when I was injured, I don't know what would have happened. Let's not thank each other. You should hurry to the bank to transfer the money and then get Uncle medical treatment as soon as possible. I will visit Uncle in the hospital when I have time."

Zhuang Rui dared not accept the two men's courtesy and stepped aside to let them pass. It was only because he recognized Song Xingjun that he did so. Otherwise, back at the City God Temple, Zhuang Rui would have definitely taken out 300,000 to snag this bargain. It would have been worth over a million in one transaction. However, Zhuang Rui did not regret it. Helping Song Xingjun this time was also a way of fulfilling one of his own wishes.

"Let's go, let's continue shopping."

After Song Xingjun and her brother left, Zhuang Rui saw the three old men chatting happily to themselves, so he took Miao Feifei and left.

Although Zhuang Rui had been in Zhonghai for five or six years, he had only ever been to school and worked, so he hadn't been to many places, let alone nearby Suzhou and other places. The next morning, he picked up Miao Feifei, and the two drove to Zhouzhuang in Suzhou. They had a great day there, and after two days, Miao Feifei had come to regard Zhuang Rui as a close friend.

After a pleasant weekend, Zhuang Rui returned to his work at the pawnshop. His responsibilities had expanded considerably; he not only had to oversee the overall management but also manage the pawnshop's investment strategies and the auction house's business. These responsibilities were largely delegated to Wang Yiding and Lai Jingdong.

In the blink of an eye, more than two months have passed. During these two months, Wang Yiding and the other person have successfully auctioned off several items from their inventory, achieving remarkable results. As for the authenticity of the auctioned items, Zhuang Rui did not inquire about them. He had already explicitly suggested to the investment company that the two people be responsible for all business related to the auction, and that they also bear the rights and responsibilities.

...

"Uncle De, take a look at the unredeemed items we've collected recently. Something seems off about them."

After get off work one day, Zhuang Rui kept Uncle De behind and handed him a piece of paper. The paper recorded the pawned items that Wang Yiding had collected over the past month. The amount and items on the paper were quite suspicious.

## Chapter 157 Deception

The piece of paper Zhuang Rui handed to Uncle De recorded the number and value of unredeemed luxury items that Wang Yiding had accepted at the pawnshop over the past year. The total number was 98 items, amounting to 9.72 million RMB. Four of these items were purchased by Wang Yiding after making a mistake, resulting in a loss of 290,000 RMB.

Of the remaining 94 jewelry and luxury goods items, 88 were sold through auctions and self-sales, generating RMB 13.6 million. Overall, the results were quite good. Apart from the antiques project and forfeited real estate mortgages managed by Uncle De, Wang Yiding's luxury goods business was one of the more important profit points within the pawnshop.

However, since Zhuang Rui took over as manager of the pawnshop, Wang Yiding has accepted 32 luxury items for pawn in just two months. Among them, 15 items were short-term pawned items with a term of one or two weeks. Now that the time has passed, they have become unpawned items. But yesterday, Lai Jingdong came to Zhuang Rui's office and said that 12 of these 15 luxury items were counterfeit, and submitted the list of items to Zhuang Rui.

After careful examination, Zhuang Rui discovered that among these fake luxury items, eight were jewelry pieces and three were luxury watches. Yesterday afternoon, Zhuang Rui and Lai Jingdong went to the bank to have these eleven items re-appraised and found that they were indeed all counterfeit.

Wang didn't mention any of the eleven counterfeit jewelry and watches, only reporting that a laptop was a fake pawn. According to Wang, he saw that the tags and data on the computer matched the invoice, so he gave it 5,000 yuan as collateral. However, a week later, after the pawn period ended and the computer became unclaimed, he installed system software and discovered that the computer had been technically disguised, with its specifications updated to a new model.

The pawnshop's total expenditure for this purpose was 550,000 RMB. This means that in just two months, the number of counterfeit items received by the pawnshop far exceeded the total amount of counterfeit items received in the entire previous year. Why would Wang Yi conceal this? Even Lai Jingdong could tell they were fake; surely he could too? This immediately alerted Zhuang Rui, who was naturally perceptive, to the suspicious activity involved.

To be honest, Zhuang Rui spent most of his energy learning about antique appreciation from Uncle De over the past two months. He examined all the valuable traditional Chinese jade jewelry in the collection, as well as the original paintings and calligraphy by famous artists such as Li Keran and Sun

Yuntian. Under Uncle De's guidance, he also saw many collections from renowned collectors in China, which broadened his horizons considerably. His understanding of antiques, both theoretically and practically, is now incomparable to what it was two months ago.

Qin Xuanbing and Lei Lei also came to Zhonghai a month ago, but for only three days. Zhuang Rui even put aside his work to accompany them the whole time, which made Miss Qin very satisfied. It was just a pity that Liu Chuan was not there and could not lure away Lei Lei, the third wheel, so Zhuang Rui's idea of getting close to her failed.

So for the past two months, Zhuang Rui really didn't pay much attention to the work at the pawnshop. Apart from making a proposal for investing in real estate, he handed over the rest of the work to Wang Yiding and Lai Jingdong. Now it seems that his concessions have made Wang Yiding unable to restrain himself and has become more and more rampant.

Uncle De looked at the data on the paper, his expression gradually becoming serious. After a while, he put the paper on the coffee table and unconsciously tapped it with his middle finger.

“Uncle De, in the past, pawnshops had clerks and tellers. The teller was usually the head manager of the pawnshop. In larger pawnshops, there were even second and third managers. If you wanted to pawn an item, it would probably have to go through several people. But here, the appraisal of luxury goods is decided by Wang Yi. Uncle De, there's probably something fishy going on here.”

Zhuang Rui's words interrupted the tapping of Uncle De's fingers on the coffee table. He naturally knew a hundred times more about the situation inside the pawnshop than Zhuang Rui did, and the current state of affairs within the pawnshop had significantly reduced the constraints on the appraisers.

"A scam!!!"

