

Golden 22

Chapter Twenty-Two: A Double Act (Part 1)

"Are you calling me?"

Zhuang Rui stopped and looked at the person who had stopped him, somewhat puzzled. The person was also a young man, probably in his early twenties, thin and frail, with small eyes that narrowed to slits when he smiled. He looked a bit like Liang Tian from the sitcom 'I Love My Family'.

This person's attire was quite interesting and had a comedic effect. He wore a pair of somewhat bulky cotton trousers on his lower body, but over a white down jacket, he wore a yellow mandarin jacket with sleeves that reached his elbows and had buttons under his armpits. However, on the person in front of him, it didn't look like the imperial guards that Zhuang Rui had seen on TV. Instead, it looked more like a little eunuch in the palace who emptied spittoons and fed horses.

"Sir, I've been watching you for a while now, and I can tell you're an expert, which is why I approached you. Are you interested in calligraphy and paintings? Come take a look at my stall; it's full of genuine works by famous artists, and I even have a painting by Zheng Banqiao that I don't usually display..."

The eunuch who was feeding the horses acted like a familiar face, leaning close to Zhuang Rui and whispering. He started by praising Zhuang Rui, but his small eyes were darting around, looking all sneaky.

"Oh? Where's your stall? It's too far for me to go..."

Zhuang Rui asked noncommittally. He would never go there if it weren't for the market. In today's society, especially in places like this, all sorts of people mingle. If you're not careful, losing money is a minor matter; losing your life is not uncommon.

Liu Chuan once told Zhuang Rui a story: last year, a young man from the countryside set up a stall here, selling some rusty ancient coins. According to the young man, he dug them up while farming, initially mistaking them for scrap metal. Later, he heard from villagers that people would buy these things, so he came to the Pengcheng antique market to try his luck. However, there were many people selling coins in the market, and his coins weren't in good condition, so he didn't make much money after a whole day.

Just as the young man was packing up his stall for the night, an old man squatted down in front of him and wouldn't leave. This old man had a discerning eye and could tell that the coins he was selling were genuine Warring States period Qi swords, and one of them was even a six-character sword coin, which has always been the rarest of all the Qi swords in existence and unearthed.

As everyone knows, the State of Qi was located in present-day Shandong. Mr. Zhu Huo, a former researcher at the Shandong Provincial Museum, mentioned in his book "A New Compendium of Ancient Coins" that a total of 4,950 Qi knives of various types have been unearthed in Shandong, but only 16 of them are six-character knives. This makes the six-character knife coin extremely precious, with a market price of at least 60,000 RMB per coin. Even so, many collectors who love ancient coins still find it difficult to acquire one.

Although the six-character knife coin was somewhat damaged, it was still in good condition. The old gentleman also found four five-character knife coins in relatively good condition. Although there are more five-character knife coins in existence, each one can still sell for tens of thousands of yuan. The old gentleman was so excited that he started shouting about it, which immediately caused a sensation in the entire antique market.

You see, the things these street vendors sell, to put it nicely, are modern handicrafts; to put it bluntly, they're fakes and shoddy goods, specifically designed to fool those who've only read a few books and come here to find bargains. This market has been open for several years, and I've never heard of anyone selling items worth over 50,000 yuan at a street stall. Most large transactions take place in the shops, where the items and amounts are kept confidential. So, the news of the "six-character knife" appearing at the street stall spread like wildfire throughout the entire market within minutes.

The old man realized his mistake after shouting and was filled with regret. His outburst had cost him a chance to snag a bargain. However, he had genuinely been searching for the six-character knife coin and sincerely wanted to buy it. The young man, having overheard the onlookers' discussions, roughly understood the value of his coins. Because the six-character knife coin wasn't in the best condition, its price was slightly lower. After some negotiation, the old man finally bought the six-character knife coin and four five-character knife coins for 90,000 yuan, and immediately took the young man from the countryside to the bank to withdraw the money for the transaction.

The story should have ended here. The old man's words prevented him from getting a bargain and cost him tens of thousands of yuan. Most of the onlookers could only sigh inwardly at the rural lad's good fortune, which resulted in him making a windfall.

However, there are many people in this market who want to get rich and have ulterior motives. After discovering the value of those coins, several greedy eyes were fixed on the two of them, and they even followed them to the bank under the pretense of watching the excitement.

After the transaction, the old man took a taxi and left, leaving the men with no way to catch him. The young man from the countryside, who had just received a large sum of money, lacked experience in dealing with people. He didn't think to open an account to deposit the money at the bank. Instead, he excitedly carried the money with him when he left the bank. This gave the men an opportunity. They followed the young man to a secluded place and robbed him of the 90,000 yuan.

Fortunately, the young man from the countryside was lucky. After being knocked unconscious by a severe blow to the head, he was taken to the hospital by a kind passerby. After undergoing craniotomy, he regained consciousness and identified the people who had been lurking in the antique market and had robbed him. Although the debt was recovered, more than 30,000 yuan of the 90,000 yuan had been squandered by the gang of thugs, and more than 40,000 yuan went to medical expenses. Those thugs were all penniless and had no one to support them, so they naturally had no money to bear the civil liability of paying for the young man's medical treatment. Although they were all severely punished by law in the end, no one could help the young man recover his real losses. This can be described as a case of joy turning into sorrow.

Since that incident, the antique market has strengthened its management and increased security. Some people who idled around all day and had bad reputations have been cleared out. Merchants in the market are also much more cautious about transactions with larger sums of money. However, the occurrence of good items appearing on the stalls like last year has not happened again.

It was precisely because of what happened here that Zhuang Rui asked the question above. These days, there are many people who would take risks for money, so we have to be careful. He was unlucky enough to be robbed before the New Year, and now, during the New Year, he doesn't want to invite bad luck upon himself.

"Brother, my stall is right next to here. You just walked by and didn't notice it..."

The eunuch, with a fawning smile and bowing, pointed to a stall on Zhuang Rui's way here.

Zhuang Rui breathed a sigh of relief. Hearing the man in front of him say that the stall was on the street he had just walked across, he figured he might as well take a look since he was going back anyway.

"Brother Xiong, bring out that calligraphy by Zheng Banqiao and let this brother take a look..."

When the two reached the stall, the eunuch who was feeding the horses beat them to it and shouted loudly to a man sitting behind the stall covered with a red cloth.

Out of the corner of his eye, Zhuang Rui noticed that the thin young man was blinking incessantly as if he had sand in his eyes while shouting. He couldn't help but smile bitterly to himself. He had really learned something new today. He had heard of medical touts and bar touts before, but he never expected to encounter an antique tout performing a double act here.