

Golden 16

Chapter Sixteen: An Encounter

Over the next few days, Zhuang Rui went to the antique market several more times, hoping to try his luck and find another item that could absorb spiritual energy. However, with the Lunar New Year approaching and more than a week of heavy snowfall, many shops in the antique market were closed, preparing to reopen after the holiday. Even the usual vendors were nowhere to be seen.

Zhuang Rui did come across a shop that was open, and the shopkeeper was very enthusiastic. However, after looking at the few books that the shopkeeper claimed were genuine works of Zhang Xu's cursive script, Zhuang Rui was simply dumbfounded. Even without using his spiritual energy, he could tell they were fake. If they were real, wouldn't the shopkeeper have already gone to Yunlong Mountain Villa to buy a villa? Why would he be hanging around here in the freezing cold? Does he look that stupid?

In a fit of anger, Zhuang Rui simply stopped going out and went to Xinhua Bookstore to buy many books on antique appreciation. He spent his days either reading or familiarizing himself with the spiritual energy in his eyes at home.

After several experiments over the past few days, Zhuang Rui discovered that the spiritual energy he could see could reach up to two meters away from his body and penetrate glass and wood that were about one centimeter thick. However, it had no effect on iron, metal, stone, or mineral objects. But Zhuang Rui believed that as the spiritual energy increased, the number of objects his eyes could see through would gradually increase.

A few days ago, Liu Chuan would bother Zhuang Rui every day, but recently it seems that his family introduced him to a girl, so he has been coming less often in the last five or six days. Seeing that other families are busy preparing for the New Year, Zhuang Rui seems to be getting more and more relaxed.

"Xiao Rui, don't stay cooped up at home all day. Go out for a walk. Oh, and go to the supermarket and buy some couplets and 'Fu' characters. The day after tomorrow is New Year's Eve, so we should put them up."

When Mrs. Zhuang arrived at her son's room, she sighed inwardly. Although her son was a steady person and rarely went to nightclubs or bars, he used to be very cheerful when he came home and would go out to play with his classmates every day. However, after this injury, he became much more

silent and spent his days burying himself in books at home, which caused Mrs. Zhuang a lot of unnecessary worry.

"Okay, Mom, I'll go right now. Or should we hang up the couplet my grandpa left behind?"

Zhuang Rui chuckled and joked that he had already told his mother about the origin and value of the couplet. His mother hadn't said anything, only telling him to keep it safe. In her heart, the actual value of the couplet paled in comparison to the longing she felt for her husband and the elderly man she loved.

Zhuang Rui put on his coat and hat and was about to leave when he ran into Zhuang Min taking her daughter back to her parents' home. Needless to say, when the little girl heard that her uncle was going to the mall, she tried her best to burrow into his arms. Helpless, Zhuang Rui could only take his niece with him.

Since large supermarkets entered Pengcheng, many traditional stores have been forced to change their business model and start their own supermarkets. However, this has made things much more convenient for ordinary people. Not only are things cheaper, but almost every neighborhood has a supermarket right at its doorstep. There is also a supermarket not far from Zhuang Rui's home, and it is a large-scale branch of a large chain supermarket in Shenzhen. It does very well, and even on snowy days, the outside is crowded with people coming and going.

Holding the little girl, Zhuang Rui slowly walked into the supermarket with the crowded throng. In this noisy environment, he felt incredibly peaceful and warm. Perhaps this is life, the mundane things like oil, salt, soy sauce, and vinegar.

"Uncle, uncle, I saw my rogue uncle..."

The little girl clung to Zhuang Rui's shoulder, waving her tiny hands frantically and repeatedly calling out, "Rogue Uncle, Rogue Uncle," drawing the attention of the crowd.

"Daughter, call him 'hooligan uncle' at home, but don't call him that outside..."

Zhuang Rui broke out in a cold sweat. Following the direction of Nannan's little hand, he saw a murderous gaze fixed intently on him.

"You rascal, what are you doing here? Haven't you been busy with blind dates these past few days? What, buying gifts to visit your future mother-in-law?"

Zhuang Rui squeezed his way toward Liu Chuan while holding his niece, unaware that Liu Chuan was winking at him.