Uncle De's face was contorted with bulging veins as he squeezed out two words. He grabbed the paper on the coffee table with his right hand and crumpled it into a ball. In his experience, if he couldn't see these clues, then he would have wasted his decades of life.

"Uncle De, please don't get agitated. We don't have any evidence. If we confront him directly, Wang will definitely deny it to the death, and there's nothing we can do about it. At most, he'll resign and leave.

We need to study this matter carefully and see how we can find something to hold against him so that he can get the money he swindled from the pawnshop back. That way, we can minimize our losses."

Uncle De's expression softened upon hearing this. He had been working as a waiter in the pawnshop since he was a teenager and valued the duties of this profession above all else. Therefore, he deeply resented Wang Yiding's actions. The matter was quite obvious: Wang Yiding colluded with outsiders to exchange fake jewelry and watches for pawn money. After the items became unpawned, he then colluded with people in the auction house to sell these counterfeit jewelry items under the guise of unpawned items from the pawnshop. In this way, the items were sold, and on the surface, the pawnshop did not suffer any losses. However, if this matter were to get out, the pawnshop's reputation would be ruined.

Wang Yiding could make money in two ways during this process. First, he could swindle money from the pawnshop. Second, he could get a substantial commission after the fake unredeemed items were auctioned off at the auction house. Judging from the current amount of money involved, it is more than 500,000 yuan, which is enough to make Wang Yiding take the risk.

"Xiao Zhuang, what do you think we should do about this? If this were in the past, we'd either beat this traitor to death or throw him into the Huangpu River in a pig cage. These young people nowadays, sigh..."

Uncle De was really angry at his son's lack of ambition. This Wang must have been an appraiser introduced by an old friend of his. He did a pretty good job last year, but as soon as he got power this year, he started to do crooked things. This made Uncle De lose face.

Zhuang Rui smiled and said, "Uncle De, this is actually all my fault. If the previous system hadn't been changed and they didn't have the right to contact the auction house, Wang certainly wouldn't have dared to do this. After this matter is resolved, I will submit a written report to the investment company and offer my resignation."

When Uncle De saw that Zhuang Rui was about to resign, he quickly said, "Little Zhuang, this won't do. I, this old man, will have to bear the consequences. At worst, I'll quit being a consultant and go home to enjoy my retirement. You're still young. It will be beneficial for you to gain more experience in this position for a few more years."

"No, Uncle De, you've been wise all your life, don't ruin your reputation in your later years. This is no big deal, I promise to handle it properly. Besides, Uncle De, you know that my family's businesses are doing

quite well, and they've called me several times to urge me to come back, but the leaders of the investment company have treated me well. I'm just using this as an excuse to resign."

Zhuang Rui's words were half true and half an excuse. His brother-in-law Zhao Guodong's repair shop business was booming. In the past two months, after deducting expenses such as wages and factory premises, the monthly net profit was 80,000 to 90,000 yuan. Zhuang Rui's investment had basically been recovered.

Liu Chuan's Tibetan Mastiff kennel project was completed long ago. He and Zhou Rui made another trip to Tibet and brought back two male Tibetan Mastiffs and four female Tibetan Mastiffs. However, the Tibetan Mastiffs' mating season is in December every year. Now Liu Chuan is preparing for the Shanxi International Tibetan Mastiff Expo at the end of June, aiming to make Pengcheng Tibetan Mastiff Kennel a household name. He called Zhuang Rui several times to urge him to come along.

What truly made Zhuang Rui decide to resign from his pawnshop job was a phone call from Song Jun. In the call, Song Jun invited Zhuang Rui to attend a jade trade fair held in Pingzhou in early June. Zhuang Rui still vividly remembers the scene that happened at the Nanjing Jade and Jewelry Exhibition and wanted to see a larger jade trading market, so he agreed on the phone.

However, when Zhuang Rui calculated the time, he had to go to Pingzhou, Guangdong in early June and then to Shanxi to participate in the Tibetan Mastiff Expo at the end of the month. This meant that he could not stay in Zhonghai for the entire month of June. Rather than taking a long leave after only a few months of work, Zhuang Rui simply had the idea of resigning. In any case, he had crammed a lot of theoretical knowledge of antique appreciation in the past two months, so he would not be embarrassed in some situations.

"So how do you plan to handle this?"

Uncle De knew that Zhuang Rui's ambitions had long since shifted, so he didn't try to persuade him to stay. In the past two months, Uncle De had already shared his decades of experience and insights into antiques with Zhuang Rui. The rest was up to Zhuang Rui to learn more about various antique objects in the future, as he had nothing more to teach him.

"Uncle De, please take a look at these videos first."

Zhuang Rui sat down at his desk and turned the computer screen slightly toward Uncle De.

"This woman appeared a total of fifteen times, eleven of which were in the reception room of the pawnshop. Uncle De, you see, she's holding a watch in her hand. In other shots, she's holding those fake pawned items."

There were four other incidents captured by the security cameras outside the pawnshop. Uncle De, look at this footage again. Isn't the man next to this woman Wang Yiding? These incidents alone are enough to prove the point. Wang Yiding colluded with outsiders to defraud pawnshops of their money using counterfeit jewelry. This is a violation of the law, and we could have easily called the police.

Zhuang Rui pointed to the footage transferred from the camera on the computer and showed it to Uncle De one by one. He wanted to resolve this issue through legal means. Wang Yiding's actions constituted fraud. Although these videos could not be used as evidence, they could be used as evidence to report the crime.

"Call the police?" Uncle De pondered for a long time before slowly shaking his head.

Chapter 158 Call the Police When in Trouble

"Officer Miao, please don't just eat! I called you here today to report a situation to the police.

Zhuang Rui looked at Miao Feifei across the table, who was eating and drinking heartily, and couldn't help but feel a little helpless. He just couldn't understand why this girl could eat so much every time and still have such a good figure.

For the past two months, Miao Feifei has been treating Zhuang Rui's house like a canteen, coming over for a meal every now and then. However, Miao Feifei is also very generous, and she will treat Zhuang Rui to a nice meal every now and then. The two really get along like buddies, which makes Wei Ge exclaim that there is something going on between them every time he sees the two of them together.

