

Golden 20

Chapter Twenty: Chinese New Year

Previously, Zhuang Rui's family would celebrate Chinese New Year with three people. After Zhuang Min got married, it was just Zhuang Rui and his mother celebrating. Although Liu Chuan's parents would invite them to their home every year for the holiday, Zhuang's mother didn't like troubling others and always politely declined. Over the years, Zhuang Rui got used to it.

From the morning of New Year's Eve, Zhuang Rui started to get busy. First, he cleaned the house, then he pasted upside-down "福" (good fortune) characters on the door, along with Spring Festival couplets, window decorations, New Year pictures, and so on. Although it was just him and his mother celebrating the New Year, they decorated the house with a strong festive atmosphere. The stereo in the house was playing a Cantonese version of "Gong Xi Fa Cai" (Wishing you prosperity), which was full of joy.

Around 6 p.m. on New Year's Eve, Zhuang Rui first burned incense and paid respects to his deceased grandparents and father. Then, he and his mother ate dinner early and sat in front of the TV, waiting for the Spring Festival Gala to start while making dumplings. According to custom, the dumplings had to be cooked early the next morning. The mother and son worked together, one pressing the dumpling wrappers and the other wrapping them, their movements very skillful.

When it comes to making dumplings, Zhuang Rui has received his fair share of scolding from his mother since he was a child. As a child, he was playful and would take a dumpling wrapper, put in the filling, and start pinching it haphazardly. The dumplings he made were all odd shapes and would fall apart as soon as they were put into the pot. However, his mother never scolded him. She just made him eat the dumplings he made each time. Over time, Zhuang Rui's dumplings became quite decent. It is said that poor children learn to be independent early, and this is absolutely true. Zhuang Rui often saw that Liu Chuan's dumplings looking like steamed buns.

"Xiao Rui, look, Liu Chuan has already found a girlfriend, and Lei Lei has such a good personality. You and Liu Chuan were born in the same year, and you're already twenty-five. When are you going to bring a wife for Mom?"

Mrs. Zhuang's rolling pin didn't stop. She seemingly casually asked her son, but in reality, she was already anxious. Although she didn't want to interfere too much in her son's marriage due to reasons she couldn't explain to him, and was very open-minded and democratic at home, she was ultimately getting older and naturally cared more about her son's life-long happiness.

However, Mrs. Zhuang did not mention Qin Xuanbing. She could tell that the girl must have come from a well-off family. In old terms, she was a socialite. Although she was very polite, she always gave people a sense of distance. Such a woman was not suitable for her son.

"Mom, I'm still young, no rush, I'll take my time. I'll definitely find a daughter-in-law who is filial to you, who will cook for you and massage your back every day. If she's disobedient, we'll divorce her and find another one..."

Zhuang Rui was joking with his mother. Although he worked in a pawnshop in Shanghai and often came into contact with women, those women were all rich and powerful, and they never gave Zhuang Rui a second glance. For an ordinary white-collar worker like him with no money or power, finding a satisfactory girlfriend in Shanghai was not an easy task. Zhuang Rui was also a normal man, well, he should be said to be a normal virgin, otherwise the scene he saw in the hospital would not have shocked him so much.

"You think I'm hiring a maid to massage my back and cook for me every day? I'm getting old. I'm just happy to see you get married peacefully. I can help take care of your child for a few years. If you keep dragging this out, I won't have the strength to help you take care of your child later..."

As if remembering something, Zhuang's mother's voice gradually lowered, and tears seemed to glisten in her eyes. She then stood up and walked towards her room.

"Mom, you're not old at all! Look at your face, you don't even have wrinkles. Okay, the Spring Festival Gala has started, come and watch TV. We've made enough dumplings for you." Seeing his mother looking a little sad, Zhuang Rui quickly changed the subject, got up, and turned up the TV volume.

In fact, Zhuang Rui and his sister have had some questions in their hearts for many years. When they were young, their mother spoke fluent Mandarin, but gradually she switched to Pengcheng dialect. Also, their mother never mentioned her own family. When Zhuang Rui was little, he and his sister asked their mother about this issue when they saw that other children had uncles, aunts, grandparents and maternal grandparents. As a result, their mother, who had never laid a finger on her two children, gave them a severe beating that time.

From then on, the sensible Zhuang Rui and Zhuang Min never mentioned the matter again. However, during holidays, the two siblings would notice that their mother was in a low mood and would go to her room to be alone for a while. Zhuang Rui would always try to find ways to make their mother happy.