When Zhuang Rui got to Liu Chuan's side, he noticed two young women standing next to him. To Zhuang Rui's embarrassment, the little girl in his arms, upon seeing an acquaintance, excitedly shouted, "Hello, rogue uncle!" Without a doubt, the two women next to him knew that Zhuang Rui had taught the little girl to call him that.

"Ahem, well, Lei Lei, I already told you Zhuang Rui definitely wouldn't recognize you, right? Let me introduce you, this is our little princess Nannan, Zhuang Rui's daughter." Liu Chuan put on a stern face, pretending not to hear Nannan's words, and introduced her to the girl next to him in a serious manner, not forgetting to tease Zhuang Rui a few times.

"Hello, don't listen to Liu Chuan's nonsense, this is my sister's child..." Zhuang Rui interrupted Liu Chuan with a smile, looked at the woman named Lei Lei, and couldn't help but admire her in his heart.

Although this woman's appearance was only above average, her wheat-colored face was full of sunny, healthy beauty. She was 1.7 meters tall and stood no less imposing next to the tall and strong Liu Chuan. Even though she was wearing a lot of clothes in winter, you could still see that she had a great figure, which meant she must pay a lot of attention to exercise.

Judging from Liu Chuan's words, he should know Lei Lei, but Zhuang Rui really didn't have any impression of this woman.

"Lei Lei? Lei Lei, oh, you wouldn't happen to be the girl with glasses, would you???" Zhuang Rui exclaimed in surprise, remembering the name of a female classmate from junior high school.

The girl with glasses that Zhuang Rui mentioned was indeed their classmate from junior high school. Back then, she wore a ponytail and thick glasses, and was quite inconspicuous in the class. Later, she transferred to another school for some reason, so he didn't remember her well. Zhuang Rui had a good memory and recalled her name, but he really couldn't connect the beautiful and youthful girl in front of him with the ugly duckling from back then.

Zhuang Rui still remembered the name because Liu Chuan had just watched Stephen Chow's movie *Fight Back to School*. Overwhelmed by a sense of justice, he taught a lesson to several male classmates who kept calling Lei Lei "Four-Eyes" in class. Because of this, Liu Chuan had to squat in a horse stance for several days during class, because his father tested the hardness of the shoe soles on Liu Chuan's buttocks.

"You two were so arrogant back then, how could you have noticed a girl like me? Zhuang Rui, you used to seem so honest, but it turns out you're quite the chatterbox..."

Lei Lei didn't know that Zhuang Rui was a sly and mischievous guy when he was in junior high school. He was the one who came up with the ideas, and Liu Chuan was the one who took the lead.

"Who is this?!"

Zhuang Rui looked at Lei Lei's companion and was stunned. If the changes in his old classmate Lei Lei surprised Zhuang Rui, then Lei Lei's companion surprised him. Working in Zhonghai, the fashion capital, Zhuang Rui, who was used to seeing all kinds of white-collar beauties, couldn't help but be stunned for a few seconds.

Unlike Lei Lei's healthy and energetic image, this woman was stunningly beautiful. She had fair skin, delicate eyebrows, a slightly upturned nose, and long, jet-black hair piled high on her head, making her slender neck appear even longer and adding to her noble and aloof air. She was slightly taller than Lei Lei, and her fitted leather jumpsuit accentuated her curvaceous figure. If this woman were wearing an evening gown, Zhuang Rui would definitely think that this noisy supermarket was hosting a lavish party.

It cannot be denied that Zhuang Rui did have the idea of using his spiritual energy to explore the secluded path during those few seconds. However, Zhuang Rui noticed that there was a hint of coldness in the other person's beautiful eyes, and it seemed to be somewhat disdainful.

Zhuang Rui's father passed away when he was young, and he has always been somewhat sensitive to other people's gazes. At this moment, he subconsciously felt that this woman was not easy to get along with, so he did not show excessive enthusiasm. He simply smiled and nodded at her, forcibly suppressing the feeling of amazement in his heart.

Qin Xuanbing looked at the man in front of her, whose appearance and clothing were rather ordinary, and felt very bad. She had been bothered by a bunch of flies in Hong Kong so much that she hadn't told her family and had secretly come to the mainland with her good friend Lei Lei for the New Year, hoping to escape the entanglement of those self-important rich kids. However, the look in the man's eyes reminded her of those annoying rich kids, so when Qin Xuanbing looked back at Zhuang Rui, her expression was very cold.