After Zhuang Rui helped Song Xingjun sell the chicken cup and she had money, her father's condition was brought under control and is now gradually improving. This made Song Xingjun very grateful to Zhuang Rui. When she had free time, she would often buy some groceries and cook for Zhuang Rui at his house. Over time, she and Miao Feifei also became friends, and the two would often come to Zhuang

Rui's house together. However, Song Xingjun was not here today, and Zhuang Rui invited Miao Feifei alone.

"Why did you call me instead of following the proper channels to report the crime? I'm just a junior traffic cop."

After Miao Feifei finished eating and drinking, she wiped her mouth with satisfaction, patted her tummy, and looked at Zhuang Rui with a teasing expression.

"Alright, tell me if you'll help or not. If you don't, I'll call 110 right now and tell them that a rude guest has come to our house to eat and drink for free."

"Little Zhuangzi, not bad, you've learned to threaten people."

Miao Feifei waved her little fist, but still didn't dare to hit Zhuang Rui. The reason was that when she joked with Zhuang Rui last time, the dress she was wearing was torn into a cheongsam by Bai Shi, which gave Zhuang Rui quite a feast for the eyes.

"Where are you looking? I'll gouge your eyes out if you're not careful."

It's almost June now, and the weather is getting hot. Miao Feifei is wearing only a tight-fitting, slightly short t-shirt and low-waisted jeans. As she stretches, her perfectly toned, snow-white abdomen is fully revealed, making it completely visible to Zhuang Rui sitting opposite her.

"Cough...cough cough, it's not like I haven't seen it before."

"What did you say? Say it again!"

"Oh, I didn't say anything. I just said that you have good teeth and a good appetite. You finished all the food on my table."

When Zhuang Rui was a child, his mother often tutored students overtime. He and his sister both developed excellent cooking skills. The time when Wei Ge got his driver's license back from Miao Feifei, Zhuang Rui personally cooked a few dishes. Ever since Miao Feifei ate Zhuang Rui's cooking that time, she often bought good ingredients for Zhuang Rui to cook, and Wei Ge also ate there many times.

"Here, take a good look and give me some professional advice later. Stop bragging about your criminal investigation background all the time. Show me some real skills."

Zhuang Rui handed Miao Feifei a document and got up to clear the dishes. Zhuang Rui had only entertained four people here before: Miao Feifei and Wei Ge, who were both foodies, and Uncle De. So, the task of washing the dishes after the meal naturally fell to him.

"Zhuang Rui, you have detailed information on this woman named Li Xia. Since she has had multiple contacts with the target, why not just take her down and use some methods? You should ask the Criminal Investigation Division to handle this."

Miao Feifei frowned as she looked at the information Zhuang Rui had given her. Judging from the multiple contacts between this woman named Li Xia and the suspect, it should be a case of collusion between insiders and outsiders to defraud pawnbrokers. Such a case should be handed over to an experienced criminal investigator, and the truth should be revealed in less than three days.

"Hey, Gege, if I could just call the police, why would I need to come to you? I want you to take matters into your own hands and subdue this woman, or get evidence out of her. Hmm, that's a bit much for you, but that's how you'll demonstrate your abilities."

While flattering him, Zhuang Rui brought out washed grapes and other fruits; after all, asking for favors requires both material and emotional incentives.

Initially, Zhuang Rui was inclined to call the police, believing the matter should be handled by professionals. However, after some consideration, Uncle De decided to handle it internally first, because if the matter were to get out, the impact would be too great. Not only would it cause consumers to distrust pawnshops, but the auction house would also be held responsible. In that case, Zhuang Rui, Uncle De, and their pawnshop would become public enemies of the industry.

So Uncle De and Zhuang Rui discussed it and decided to start with the woman whose signature was Li Xia. Once they got evidence that Wang Yiding had colluded with outsiders to commit fraud, they wouldn't have to worry about Wang Yiding denying it. Presumably, he would make a smart choice between returning the stolen goods and going to jail. And with Uncle De's connections, once this matter spread throughout the industry, Wang Yiding would probably have no choice but to go abroad to make a living. No matter what industry it is, no one would hire someone like him who betrays his own people.

"That's not difficult, but Little Zhuangzi, if I help you, how will you thank me?"

Miao Feifei could tell from Zhuang Rui's information that neither of the perpetrators were experienced; there were flaws everywhere. Starting with this woman would likely be an easy way to find a breakthrough.

"You've been eating my food for over two months, so it's time you helped me with some work. You won't have the chance to help me anymore. After this matter is resolved, I will voluntarily resign from the company."

Zhuang Rui's voice was a little low. This job was the longest he had ever held since graduation. Although he had made up his mind, he was still a little reluctant to leave, especially since his close friend Uncle De had benefited him greatly.

"What? You want to resign! This has nothing to do with you, why do you want to resign? I'll handle it for you." Miao Feifei's reaction was stronger than Zhuang Rui expected, as if she had made a mistake and wanted to resign.

"I've had the idea of resigning for a long time. This is just an excuse. My mother is getting old, so I might spend more time in Pengcheng in the future. Of course, I also have a home here in Zhonghai, and I'll come here often in the future."

Zhuang Rui's words were unclear; he wasn't sure if he was explaining to Miao Feifei or comforting himself. According to his previous plan, he intended to work at the pawnshop for a year or two before starting his own business. He hadn't expected to leave after only two months. If he had known this would happen, Zhuang Rui wouldn't have bought this house.

"Go ahead and go. Anyway, I'll be going back to Beijing soon, Xiao Zhuangzi. Then we'll have fewer chances to see each other in the future."

Miao Feifei was feeling down. Apart from Zhuang Rui, she had almost no friends in Zhonghai. Since meeting Zhuang Rui, her leisure time had become much richer. She often dragged Zhuang Rui to karaoke after work and traveled to surrounding cities on weekends. This made Miao Feifei almost forget about returning to Beijing in the past two months. Now, when she heard that Zhuang Rui was leaving, she felt a strong sense of reluctance.

