

## Golden 21

### Chapter Twenty-One: The Antique Market

Zhuang Rui put Nannan down from his shoulder. Nannan was quite well-behaved; she first struggled to climb onto the chair before saying in her childish voice, "Happy New Year, Uncle Rogue! Nannan wishes you a Happy New Year! She actually kowtowed, but almost fell off the chair.

Liu Chuan didn't care that his daughter was calling him "Rogue Uncle." Overjoyed, he hugged her tightly with one arm and pulled a handful of hundred-yuan bills from the drawer with the other. Without counting them, he stuffed them into the small handbag on her clothes, saying, "Hey, my darling, you can pick whatever you want in this shop. Once you've chosen, Uncle will deliver it to your house. But, daughter, why are you climbing on a chair to wish Uncle a Happy New Year?"

Nannan was so engrossed in looking at the little animals in the shop that she couldn't take it all in. She replied, seemingly out of the blue, "Uncle said that if Nannan kowtows to that hooligan uncle, she'll get paid. If Nannan has money, she can buy White Rabbit candy. Mom never gives Nannan any. Nannan is wearing new clothes, and if she gets them dirty on the floor, Mom will scold her."

"Forget it, your shop is full of bastards and animals, my niece doesn't want her..."

Zhuang Rui quipped from the side, but Liu Chuan's business was really good right now. Within five minutes of coming in, several couples who seemed to be in love had bought a few turtles and hamsters. What surprised Zhuang Rui was that these few inconspicuous little trinkets actually sold for over a thousand yuan, and the pair of golden mice actually sold for 600 yuan. Zhuang Rui couldn't help but shout in his heart that he was a swindler.

"What are you looking at everywhere you go? Let me tell you, Lei Lei and Qin Xuanbing are coming over to help out soon. Hey, that woman may be a bit cold, but her looks are absolutely stunning. Aren't you tempted, kid?" Liu Chuan put Nannan down, greeting guests while chattering away.

"Come on, she's obviously a rich girl. I can't afford her. Didn't they say they were leaving Pengcheng on the fifth day of the new year? Oh right, hooligan, you take Nannan to play for a while, I'm going out for a walk..."

Zhuang Rui casually remarked that seeing his niece, who had been bothering him for several days, finally focus her attention elsewhere, he decided to go for a stroll in the antique market. As for Qin Xuanbing, Zhuang Rui knew she didn't have any good feelings towards him, so he was too lazy to bother with her.

"I don't know. Lei Lei called and said she'll leave in a few days. You go to the market, but come back early. I have something to discuss with you." Liu Chuan waved his hand, signaling Zhuang Rui to go and come back soon.

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Pengcheng, one of the nine ancient provinces of China, is a place with a deep historical and cultural heritage. In particular, Han culture has left a profound mark on this city. Cultural relics from the Han Dynasty and even earlier can often be found in Xuzhou, which is something the people of Pengcheng are very proud of. Perhaps because of this, collecting has become a source of enjoyment for many people in Pengcheng, with joy and disappointment rising and falling within its sphere.

The place where Zhuang Rui is located is the most concentrated and bustling area for collectibles in Pengcheng City. It's a favorite spot for almost all collectors in this ancient city to browse and hunt for bargains. It's a place where opportunities and pitfalls coexist, and joy and disappointment are intertwined.

The original collectibles market wasn't as large as it is now. Back then, most shops operated in a small park next door. Later, the market outside gradually became more popular, but now only a small number of stalls and shop owners operate in the adjacent park, and it doesn't seem to be doing very well. So most of the shops inside have switched to selling fish, insects, flowers, and birds.

The market offers a wide variety of collectibles; you could find almost any imaginable collectible here. Collectors who pay attention are unlikely to leave empty-handed. Jade, bronzes, coins, woodenware, porcelain, silverware, miscellaneous items, calligraphy and paintings, comic books... the selection is vast. However, the most distinctive collectibles of Pengcheng are perhaps those from the Han Dynasty, such as Han mirrors, Han jars, and rubbings of Han stone reliefs, which are very popular with both locals and visitors.

There are many shops in the market, but not many specialize in antiques. Some shops also run tea houses, coffee shops, and other similar businesses.

Like many collectibles markets in China, there aren't many tourists here on weekdays, mostly from out of town. But on weekends and holidays, it's a completely different story – bustling and crowded, just like it is now. On the one hand, many people have time to try their luck on weekends and holidays, hoping to find some satisfactory collectibles. On the other hand, many small vendors from surrounding areas also come here, setting up stalls with newspapers or velvet cloths, displaying all sorts of old and quirky items they've gathered, and then setting up a small stool behind them to sit on – that's how they start their business.

Although it was still freezing cold, Zhuang Rui saw nothing but smiling faces filled with festive joy amidst the crowded throng. Upon closer observation, he noticed that the majority of the people coming and going were young men and women, but they were all just browsing, rarely staying at a single stall for more than a few minutes. They mostly bought handicrafts, priced at ten or eight yuan, which were relatively cheap and far from being valuable collectibles. Those who stood or squatted by the stalls, lingering there, were often middle-aged or elderly people. Some even held magnifying glasses the size of coins, carefully examining the items. Some were haggling with the stall owners over prices. These people were the main consumers in the collectibles market.

Despite the excitement, Zhuang Rui knew better than to act rashly. Yang Wei's father was famous not because he was rich, but because he had a house full of counterfeit goods. People in the industry would often tell him stories about the origins of his items, and Yang's father would be fooled. Over the years, he had paid at least several million in tuition fees, but still hadn't found the right way. This was a laughing stock in their circle.

In this world, most people who drown are swimmers. In the antique business, the target is those who have only a superficial understanding of antiques. If one out of ten items they buy is actually an old item, they are considered lucky.

The unspoken rule of the collecting world is that both genuine and fake items exist, and it all depends on the buyer's discerning eye. It's not impossible to find an old item by sifting through the sand, but it's also common to accidentally buy a new item. So, whether you find a bargain or make a mistake and lose money depends entirely on the collector's decision. For most people, collecting is all about having a keen eye, seizing opportunities, and experiencing the thrill of the moment. However, Zhuang Rui felt that he didn't seem to belong to this category.

Zhuang Rui strolled leisurely along the street stalls, following the flow of people. He had no desire to enter those shops, not only because he had been taken advantage of in a shop before the New Year, but also because he had heard Uncle De mention in a previous conversation that in the antique collecting world, those who could afford to open shops usually relied on regular customers and could go three years without opening, but then live off their profits for three years. Most of the items displayed on the

shelves in their shops were modern handicrafts. So, putting aside the fact that genuine goods wouldn't be displayed in these shops, the fact that the shop assistants would claim that a spittoon was used by Emperor Qianlong was simply unbearable. Zhuang Rui was too lazy to bother with such a ridiculous idea.

Zhuang Rui was particularly interested in the stalls selling calligraphy and paintings, often squatting there for half a day, picking up each item and examining it carefully. Anyone who didn't know better would think he was an expert, looking at things so meticulously. Little did they know that he had to distinguish each item one by one, which of course took a lot of time. However, after browsing for more than two hours and looking at more than a dozen stalls, Zhuang Rui still couldn't find a single thing of value, and he was slightly disappointed.

"Brother, I have some old things here, would you like to take a look?"

It was almost noon when Zhuang Rui shook his head, turned around with some disappointment, and was about to go back when someone suddenly tugged at his sleeve.