

Golden 231

Chapter 231 Myanmar

"Uncle Qin, take care. Aunt Fang, take care..."

Zhuang Rui raised his right hand and waved it forcefully at the Mercedes-Benz with Hong Kong license plates that had already started moving.

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to lower his hand after the Mercedes had driven more than ten meters away, the car window suddenly opened, and Fang Yi called out to him, "Little Zhuang, you must come to Hong Kong to play when you have time. Xuanbing will accompany you then."

"Okay, okay, I'll definitely go..."

Zhuang Rui had just lowered his right hand halfway when, as if springy, he quickly raised it again, but the smile on his face was more like a grimace.

The Mercedes finally disappeared from sight, and Zhuang Rui felt completely paralyzed. If it weren't for Wei Ge supporting him, Zhuang Rui would have collapsed onto the ground right now.

This couple wasn't there to buy jade at all; they were practically checking people's backgrounds. They were even more thorough than the neighborhood committee ladies with red armbands who used to ask questions. They questioned everyone from Zhuang Rui's grandfather to his sister's niece, and even about the size and gender of their white lion. Aunt Fang didn't let them off the hook.

"No, we need to call and ask what Xuanbing said to her mother." Zhuang Rui took out his phone and dialed Qin Xuanbing's number.

"Zhuang Rui, what did my mom ask you?"

"Xuanbing, what did you say to your mother?"

As soon as the call connected, both sides started asking questions simultaneously.

"You go first!"

"You go first!"

"Your mom checked my family's household registration; she almost asked me how many times I've been married..." Zhuang Rui said irritably.

"Hehe, I only said we're friends, nothing else. That's just how she is, don't take it to heart." Qin Xuanbing felt a little embarrassed after hearing Zhuang Rui's words.

"I don't really care, but your mom seems to be quite concerned about whether we've done 'that'..."

Zhuang Rui recalled Qin Xuanbing's mother's question from earlier and couldn't help but find it a little funny; a mother's fear of her daughter being taken advantage of.

"What did you say?" Qin Xuanbing asked nervously.

"What do you mean, 'what did you say'? I didn't do anything, yet I was interrogated for so long..." Zhuang Rui was immediately furious. If something had really happened, he wouldn't be angry.

"Alright, don't be angry. Wait for me to get back. At most... at most..." Qin Xuanbing couldn't quite bring herself to say it.

"What's the most?" Zhuang Rui asked knowingly.

"I'm not talking to you anymore, it's the middle of the night here, I need to go to sleep..." After hanging up the phone, Qin Xuanbing's face was flushed and her body was slightly hot, as if the air conditioner blowing out cold air had broken down.

"Hey, we've finished flirting and teasing, and your mother-in-law has already questioned us. Shouldn't we go eat?" Wei Ge walked over with a bitter face.

"My goodness, I wasn't this tired even after working on rocks all day yesterday..."

Recalling Qin Xuanbing's mother's overly enthusiastic manner, Zhuang Rui still felt lingering fear. They were just friends, yet Fang Yi made Zhuang Rui call her "Auntie" as soon as she arrived. Not only that, but her eyes were constantly staring at Zhuang Rui as she spoke, making Zhuang Rui feel uneasy all over, and sweat dripped down his back.

"You're just being smug, aren't you? Someone gave you forty million and even offered you their daughter. What's so tiring about that? I'm handsome and dashing, but nobody's interested in me..."

"Come on, let's go eat. I'll ask Lao Si to find some professionals to take care of you later."

Unable to bear Wei Ge's resentful expression, Zhuang Rui returned to the meeting room, called out to the bank employee, and drove towards the hotel booked by Fatty Ma.

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"How much did you earn in total?"

Sitting in the bank's VIP lounge, Zhuang Rui asked Fatty Ma, who was furiously typing on a calculator,

After lunch, Wei Ge and Lao Si went back to the hotel first. Yan Zi, who had been following Ma Pangzi, was also sent back by him. Zhuang Rui, Song Jun, and Ma Pangzi went directly to the bank. Although the jade gambling conference still had five days to go, which was a good time for those individual gamblers, for them, the jade gambling conference had already come to a successful end.