"Hehe, why are you being so sentimental? I'll be going to Beijing often in the future, and I might even stay for a while. You'll be the host then, so you'd better treat me well."

Zhuang Rui was also happy to hear that Miao Feifei was going back to Beijing. It was quite pitiful for a girl to be alone in Zhonghai with no friends. So, Zhuang Rui had been very tolerant of Miao Feifei for the past two months.

"Is what you said true? You're not lying to me, are you?" Miao Feifei's eyes lit up.

"Of course it's true. I've already prepared the knife to rip you off when I go to Beijing. How can I not go?"

Zhuang Rui said with a smile that his plan to go to Beijing was suggested by Uncle De.

What Uncle De taught Zhuang Rui was mostly experience he had accumulated over decades. However, Uncle De was not good at theoretical knowledge. He could tell the authenticity of many objects, but he couldn't explain the deeper historical background. Therefore, Uncle De suggested that Zhuang Rui study archaeology at Peking University.

The Department of Archaeology at Peking University was established in 1922 and is the only key discipline in this field in my country. It boasts a group of professors and associate professors with profound academic attainments and high teaching standards. Its archaeological teaching and research level is among the leading in China and has a great influence internationally. Although Uncle De is an unorthodox student, he has some friends who teach at Peking University. Uncle De recommending Zhuang Rui to take the entrance exam for his old friends' graduate programs will probably give him some face.

Zhuang Rui was quite confident about applying for graduate school at Peking University. Although he was slightly weaker in humanities, he was good at English. Due to the domestic education system, many traditional Chinese arts majors were blocked from graduate school admissions because of English proficiency, to the point that a famous master of traditional Chinese painting resigned from the university in anger. Zhuang Rui, however, did not have to worry about this.

"Okay, I'll take care of this for you. Remember you owe me a favor." Miao Feifei picked up the documents on the table and put them in her bag.

After seeing Miao Feifei off, Zhuang Rui looked at the house he had lived in for more than two months and felt a little reluctant to leave. The environment here was much better than his home in Pengcheng. Zhuang Rui secretly made a decision: when he returned to Pengcheng, he would definitely buy a better house.

Now Zhuang Rui has nearly nine million in cash again. The Song army offered eight million eight hundred thousand for Tang Bohu's painting "Li Duanduan". This made Zhuang Rui's pockets rich again.

"Hey Xiao Zhuang, you're still reluctant to let go of that lousy manager? Hurry up, brother, I'll be waiting for you in Pengcheng."

Just as Zhuang Rui was thinking about Song Jun, his phone, which was in the living room, rang. He answered and heard it was Boss Song calling, urging Zhuang Rui to finish dealing with the Zhonghai matter quickly. It was already the end of May, and the Pingzhou jadeite rough stone trading was about to begin on June 5th. Song Jun had been holding back his efforts, raising a lot of funds, and was preparing to dominate the market.

"I understand, Brother Song. It won't stop you from making a fortune, don't worry."

After exchanging a few words with Song Jun, Zhuang Rui lit a cigarette and went to the balcony. He needed to resolve this matter of Wang Yi's deception as soon as possible.

Chapter 159 The Truth Comes Out

"Spicy girl, spicy girl, spicy girl, spicy girl, I'm not afraid..."

Wang Yiding hummed a song as he parked his Honda Fit, which he'd only bought less than a year ago. He was increasingly dissatisfied with the car; the engine displacement was too small, and it was a hatchback, not stylish enough. Just a few days ago, he and Xia had gone to a car show and he'd seen a Buick Regal he liked, which would cost around 200,000 yuan. Wang Yiding was planning to give this car to Xia after he bought a new one.

Thinking of Xia, Wang Yiding couldn't help but hum the song "Spicy Girl" again. Xia's full name was Li Xia, a girl from Sichuan. After graduating from university, she stayed in Zhonghai to work, but she was just an ordinary clerk. By chance, Wang Yiding met Xia and began to pursue her very passionately.

But girls these days seem to be very realistic, especially women living in international metropolises like Shanghai. Are education, looks, and character important to them? Very important! However, if you have money, those conditions can be relaxed a bit, or even eliminated altogether.

Wang Yiding earns over 100,000 yuan a year, which is considered a good income for a high-level white-collar worker in Zhonghai. However, he hasn't been back from abroad for long and spends money extravagantly. He only drives a car worth a little over 100,000 yuan and still lives in a rented house. Therefore, Li Xia, who is very confident in her appearance, has not listed Wang Yiding as her number one boyfriend. In other words, Wang Yiding's assets are not enough for Li Xia to lower her requirements for his education, appearance, and character.

They had been dating for more than half a year and had spent tens of thousands of yuan on each other, but Wang Yiding hadn't even touched Li Xia's hand more than a few times, let alone had sex with her. This made Wang Yiding, who always prided himself on being handsome, dashing, young, and rich, very depressed. However, their relationship underwent a fundamental change more than a month ago, and even made a breakthrough a few days ago. This made Wang Yiding smile when he thought about it.

Thinking of Li Xia's graceful figure, fair skin, and intoxicating moans, Wang Yiding felt a certain part of his body involuntarily harden. "Hmm, I'll have Xia make turtle and chicken soup tonight, something nourishing." As he thought this, Wang Yiding took out his phone and dialed, but the call went unanswered, making him frown. Could it be that he had been too rough with her yesterday, and Xia was still sleeping?

Looking at the time on his phone, it was already 8:30. He was already half an hour late. Wang Yiding quickly got out of the car and walked into the pawnshop. He casually joked with Xu Ling. After winning over Li Xia, his interest in Xu Ling had greatly diminished, but he still wanted to get the better of her every day.

"I'm free this morning. I'm having lunch with Old Shen from the auction house to finalize the auction items for next week. Hmm? Why aren't you answering the phone yet?"