"Wood, this is Miss Qin, from Hong Kong, a friend of Lei Lei, who is here on a trip to the mainland..."

Liu Chuan introduced the woman to Zhuang Rui, saying that he was actually quite annoyed with her. Although she was very pretty, she was as cold as ice. What he found most unbearable was that his father had introduced him to a girlfriend, who was also a classmate from junior high school. He was quite satisfied with Lei Lei, but these past few days, every time they went on a date, Lei Lei had an ice block and a third wheel by her side.

"Alright, Lei Lei, it's too crowded here, let's go."

Qin Xuanbing frowned as she looked at the crowded people. She used to shop in Hong Kong at boutiques with personal staff, so she was not used to this kind of scene. She wished she had stayed at Lei Lei's house.

"It's Chinese New Year, the more people, the better the atmosphere. You'll get used to it. After we finish shopping, let's go to Zhuang Rui's house for dinner. Wood, are you happy to go?"

Liu Chuan's real intention in bringing the two of them here to shop today was to prepare for lunch at Zhuang Rui's house. He also had another idea in mind: wood and ice, and he could get rid of a third wheel—killing two birds with one stone.

"Welcome, old classmates! It's just that the place is small, I don't know if you would do me the honor of joining us."

Zhuang Rui naturally wouldn't refuse Liu Chuan's request. He merely glanced at Qin Xuanbing while speaking, sensing her coldness, and offered only a polite invitation.

"Okay, okay, pretty auntie, come to our house for dinner! Grandma's cooking is so delicious..." Nannan clapped her hands happily, enjoying the lively atmosphere.

Lei Lei looked at Qin Xuanbing with some difficulty. Qin Xuanbing had a straightforward personality and was quite happy to see Zhuang Rui. According to the customs in Pengcheng, if someone invites you to their home for dinner, you are definitely treated as a distinguished guest. However, Qin Xuanbing had a rather aloof personality, and Lei Lei was afraid that she might say something unpleasant.

"I'm fine with anything."

Unexpectedly, Qin Xuanbing did not refuse. She said calmly that she did not want to visit a stranger's home, but she had already caused Lei Lei a lot of trouble during her trip to Pengcheng. If she did not go, Lei Lei would probably refuse her.

"Alright, let's hurry up and leave after we've bought our things, it's too crowded here."

Liu Chuan first called Zhuang's mother to tell her that some friends would be coming to their house for dinner later, and then the group headed towards the shopping area.

Although Qin Xuanbing seemed aloof to Zhuang Rui, she clearly adored Xiao Nannan. In no time, her shopping cart was overflowing with clothes, food, toys, and a Barbie doll for Xiao Nannan, totaling over two thousand yuan. Zhuang Rui didn't have that much money on him and tried to take out the things he bought for Nannan several times, but Lei Lei stopped him each time.

"You're having an affair, aren't you? How did things develop so quickly? Come on, tell me the truth."

While Lei Lei was pushing the shopping cart with Nannan ahead, Zhuang Rui pulled Liu Chuan aside and asked in a low voice.

Liu Chuan smiled so much his eyes narrowed and said, "Hehe, I'm charming, bro. I can't help it. I took her to the pet store for a day. They said I'm kind-hearted and reliable. But I didn't forget you. Isn't that one over there for you?"

Actually, Liu Chuan himself was a little puzzled. Although his brother was tall and strong, he wasn't exactly the kind of person everyone loved or admired. So why did Lei Lei seem to know so much about him?

"You've got your eye on both, but I'm not interested."

Zhuang Rui replied irritably, "That woman is beautiful, but she's too aloof. It's already freezing cold outside, several degrees below zero. If you put her in the house, the temperature inside would probably drop several degrees. It's a pity about her looks and figure. It seems someone once considered using some means..."

When they came out, Liu Chuan paid the bill, but Qin Xuanbing insisted on paying separately for the clothes and toys she bought for Nannan. The group threw the bags into Liu Chuan's car and drove towards Zhuang Rui's house.

As soon as they entered the house, before Liu Chuan could even start shouting, Zhuang Min came out of the kitchen with red eyes, as if she had just been crying. Without even greeting Lei Lei and the others, she said to Zhuang Rui, "Xiao Rui, Mom just fell and hurt her back. She refuses to go to the hospital no matter what. You and Da Chuan go and persuade her."