"Look at you, all eager, haven't you ever seen so much money before?" Fatty Ma said, annoyed, after pressing the wrong number.

Zhuang Rui chuckled and said, "I have seen it, but that money isn't mine, Brother Ma. How much is it in total?"

"Including the 40 million from the last two pieces of jade, the total is 318.3 million. The 300,000 is considered a bonus. The total is 318 million. We invested a total of 66.6 million and made a net profit of 251.4 million. Damn, this is incredibly profitable!"

Even Fatty Ma couldn't help but get excited when he finally finished calculating, and he blurted out a curse.

"Look at the two of you, Lao Ma, you're worth billions, is this all you've got? Calm down, calm down."

Song Jun remained calm, picked up the coffee that was supposedly brewed by the bank manager himself, took a sip, and then spat it out with a "Pah!"

"Damn, this coffee doesn't have any sugar at all?"

"Brother Song, when someone asked you if you wanted to add sugar, you said you added it yourself. Calm down, calm down."

Zhuang Rui suppressed a laugh and countered with the same words Song Jun had just said.

"Of course he's calm. The money is still in his account. Old Song, let's go transfer it. This money is fucking awesome. I've been mining coal for over ten years, and this is all I have."

Usually cheerful Fatty Ma was unusually excited today. He turned around, patted Zhuang Rui, and said, "There's a jade auction in Yangon, Myanmar next January. Let's go together, brother..."

"We'll see, we'll talk about it later..."

Zhuang Rui answered absentmindedly. At this moment, his mind was focused on the three hundred million. If he got a share, that would be more than one hundred million. To say that Zhuang Rui wasn't excited would be pure nonsense.

“Look at how pathetic you all are. Come on, let’s transfer the money...”

Song Jun knew that neither of them would feel at ease until the money was in their pockets. These days, people would even fall out over a few hundred thousand yuan, let alone three hundred million. Even Song Jun's heart was in turmoil, far from the calm he appeared on his face.

According to the prior agreement, each of the three would receive 106 million, but Zhuang Rui only took 90 million, leaving the remaining 16 million in Song Jun's account. That was the money Zhuang Rui planned to use to buy a villa. According to Song Jun, 16 million would be enough, and he would take care of it when he flew back to Pengcheng tomorrow.

With the remaining ten million or so, Zhuang Rui's net worth was now over one hundred million. According to Song Jun, Zhuang Rui was now qualified to mingle in Fatty Ma's circle. Of course, this qualification only referred to his net worth. If he wanted to enter Song Jun's circle in Beijing, it wasn't enough to just have money; he also needed status.

After the transfer, Fatty Ma pulled Zhuang Rui aside and said with a grin, "Brother, you've got the money. How about we go to Myanmar with me next year? I've heard the quality there is top-notch. The rough jade we're seeing now is what they didn't pick out..."

Zhuang Rui was also tempted by this. Gambling on stones was indeed a good way to make money. So many people win big every day, but no one paid attention to him. He could make another fortune if he had the chance. Although a hundred million seemed like a lot, money doesn't last long. Buying a house would take away one-tenth of his wealth.

"Old Ma, know when to quit while you're ahead. In China, this is our territory, and we can handle anything here. But once you're in Myanmar, you won't have that luxury anymore. Don't end up with money to burn but no life to enjoy it..."

Before Zhuang Rui could answer, Song Jun poured cold water on his words, saying that the local forces in Burma were too complicated and that one could easily be targeted if one was not careful. Not to

mention, among the merchants in Guangdong who traded raw materials, six or seven out of ten had been kidnapped in Burma. Some had paid ransoms to save their lives, but others had still lost their lives in a foreign land even after paying the ransom.

After hearing Song Jun's explanation, Zhuang Rui and Fatty Ma gasped. They hadn't expected the situation in Myanmar to be so chaotic, something unimaginable in China, which had enjoyed decades of peace.

"Cough...cough...Want to go to Myanmar? It's not impossible. Follow me, Brother Song, and I'll guarantee your safety. But if you follow Old Ma, well, that's another story..."

Seeing that he had frightened the two men quite a bit, Song Jun coughed twice to bring their attention back.