Wang sat in his office, flipping through his notebook. He casually called Li Xia again, but no one answered. He couldn't help but feel annoyed.

Wang Yiding is rather narrow-minded. After he made Li Xia quit her job, he treated her as his own, and he needed to call her several times a day to feel at ease. From a psychological point of view, this is a manifestation of extreme self-insecurity. Of course, Wang Yiding thought this was his way of showing concern for Li Xia.

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"Damn it, Old Shen is really ruthless. He ripped me off two cartons of Zhonghua cigarettes. I'll see if that receipt can be used for reimbursement. Anyway, this hothead manager rarely looks at these things.

Wang Yiding, slightly drunk from lunch, had just reached the second floor when he saw Xiaoli, the saleswoman in the pawn shop. He quickly reached into his pocket, pulled out a fifty-yuan note, and called out to Xiaoli, "Xiaoli, go buy me a drink, this mineral water is tasteless." As he spoke, Wang Yiding stuffed the money into Xiaoli's hand, then casually patted her hand, laughing as he walked towards his office.

"Appraiser Wang, please come over here for a moment. We need to have a short meeting."

With Wang Yiding's laughter, the door to Zhuang Rui's office opened, and Zhuang Rui stood in the doorway and waved to Wang Yiding.

Wang Yi let out a burp, looked at Zhuang Rui with blurry eyes, and said unhappily, "Why are we having a meeting? I just finished having dinner with a client. Sigh, the client was too enthusiastic and forced me to drink a few glasses. Manager Zhuang, if it's not something very important, I'll go back and get some sleep."

Zhuang Rui frowned. He had never seen anyone like Wang Yiding who was completely unfazed after committing a crime. He glanced at Xiaoli, who was holding fifty yuan and seemed a little lost, and suppressed his anger, saying calmly, "You should come here for a moment. There are some things I need to ask you."

After saying that, Zhuang Rui turned around and went into the room. After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Wang Yi seemed to sober up a bit and followed Zhuang Rui in.

"Oh, Uncle De, you're here too. Brother Lai, I heard you acquired a foreign oil painting a while ago? From the early 20th century? You're so inconsiderate, you didn't even offer to let your old brother admire it. I only found out today when Lao Shen told me. Manager Zhuang, what's up? Hurry up and tell us, a client might be coming soon..."

Wang Yi walked into the manager's office and saw Uncle De and Lai Jingdong sitting inside. He quickly greeted them with a laugh and, without waiting for Zhuang Ruirang, plopped down on the sofa. His eyelids were drooping, and he leaned back as if he wanted to take a nap.

"Take a look at this first. I think you need to give an explanation to the pawnshop or the investment company."

Without wasting any words, Zhuang Rui placed the list of items Wang Yiding had accepted as counterfeit goods on the coffee table in front of the sofa, his eyes fixed on Wang Yiding.

What is this thing?

Wang must not have realized that his actions had been exposed. He casually picked up the paper, and after just one glance, his eyes, which had been narrowed to slits, suddenly widened, and his drunkenness instantly sobered up.

"Manager Zhuang, what do you mean by this? The items listed on this piece of paper are all the pawned items I've recently received. Why are you showing me this list?"

Wang Yiding shook the paper in his hand, making a rustling sound, and asked Zhuang Rui while pretending to be confused. The slight panic that flashed in his eyes was caught by Zhuang Rui, who had been watching him closely.

Seeing Wang Yiding's clumsy performance, Zhuang Rui was too lazy to beat around the bush anymore and said bluntly, "Appraiser Wang, we've been colleagues, so I'll give you a chance. You tell me yourself, and I'll take the blame for this. Otherwise, you'll have to bear the consequences!"

"What are you talking about? I accepted the pawned items according to the regulations. Even if these were fake, I didn't know. I was deceived too. What do you want me to say?"

Wang Yiding raised his voice, but to Zhuang Rui and the others, it appeared as a show of bravado masking inner weakness; beneath his tough exterior, he couldn't conceal his inner fragility.

"Smack!"

Zhuang Rui slammed his right hand heavily on the table, stood up, and looked at Wang Yiding, saying sternly, "Wang Yiding, I've given you a chance. If you continue down the wrong path, don't blame me for not showing any camaraderie. I never said these items were fake. You didn't identify them as fake back then, so why are you saying this now?"

Wang Yi must have looked at the form in his hand again carefully. It only listed the pawn time and the amount involved for the eleven fake pawned items, without explaining that they were fake. He had let it slip earlier.

"What's there to say? It's just a few pieces of counterfeit jewelry. Besides, when I bought these items, I paid one-sixth of the price of the genuine articles. When they're auctioned off, I can immediately make back at least 80%. This way, the pawnshop can generate a lot of profit."

Wang realized he couldn't hide the truth any longer, so he started making excuses for himself. Perhaps that's what he really thought, because he became more and more smug as he spoke, as if everything he did was for the pawnshop's benefit. As for the fake pawn money, he naturally didn't mention it at all.

Upon hearing Wang Yiding's words, Uncle De turned pale with anger, Lai Jingdong gloated on the side, while Zhuang Rui laughed at what Wang Yiding said. This was supposed to be a master's graduate who had returned from studying abroad, yet he was so ignorant of the law.

Zhuang Rui once saw a joke about a doctoral couple who had been married for three years without having children. When they went to the hospital for a checkup, both of them were found to be in good health, which seemed a bit strange. Finally, an old doctor asked the couple a few questions about their intimate relationship, and they discovered that in the past three years, their so-called love had simply involved sleeping in the same bed, with no other substantial physical contact. This shocked everyone present.

Of course, our forensic expert Wang has been to many red-light districts abroad and has repeatedly displayed his national power on tall, strong, and hairy foreign women. However, his understanding of legal knowledge is almost the same as that couple's understanding of human physiology.

"Wang Yiding, are you holding a Chinese passport?" Zhuang Rui suddenly asked.

"Yes, what's wrong?" Wang must be a little confused.