When Zhuang Rui was lost in thought, he often imagined that his mother must have come from a prominent family, and that she and his father would elope to a secluded garden like Sima Xiangru and Zhuo Wenjun. This was because his mother not only knew English but was also fluent in Russian. Zhuang Rui was genuinely curious about his mother's background. He wondered what kind of family could have raised a mother who was both independent and strong, yet also tactful in her dealings with others. The wealthy and powerful women he had met in Shanghai were far inferior to his mother in terms of temperament.

After quite a while, when the Spring Festival Gala had already started, Zhuang's mother finally came out of her room with red eyes. However, she was in a much better mood than before. She sat down in front of the TV and chatted with Zhuang Rui while watching the Spring Festival Gala.

Watching the Spring Festival Gala now is just a habit during the New Year; it doesn't feel the same as it used to. Zhuang's mother is getting old, so she goes back to her room to sleep around 10 o'clock. Zhuang Rui finds it quite boring watching alone and keeps getting sleepy, but he doesn't dare to go to sleep because he knows that the New Year's greetings phone calls at midnight will definitely wake him up.

Around midnight, Zhuang Rui quickly pulled the telephone line from the living room to his room. Sure enough, a little while later, Liu Chuan, his four college roommates, and a group of junior high school classmates with whom he had exchanged phone numbers the day before all called. After hanging up, Zhuang Rui wanted to call Uncle De, but seeing that it was almost 1 a.m., he decided not to and planned to wish Uncle De a Happy New Year in the morning.

After getting up early in the morning and eating dumplings, Zhuang Rui called Liu Chuan's parents, Uncle De, and some friends in Zhonghai to wish them a Happy New Year. Then he went back to bed to catch up on sleep.

There wasn't much going on on the first and second days of the Lunar New Year. Apart from visiting his godmother and sister to wish them a Happy New Year, Zhuang Rui stayed home reading. He bought several hundred yuan worth of books on appreciation and collection from Xinhua Bookstore, but he had only read a few so far. Zhuang Rui still had a vague understanding of the antique business, but it was much better than before when he would fall asleep whenever he saw such books. At least he could concentrate on reading them.

Whether it was because of his improved eyesight or because he had crammed some knowledge in the past few days, Zhuang Rui was actually feeling a little restless. If the flower and bird market hadn't only opened on the fifth day of the Lunar New Year, he probably would have given it a try.

When the daughter returned home on the third day of the Lunar New Year, her older sister and brother-in-law brought her to the house, making it a lively day. The girl was very affectionate towards her uncle, whom she didn't see often but who allowed her to eat White Rabbit candy. In the evening, she didn't want to go home with her parents, so Zhuang Min let her daughter stay for a few days, since her mother often helped her take care of her children in the past.

As a result, Zhuang Rui had no time to read. He simply took his niece to play all over Pengcheng for a few days and forgot about his plan to go to the flower and bird market. It wasn't until Liu Chuan called on the sixth day of the Lunar New Year and asked him to come to the store that he leisurely strolled over with his niece.

This time, Zhuang Rui's walk through the flower and bird market wasn't so smooth. The heavy snow had long since stopped, and now the streets along the flower, bird, and antique market were lined with stalls selling everything from old books and newspapers to coins, jade, and bronzes. Combined with the antique-style buildings in the market, if you didn't look at the clothes people were wearing, you'd think you'd traveled back to ancient times.

With great effort, Zhuang Rui managed to squeeze into Liu Chuan's shop by letting Nannan sit on his shoulders. Once inside, he was astonished to find that the once empty shop was now filled with all sorts of pets. He wondered where Liu Chuan had put all the animals before the New Year. The two fish tanks, one large and one small, near the entrance contained ornamental fish and pet turtles, while the cages that had previously housed them were filled with dogs of all sizes, from small Pekingese and Shih Tzus to fierce-looking German Shepherds.

Two more employees joined the store. Liu Chuan usually travels all over the country to purchase goods and rarely stays in the store. These two are the ones who manage it. Zhuang Rui had been here a few times before and was quite familiar with them. Last time Zhuang Rui came, Liu Chuan gave the two employees a day off.

Compared to the leisurely atmosphere before the Lunar New Year, the shop is now incredibly busy. All three of them are working non-stop, and it's rare that Liu Chuan can still make no mistakes when taking money and giving change.

"Hey, now that you have a girlfriend, you know how to get down to work!" Zhuang Rui joked, seeing Liu Chuan sweating profusely despite the cold weather.

"That's right, we can't hang out with you anymore, you bachelor. Oh, our little princess is here. Come and kowtow to your uncle so I can give her some New Year's money."

Liu Chuan was overjoyed when he saw the little girl. He had always been the one to kowtow to others since he was a child. Last year, the little girl was still young, but this year, he had been asking her to kowtow to him and wish him a Happy New Year since before the Lunar New Year.