"Hey, Lao Song, what are you talking about? Do you think I, Lao Ma, have 'rich' written all over my face or something? If all else fails, I can just hire a bunch of mercenaries in Myanmar and that'll be the end of it..."

Fatty Ma was somewhat unconvinced by what Song Jun said. He had worked his way up from the bottom and was quite knowledgeable about things in the underworld. Although he had never been to Myanmar, he knew that in places where there was fighting, there were often international mercenaries operating.

Upon hearing this, Song Jun showed a hint of disdain on his face and said, "Mercenaries? If they kidnap you, their employer, you won't even have a chance to seek justice. Listen to me, brother, there will be an exchange group going to Myanmar next year. We'll just slip you in there."

There's a group of people in Beijing who set up a jade gambling club last year. However, their approach is somewhat different from that of jade gambling in Pingzhou. It's more about comparing eyesight and seeking some excitement, with money being a secondary concern.

Song Jun didn't say some things. This exchange group was actually organized by people in their circle in Beijing. They were just using the name of the country. With this name, it would be safe to go to Myanmar. After all, this small, barbaric country wouldn't dare to offend the increasingly powerful Chinese government.

"Let's forget it. The water over there is so murky, we're not going to wade in. This little bit of money is enough for me to live on for a lifetime."

Zhuang Rui backed down. His interest wasn't actually in jade and gemstones; he preferred antiques. The history embedded in those objects could easily captivate one.

Zhuang Rui's words greatly displeased Song Jun and Fatty Ma. The two brothers shared the same thought: without Zhuang Rui by their side, they felt uneasy.

Chapter 232 The Prodigal Son Returns Home

Although Song Jun and Fatty Ma bombarded Zhuang Rui with questions, Zhuang Rui still hadn't made a decision. He was scheduled to take the preliminary exam for Peking University's graduate program next January, and whether he'd have time then was uncertain.

Back at the hotel, Zhuang Rui was interrogated again by Wei Ge and Lao Si, mainly about his financial situation. After having dinner with Zhou Rui that evening, Zhuang Rui decided to leave Guangdong the next day.

Guangdong is the headquarters of Xu's Jewelry. Although the head of Xu's Jewelry, who is still lying in bed, has not taken any action against him, Zhuang Rui still feels uneasy about staying here.

Although Zhuang Rui reaped a considerable reward from this jade gambling venture, he wasn't particularly happy. The ups and downs and overnight riches in jade gambling don't feel real. People always remember those who win, while the many who lose everything are forgotten.

Zhuang Rui and his group's jade gambling venture may be portrayed as a legendary story, inspiring more people who want to get rich overnight to invest in jade gambling. Of course, there will also be more people in the world who lose everything.

Having witnessed his own gambling successes and others' failures, Zhuang Rui felt a sense of brutality, or perhaps the restlessness of people's hearts, beyond the excitement and mystery of gambling on stones. This might be one of the reasons why gambling on stones is so attractive.

The next morning, after saying goodbye to Fatty Ma, Zhuang Rui and Lao Si drove back to Zhonghai with Wei Ge and Zhou Rui. Song Jun had already returned to Pengcheng by plane the night before. According to him, it was better to buy Zhuang Rui a villa sooner rather than later, as there were quite a few people eyeing that house.

It was already early morning of the next day when they arrived in Zhonghai. After dropping Wei Ge off at home, Zhuang Rui immediately called Uncle De. Hearing that Uncle De was already up, he drove to pick him up and took him to a teahouse.

Zhuang Rui had no choice; he didn't have time to stay in Zhonghai any longer. Song Jun had already called yesterday, saying everything about the villa was settled and they were just waiting for him to return to sign the papers and complete the transfer. Zhuang Rui hadn't even discussed the villa purchase with his mother yet, and he was feeling a bit anxious. He just wanted to finish things in Zhonghai as soon as possible and get back to Pengcheng quickly.

Zhou Rui had driven all night and stayed in the car to catch up on sleep. After Zhuang Rui and Uncle De settled down at the teahouse, they ordered several baskets of soup dumplings and dim sum. The morning tea in Zhonghai is different from that in Guangdong; each has its own unique characteristics.