"That's good. Chinese law applies to you. Let me explain the relevant interpretation of fraud in the Criminal Law. Article 266 of the Criminal Law states: Whoever defrauds public or private property of a relatively large amount shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not more than three years, criminal detention, or public surveillance, and may also be fined."

If the amount involved is huge or there are other serious circumstances, the offender shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than three years but not more than ten years and shall also be fined.

If the amount involved is particularly large or there are other particularly serious circumstances, the offender shall be sentenced to fixed-term imprisonment of not less than ten years or life imprisonment, and shall also be fined or have his/her property confiscated.

"Fraud" mainly refers to the act of illegally obtaining public or private property by fabricating facts or concealing the truth with the intent of illegal possession.

By the way, Mr. Wang, let me remind you again: personal fraud involving more than 200,000 yuan of public or private property constitutes "especially large-scale fraud." As for which of these criteria applies to you, you can check which one applies to you.

As Zhuang Rui spoke, Wang Yiding's body trembled involuntarily. His face, which had been flushed from drinking, turned pale, and his eyes were filled with fear.

"Clang, clang clang..."

Just as Wang Yiding's mental defenses were about to collapse, there was a knock on Zhuang Rui's manager's office door.

"Manager Zhuang, I'm bringing drinks for Appraiser Wang. This is the orange juice with pulp you always order..."

As Xiaoli pushed open the door, she seemed to sense the heavy atmosphere in the room. She stuck out her tongue, quickly walked to Wang Yiding, placed a bottle of orange juice with pulp and the change on the coffee table in front of him, and then quickly left.

In the past, Wang Yiding would definitely have grabbed Xiaoli's hand and generously slipped the change into her hand. But today, Wang Yiding had no such intention. He didn't even know how he opened the bottle of drink. For the first time, he felt that the sweet drink tasted so bitter. And the energetic model in a short skirt with exposed thighs on the juice bottle lost its appeal in Wang Yiding's eyes for the first time.

"Manager Zhuang, Uncle De, I really didn't know these things were fake. You have to believe me. I can apologize for this, I can resign from the investment company, but... but I really had no intention of defrauding anyone..."

The icy drink seemed to have awakened Wang Yiding's almost frozen mind. He put down the drink and shouted that he was innocent, denying what he had just said. For someone like Wang Yiding, once he swallowed something, he never thought about spitting it out. Even if he quit his job now, he would have earned more than 500,000 yuan. There are plenty of pawnshops in China. He could just move to another city and find another one to make a living.

Zhuang Rui didn't expect Wang Yiding to be such a stubborn and unyielding character, not knowing what would happen until he was faced with a fatal mistake. He picked up his phone, dialed a number, and said one sentence.

Less than two minutes later, the door to the manager's office was pushed open again, and Miao Feifei walked in wearing a neat police uniform. She placed a voice recorder and a statement on Zhuang Rui's desk, glaring at him fiercely. She had spent a lot of money to get these two items.

"Thank you, officer. Please go to the conference room and have a seat. We'll work on the suspect here. We're just following the principle of punishing past mistakes to prevent future ones and curing the disease to save the patient."

Zhuang Rui stood up, pretending to be businesslike and acting as if he didn't know her, and saw Miao Feifei out. Behind the backs of everyone in the room, he gave Miao Feifei a thumbs up.

Ever since Miao Feifei walked into the office, Wang Yiding's previously composed face became incredibly flustered. His previously upright joystick shrunk back down. After Zhuang Rui saw Miao Feifei out, Wang Yiding's eyes were fixed on the two objects on the desk, but his mouth remained tightly shut, presumably still harboring a glimmer of hope.

"Take a look at this. If you need to listen to the recording after you've looked at it, I can do that for you."

Zhuang Rui threw the statement on his desk in front of Wang Yiding. He had heard the statement and the contents of the recording pen at noon, and was then ripped off by Miao Feifei for it. Several of Miao Feifei's colleagues who had helped him were also at the table at the time. The reason he asked Miao Feifei to bring this evidence over was to intimidate Wang Yiding.

"I confess, I deserve to die, I'll confess everything, please don't arrest me and put me in jail, Uncle De, you have to save me, Manager Zhuang, I really didn't know it was illegal."

Looking at Li Xia's statement, the bright red handprint, and Li Xia's signature on the paper, Wang Yiding's mental world finally collapsed. Tears and snot streamed down his face as he grabbed Uncle De beside him, crying loudly as if he had grasped a lifeline.

"Alright, stop wailing!"

Uncle De's sharp shout interrupted Wang Yiding's words.

"The reason we didn't let the police take you away earlier was to give you a chance. What are you crying for? Explain yourself clearly and return the stolen money. This old man will plead with Manager Zhuang for you."

Uncle De's words calmed Wang Yiding down a bit. After seeing Zhuang Rui nod, he finally believed that what Zhuang Rui had said before was true. Wang Yiding was only over thirty years old this year, and he didn't want to spend ten years in prison before coming out to enjoy life. So he told him in detail how he had been tricked.

Originally, when Zhuang Rui first became manager, Wang Yiding had no wicked thoughts. He just wanted to figure out how to cooperate with the auction house to auction off the few fake pawned items he had mistakenly acquired last year. Who knew that the auction of those four fake pawned jewelry items last year would go so smoothly, with no one raising any objections to the authenticity of the items. This not only earned Wang Yiding a substantial commission, but also fueled his growing greed.

Before returning to China, Wang Yiding spent a few days in Macau. As everyone knows, Macau is a world-famous gambling city in the East, and along with it comes a thriving pawn industry. Due to his profession, Wang Yiding visited several pawn shops and took a fancy to a few counterfeit jewelry pieces and expensive watches that were almost indistinguishable from the real thing. He bought them at a very low price. According to his thinking at the time, the watches were to enhance his image, and the jewelry was naturally for him to use to pick up girls later.

However, his collaboration with the auction house led Wang to reassess the value of those counterfeit jewelry and watches. He then approached Li Xia, asking her to bring the fake jewelry and watches to a pawnshop to exchange them for cash. Initially, Li Xia didn't know the jewelry and watches were fake; Wang simply said he worked there and couldn't easily have them appraised, which is why he asked Li Xia for help.