"You little rascal, you're really daring. I wouldn't even dare touch jade gambling, but you went and gambled away your entire fortune. Luckily, you won. If I find out you're such a gambler again, don't call me Uncle De anymore. This is the first time, and it's a one-time thing..."

Uncle De didn't drink the tea that Zhuang Rui had poured for him. Instead, he put on a stern face and gave Zhuang Rui a few harsh words of reprimand. Although Zhuang Rui had been a manager for a few days, in Uncle De's eyes, Zhuang Rui was still that naive young man who had just entered society.

"Yes, Uncle De, I understand. This time it was just a moment of excitement. Even if I go again, it won't be like this time..." Zhuang Rui knew that Uncle De was doing it for his own good, but he didn't say anything definitively. Who knows what will happen in the future?

"Hey, you've gotten too big for your britches, you don't even listen to Uncle De anymore. Let me tell you, collecting is about enjoying culture. You can find joy in reading history, and there's also wealth involved, but it's wealth with substance. At least it won't make you look like you're just after money, like when you gamble on stones."

I told you to take the postgraduate entrance exam so you could accumulate more theoretical knowledge. Archaeology is different from collecting, but it involves dealing with many valuable artifacts, and there's a relatively professional theoretical system for dating and authentication. Now that you have the money, you'd better study hard. If you fail, Old Meng will just laugh at me for nothing."

Uncle De treated Zhuang Rui like a nephew, and spoke to him quite casually. This time, he had even swallowed his pride and pleaded with Zhuang Rui to apply for his old friend's graduate program, hence this further reprimand of Zhuang Rui.

"Hehe, put it down, Uncle De, I guarantee you'll pass on the first try. We were an excellent student in school, both in character and academics..."

Zhuang Rui has also been researching information about postgraduate programs in archaeology. Classical Chinese and chemistry are his strengths, so there shouldn't be too much of a problem.

"Alright, stop joking around. Let me see that Ru ware porcelain fragment you found." Uncle De interrupted Zhuang Rui, who was also quite curious about the porcelain fragment Zhuang Rui had mentioned on the phone.

Zhuang Rui opened his handbag and carefully took out the broken pieces of porcelain wrapped in a towel. Uncle De was both amused and exasperated. What does it mean to be an amateur? It perfectly describes someone like Zhuang Rui.

However, after the towel was lifted, Uncle De's attention was completely focused on these broken porcelain shards. The cleaned shards had a faint sky-blue color and fine lines like spider silk, which made the porcelain body look even more delicate and smooth.

"Indeed, it's Ru ware porcelain, and it's even official Ru ware from the Northern Song Dynasty. The inscription on it was engraved later, not printed before firing. Zhuang Rui, is this really a set of broken porcelain? It doesn't matter. Even if one or two pieces are missing, or there are some chips, it's not a problem. This kind of porcelain is priceless!"

After looking at it for a long time, Uncle De's face showed a look of shock. He originally thought that Zhuang Rui had found a Southern Song Dynasty imitation of Northern Song Dynasty Ru ware, but now it

seems that it is a genuine Northern Song Dynasty Ru ware, which is several times more expensive than the Southern Song Dynasty Ru ware.

"I've pieced it together roughly, and it should be a set. Anyway, I'm leaving it to you, Uncle De. Once it's fixed, I'll leave it with you. I don't have time to pick it up right now."

Zhuang Rui didn't know much about porcelain. He didn't realize that even though it was just a fragment of Ru ware porcelain, it was a priceless treasure in the eyes of porcelain collectors.

"Alright, I'll put it in the bank safe deposit box after it's repaired. With that spendthrift son of mine, he might just steal it and sell it."

Uncle De smiled wryly. Every family has its own troubles. His eldest son is a bookworm and his job as a university teacher is relatively stable. But his youngest son is good-for-nothing. He's over thirty years old and still sponging off his parents. Uncle De has secretly sold off several of his valuable collections.

"Alright, Uncle De, you can handle it as you see fit. I'm a bit busy this month, I'll come see you again after this month." Zhuang Rui had to rush back to Pengcheng today, so after asking the waiter to pay the bill, he got up to say goodbye.