Li Xia, who originally thought Wang Yiding was just a white-collar worker, was surprised to find that he had so many valuable jewels. She fell in love with him immediately, making the famous appraiser Wang Yiding achieve success in both love and career. Even after Li Xia found out that the pawned items were fake, she still admired Wang Yiding when she saw the hundreds of thousands of yuan in real gold and

silver that she got back. These days, as long as you can make money, who cares how you got it? In most people's eyes, if you don't steal or rob, then you're not breaking the law.

Wang Yiding certainly thought so too. Zhuang Rui's delegation of authority gave him the opportunity to dispose of the counterfeit jewelry and watches he possessed through auction houses. Through the auction process, pawnshops could obtain several times more funds from these fake jewelry than the initial loan amount, and auction houses could receive a substantial commission.

As for Wang Yiding himself, he reaped a double reward. He was so proud of his brilliant idea that it could kill three birds with one stone. However, he never expected that his scheme would be exposed one day.  
Chapter 160 Drunkenness

"Snap...crack..."

Sitting in the living room, Zhuang Rui listened to the sounds coming from the kitchen, his eyes twitching incessantly. He was filled with regret; how could he have agreed to let that young lady into the kitchen?

"Hey, is this the eighth plate? Do you think you've bought enough? Do you think they might run out of dishes and just bring out the rice cooker instead?"

Wei Ge held the TV remote in his hand, constantly changing channels, and said some concerned words to Zhuang Rui, but his words sounded like he was gloating.

"Shut your mouth, or I'll call Uncle Yang and tell him that the 'Han Dynasty Jade Figure of a Lady' is a fake that you've switched out."

Zhuang Rui glared at Wei Ge and replied irritably that Yang's father's "Han Dynasty Jade Figure of a Lady" was one of the few genuine pieces in his collection, which he had always cherished. However, Wei Ge was short of money a while ago and when he went to beg his father for money, he accidentally knocked the object to the ground.

Afterwards, fearing that his father would find out, Wei Ge asked Zhuang Rui to spend a few hundred yuan to buy a piece of inferior jade and have someone carve it according to the original piece. He then

put it back on the display shelf in Yang's father's collection room. More than a month has passed, and it has not been discovered.

"Hehe, you can't escape reporting me for this either. Let's not talk about that anymore. Hey, have you noticed that both of these women seem to have a bit of a crush on you? Which one do you like?" Wei Ge threw down the remote control in his hand, leaned in front of Zhuang Rui, and had a lewd expression on his face.

"Can't you stop being so vulgar, my friend? You know we're all friends," Zhuang Rui said righteously.

"Pshaw, what a joke. Running around the streets in the middle of the night helping people buy dresses, and you call that a friend? More like a sex partner."

Wei Ge looked at Zhuang Rui with disdain. Last time, after Bai Shi tore Miao Feifei's dress, it was only a little past eight o'clock, and Zhuang Rui had called Wei Ge to ask where he could buy women's clothing. That gave Wei Ge leverage over Zhuang Rui, which he would bring up from time to time to rub salt in the wound.

"Smack..."

"This is the ninth one..."

Zhuang Rui stared speechlessly at the kitchen. He wondered how many dishes Miao Feifei would break before she would come out. Today was the third day since Zhuang Rui resigned from the pawnshop. It happened to be the weekend, and Miao Feifei and Song Xingjun came together, saying they wanted to cook a nice meal to reward Zhuang Rui before he left Zhonghai. However, they didn't expect that as soon as the two of them entered the kitchen, all the cups and dishes in Zhuang Rui's house would be ruined.

The matter of Wang Yiding's fraudulent pawnshop dealings was resolved a week ago. No police were called, and the matter was settled by Wang Yiding returning the embezzled funds. Wang Yiding resigned and left the pawnshop three days before Zhuang Rui. It is said that he left Zhonghai. As for whether he went abroad, Zhuang Rui did not inquire further. However, he knew that Wang Yiding had sold his car to return the embezzled funds, and Li Xia immediately turned to another man, leaving Wang Yiding with nothing.

Zhuang Rui's resignation did not cause any ripples. There were differing opinions within the investment company regarding his appointment as manager of the pawnshop, and he only got the position because of Uncle De's strong support. Now that he has resigned, the position is vacant and someone else can be appointed. Everyone is happy except for Uncle De. The new manager took office on the same day Zhuang Rui resigned.

Uncle De originally intended to retire and resign from his job as a pawnshop consultant, but the pawnshop was short of both new and experienced staff and appraisers, so he could only reluctantly continue working for a while longer. When Zhuang Rui was leaving, he wanted to give Uncle De the set of Zhu Kexin's purple clay teaware, but Uncle De firmly declined. In the end, he bought it for 500,000 yuan, which increased Zhuang Rui's bank savings considerably.

As for the most disappointed people in this pawnshop reshuffle, besides Wang Yiding, it would probably be Lai Jingdong. This key figure who exposed Wang Yiding's pawnshop fraud originally thought that after Zhuang Rui's departure, the manager position would be his for the taking. However, he didn't expect another manager to be parachuted in from the investment company, leaving Lai Jingdong somewhat disheartened and considering resigning.

However, none of this mattered to Zhuang Rui anymore. He had settled all his affairs in Zhonghai. Apart from this house and a few friends, he had no further connection with Zhonghai. Moreover, he was going to drive to Guangdong the day after tomorrow to attend the jadeite rough stone trade fair held in Pingzhou. This made Zhuang Rui feel somewhat disappointed, but also excited. The grand scene that Song Jun had described made him quite fascinated.