"Okay, drive carefully on the road. By the way, you must come over at the end of September. I'll take you to Beijing to visit Lao Meng. He's doing archaeological work in Shaanxi right now..." Uncle De gave Zhuang Rui a few instructions as he saw him off downstairs.

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By the time Zhuang Rui and Zhou Rui drove back to Pengcheng, it was already dark. Zhou Rui had been driving almost the entire way from Guangdong to Zhonghai and then to Pengcheng. He was exhausted by then, so he parked the car downstairs and went upstairs to sleep.

"Xiao Rui, you must be tired. Go take a shower and eat first. Call Zhou Rui down too."

Upon entering the house, Zhuang Rui found that his sister's family was also there. Nannan ran and jumped into Zhuang Rui's arms, hugging her uncle's neck tightly and refusing to let go. His mother remained as serene as ever, but her words revealed deep concern.

"Little girl, come down quickly, your uncle is tired. If you don't behave, your uncle won't like you anymore."

"No, I haven't seen my uncle in so long, I want to sleep with him tonight..."

"Mom, I already called and told you not to wait for me to eat. You guys eat first. Zhou is tired, let him take a nap."

Zhuang Rui looked at the food on the table, which hadn't been touched, and knew that his family was waiting for him to come home for dinner.

"Go play with the white lion, Uncle needs to take a bath." The little guy was indeed distracted by Zhuang Rui's words and shouted as he pounced on the white lion following behind Zhuang Rui.

"Mom, I have something to tell you. I made some money this time and I want to buy a new house. Look, the white lion is so big now. It's easy to scare people by having it coming and going around here."

After taking a shower, Zhuang Rui sat down at the dining table and cautiously brought up the topic of buying a house. Although he felt he was an adult, in this family, his mother still had the final say.

"Brother, where are you buying it?" Zhuang Min asked before Zhuang's mother could answer.

Zhuang Rui glanced at his mother's face and said, "Yunlong Manor has good air quality there, and Mom can even take a walk by the lake in the morning."

"What? You bought it there? Bro, those are all villas, I heard they cost tens of millions a unit."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Zhuang Min was so shocked that she dropped the piece of chicken she was holding with her chopsticks. She knew that her younger brother had some money now, but to want to buy a villa was just too outrageous.

"Just buy it, why make such a fuss? But Xiao Rui, Mom is used to living here. I'm surrounded by old colleagues, so I'm not lonely. I won't go to the villa anymore. I'll just take Nannan there for a day every weekend."

Mrs. Zhuang was quite open-minded and didn't feel there was anything wrong with buying a villa. She was just used to living here and didn't want to move to a villa. However, fearing that her son might overthink things, she said she would stay there one day a week.

"Well, I won't be staying there often. I'll buy you a car, and you can drive there whenever you want."

Seeing that his mother didn't object to him buying the villa, Zhuang Rui was overjoyed. Taking advantage of his mother's good mood, he continued, "Mom, there's something else. I want to apply for the graduate program in archaeology at Peking University. I might be spending a lot of time in Beijing these next few years. How about you come and live with me in Beijing for a while after I get accepted?"

"Beijing?!"

Upon hearing this, Mrs. Zhuang was stunned for a moment, her face turning pale, and her outstretched hands, which were about to pick up some food, stopped above the table.

Chapter 233 The New Home (Part 1)

"Xiao Rui, don't other schools offer archaeology programs? Do we really have to go to Beijing?"

Mrs. Zhuang put her chopsticks back down, looked at Zhuang Rui, and asked, her expression still not very pleasant.

"Mom, Uncle De has an old friend at Peking University, and he wants me to apply to his graduate program..."

Zhuang Rui also noticed that his mother seemed to be in a bad mood, so he answered honestly. He also recalled a past event: when he was choosing a university after graduating from high school, it seemed that his mother had strongly advocated that he go to Zhonghai. At that time, with Zhuang Rui's grades, it would have been an easy task for him to get into one of the top universities in Beijing.

"How about we just give up and not take the exam? I'm too lazy to go out anyway."

Seeing his mother's appearance, Zhuang Rui felt a pang of pity. His mother had raised him and his siblings all by herself, and Zhuang Rui would never let his mother be sad or upset.

"Mom, it's a good thing that Xiao Rui is going to graduate school. If he's going to Beijing, then let him go to Beijing. If you're worried, you can come and stay with him for a while."

Zhuang Min's personality is the exact opposite of Zhuang Rui's; she's a bit careless. She was busy feeding the little girl and didn't notice that her mother's mood was a little off.

"Sister, stop talking. I can apply to other schools. I heard that the archaeology department at Shanxi University is quite good. Let me inquire about it first..." Zhuang Rui interrupted Zhuang Min. After a moment of surprise, Zhuang Min realized something.

"Mom, we're all grown up now, what can we still talk about? Back then, Xiao Rui could have gone to school in Beijing, but..."

"Alright, that's enough. There are some things you kids don't understand..."

Before Zhuang Min could finish speaking, her mother interrupted her. Perhaps realizing her own lapse in composure, Zhuang Min turned to Zhuang Rui and said, "Xiao Rui, Mom is fine. Don't let Uncle De's good intentions go to waste. Go to Beijing."

Guodong, you guys take your time eating, Mom's finished.

After speaking, Mrs. Zhuang stood up and returned to her room, leaving Zhuang Rui and the others looking at each other in bewilderment.

"Sis, can't you say less? You know Mom doesn't like people bringing up her past. Look, you've made her angry again." As soon as Zhuang Rui got home, he complained about his older sister because his mother was unhappy about the postgraduate entrance exam.

"You heartless bastard! I was just speaking up for you. Besides, we're all grown up now. Mom can talk to us about her worries now. It's okay, I'll go and comfort her later. Mom gets sad a few times every year."

Zhuang Min's personality is somewhat similar to Lei Lei's; she can't keep things to herself. Over the years, she has almost always been the one to ask Zhuang's mother about her past first, and naturally, she has received far more scolding than Zhuang Rui.

"Okay, remember, don't mention that again. If Mom wants to tell us, she will. By the way, brother-in-law, how's the auto repair shop doing?"

When Zhuang Rui got home, he hadn't even had a chance to talk to Zhao Guodong yet. After telling his older sister what was going on, he asked his brother-in-law about the repair shop. Actually, he didn't want to care about the repair shop; he just wanted to change the subject and stop talking about his mother's past.

Zhao Guodong poured his brother-in-law a glass of wine and said with a smile, "It's great. We can't even keep up with the demand for repairing trucks right now. I've hired seven or eight more people, and they all have to work overtime tonight to repair trucks. If you hadn't come back today, I would have been staying at the repair shop."

"No, brother-in-law, you have to come home every day, otherwise my sister will definitely say that I'm exploiting you."

Seeing that his brother-in-law, who used to be so quiet that he couldn't even fart after three blows, was now much more cheerful, Zhuang Rui was very happy and started joking with Zhao Guodong.

What's the point of making money? Isn't it just to improve the lives of yourself and your family? However, Zhuang Rui wouldn't give him money directly; that would make him lose himself and his sense of self-worth. Earning money through his skills, like this, gives Zhao Guodong a much greater sense of satisfaction than if Zhuang Rui simply threw a million at him.

"I'm so busy. The car decoration business I told you about a while ago is finally up and running. The profit margin in this area is huge, much higher than car repair. Once the market opens up, that's when we'll really make money." Zhao Guodong was very excited when talking about his current job.

"We've been married for so long, what's wrong with not coming home for a few days?" Zhuang Min said dismissively.

"Sis, haven't you heard that men become bad when they have money?"

"No, no way. Even the cat that catches mice at our repair shop is male," Zhao Guodong quickly clarified, making a rare joke.

"Your brother-in-law isn't that kind of person. But Xiao Rui, you're not getting any younger. You'll be 26 after the New Year. Have you found someone yet?"

As the eldest sister, Zhuang Min was even more concerned about this matter than Zhuang's mother. Every time Zhuang Rui came home, he would be questioned by Zhuang Min.

"Sigh, I drove back from Guangdong and haven't had a break. I'm so tired. Sis, I'm going to bed now. You can cook a couple more dishes and heat up the rice, then take it upstairs to Brother Zhou. He hasn't eaten yet."