Originally, Zhuang Rui and Song Jun had agreed to return to Pengcheng first, and then fly to Guangzhou together. However, after thinking about it, Zhuang Rui decided to drive to Guangdong from Zhonghai. Firstly, he couldn't bear to leave Bai Shi in Pengcheng, and secondly, it was because of Yang Wei. When Wei heard that Zhuang Rui was going to Guangdong to gamble on jade, he was so excited that he pestered Zhuang Rui for several days, insisting on going with him. He even called his fourth brother in Guangdong, and the three brothers planned to reunite in Guangdong, which made his second and third brothers in Beijing and Shaanxi quite envious.

Since selling that piece of jadeite, Liu Chuan has been incredibly wealthy. He transferred the pet shop in Pengcheng to Li Bing, retaining only Zhou Rui's 30% stake, and then focused all his energy on the mastiff kennel. In the past few months, Liu Chuan and Zhou Rui have visited many mastiff kennels across the country and have a clearer vision for the future development of the Pengcheng mastiff kennel.

Zhou Rui wasn't too busy lately. Zhuang Rui, due to his extreme distrust of Wei Ge's driving skills, called Zhou Rui and asked him to accompany him on a trip to Guangdong. The train was tonight, and they should arrive in Zhonghai early tomorrow morning. After resting for a day, they could head to Guangdong.

...

"Alright, the food's served..."

Miao Feifei's voice sounded like heavenly music to Zhuang Rui and Wei Ge. They had been waiting since 5 p.m. to get this meal. The news broadcast on TV had been over for more than half an hour. Miao Feifei had even hidden all the food in the house. The two brothers were starving.

"Scrambled eggs with tomatoes, braised crucian carp chunks, Dongpo crystal pork knuckle, stir-fried cured pork with bamboo shoots, chicken stew with mushrooms..."

Miao Feifei and Song Xingjun served the dishes from the kitchen like waiters. The names of the dishes made Zhuang Rui and Wei Ge's mouths water. They sat down at the table with chopsticks in hand, ready to fight. However, when the dishes were served, the two were completely dumbfounded.

"Don't eat yet, everyone. This is the first time in my life that I've cooked a whole table of dishes all by myself. Wait, let me take a picture first."

After serving the dishes, Miao Feifei didn't notice Zhuang Rui and Wei Ge's expressions. She was holding a digital camera, ready to take a permanent memento of the meal.

"Miss Miao, could you please introduce these dishes to us? I'm confused and can't tell them apart."

After Miao Feifei finished taking the photos, Zhuang Rui pointed to the dishes on the table with his chopsticks and said to Miao Feifei, "Putting aside how these dishes taste, just looking at their colors makes Zhuang Rui and Wei Ge hesitant to pick them up."

The bright red dish that looked like tomato sauce must be scrambled eggs with tomatoes, but Zhuang Rui couldn't tell the difference between the remaining dishes. They were all dark and unappetizing, though they smelled quite good, with a burnt aroma.

"This is her first time cooking, so it doesn't look very appetizing, but it tastes really good. I've tasted it myself, you can ask Xingjun if you don't believe me."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Miao Feifei's excitement vanished. The usually cheerful Miao Feifei's voice grew softer and softer, and her expression became hesitant. As she spoke, her eyes reddened, and tears welled up in them.

"Yes, I can vouch for that. These dishes taste really good, and they were all made by Sister Feifei alone. I just helped out. Look, Sister Feifei even cut her hand while chopping vegetables." Song Xingjun nodded repeatedly from the side. Her words made Zhuang Rui's gaze fall on Miao Feifei's left hand. Sure enough, there was a not-so-small wound on her middle finger.

"Then let's try it first. Gege, you've eaten so many of my meals, you've probably learned a bit of my skills. Wei Ge, fill up the bottles, let's have a drink together."

Zhuang Rui was a little touched. He knew that Miao Feifei's family had many boys and she was the only girl. She had been spoiled since she was a child. She had never even washed a dish, let alone cooked. It must have been really hard for her to prepare such a meal today.

The liquor was a 52-proof Wuliangye that Wei Ge brought from home. After filling everyone's glasses, everyone clinked glasses and drank it down honestly without anyone trying to cheat. Zhuang Rui picked up a piece of meat that looked like braised pork knuckle with his chopsticks. After mustering up a lot of courage, he put it in his mouth, but he tasted a fishy flavor. It turned out that the dish was braised crucian carp.

To be honest, although these dishes didn't look very appealing, they tasted alright. The slightly charred fish skin concealed tender meat, which gave them a unique flavor. With his worries gone, Zhuang Rui started urging Zhuang Rui to drink.

Perhaps because their parting was imminent, Miao Feifei and Song Xingjun also started drinking baijiu (Chinese liquor), and the atmosphere at the table gradually became lively. Miao Feifei even took the

initiative, constantly clinking glasses with Zhuang Rui and Yang Wei. According to the customs of northerners, the wine that is clinked glasses is to be drunk in one gulp.

After three or five rounds, Yang Wei was the first to give up. To be honest, Wei Ge's alcohol tolerance was really not that great. He drank less than two liang (100ml) of Wuliangye before his eyes were already blurry. He swayed and insisted on going home to argue with his father. Zhuang Rui knew that he hadn't driven, so he let him leave.

After finishing a bottle of Wuliangye, Song Xingjun felt a little dizzy and borrowed Zhuang Rui's guest room to rest. However, Miao Feifei still wouldn't let go and dragged Zhuang Rui along, insisting on drinking beer. Although Zhuang Rui had a good alcohol tolerance, he was most afraid of mixing drinks. After drinking two more bottles of beer, Zhuang Rui also felt the effects of the alcohol. He looked at Miao Feifei, who had been drunk and passed out on the table, and smiled bitterly.

"I'm afraid I'll have to sleep on the sofa tonight."

Swaying as he stood up, Zhuang Rui scooped Miao Feifei up in his arms, kicked open his bedroom door, and groped his way in. He was about to put Miao Feifei on the bed when, after a few steps, his leg tripped on the edge of the bed, and he fell onto the bed with Miao Feifei in his arms.

Zhuang Rui tried to stand up by supporting himself on his arms, but he felt no strength at all. In addition, a wave of sleepiness washed over him, and he drifted off to sleep.