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he stood up and walked towards his room. What a joke! He had already been bombarded with questions by Qin Xuanbing's mother once, and his older sister was much more formidable than her.

"Honestly, why didn't you call others down for dinner? Never mind that, go to sleep. Hey, wait a minute, Xiao Rui, get back here! You haven't answered my question yet!"

Zhuang Min was met with the sound of Zhuang Rui slamming the door shut, which angered her so much that she went over and kicked it twice. The person inside the room, of course, pretended to be dead and didn't hear it.

Zhuang Rui had been through a lot these past few days. The continuous stone-cutting had kept his nerves on edge. This fatigue was different from physical fatigue; it was something that spiritual energy couldn't eliminate. Now that he was back home in his familiar room, he immediately relaxed and slept for more than ten hours. If it weren't for his phone ringing, he probably would have slept until the afternoon.

Hello, who is this?

Zhuang Rui didn't even open his eyes. He followed the sound, reached for his phone from the bedside table, and asked groggily.

"Are you in Pengcheng? Still sleeping? Get up quickly, I'll take you to handle the formalities. I have to rush to Beijing at noon, but I don't have time..."

Song Jun's voice came from the phone, startling Zhuang Rui awake. He drew back the curtains and looked out the window, only to find the sun already high in the sky, its intense rays flooding the room and instantly brightening it.

As Zhuang Rui put on his clothes, he said into the phone, "Brother Song, I drove back. I'm leaving now. Where are you?"

"Drive directly to the Housing Management Bureau in Yunlong District later. I'll wait for you here. Hurry up, and don't forget your ID card..."

Song Jun really had an urgent matter. His father hadn't been feeling well yesterday and couldn't get out of bed today. If it weren't for Zhuang Rui's matter, Song Jun would have taken a plane to Beijing this morning.

"Xiao Rui, what happened? Why are you in such a hurry? Drive carefully."

Zhuang Rui hurriedly brushed his teeth, grabbed a wet towel and wiped his face haphazardly. Without even eating breakfast, he ran downstairs, causing his mother to think something had happened and chase after him to ask.

Zhuang Rui reversed the car, leaned out of the window, and said, "Okay, Mom, it's nothing, I'll be back in a bit."

When Zhuang Rui arrived at the Housing Management Bureau, Song Jun was already getting restless. When he saw Zhuang Rui come in, he pulled him over, took out a stack of documents from his bag, spread them on the table, and said, "You have to sign each one. There's ink pad over there. Put your fingerprint on your name. I've already arranged everything regarding the property certificate. You can get the certificate in three days."

"Thank you, Brother Song. By the way, why are you in such a hurry to get back to Beijing?"

Zhuang Rui waited almost two months to get the property certificate for the house he bought in China Overseas, but he didn't expect it to be done in just three days here. He knew that Song Jun had used his connections to get it done so quickly.

"My grandfather isn't in good health, shouldn't I, as the eldest grandson, go back? Alright, if you want to thank Brother Song, come with me to Myanmar next year..."

Before Zhuang Rui could reply, Song Jun glanced at his watch and continued, "I'm leaving now. You can fill out those forms. By the way, this villa only cost 15.2 million. I won't give you the remaining 800,000. Keep the key. There are some items inside the villa that are worth your money."

Song Jun took out a large bunch of keys and the remote control for the garage door lift from his bag and placed them on the table. It wasn't that he wanted to embezzle Zhuang Rui's hundreds of thousands of yuan; he simply didn't have time to go to the bank to transfer the money to him.

Zhuang Rui felt a little embarrassed upon hearing this, knowing that he must have delayed Song Jun's time. As he got up to see Song Jun out, Zhuang Rui asked, "Brother Song, is the old man alright? Should I go with you to check on him? I brought back some Tibetan medicine from Tibet."

Zhuang Rui was thinking that if he could see the old man and send him some spiritual energy from a few meters away, even if it didn't cure him, it could at least alleviate his condition. Moreover, as long as he didn't have physical contact with Song Jun's grandfather, no one would suspect that he was the one with the illness.

"He doesn't have any serious illness, he's just getting old, and with some old injuries from the war years, his health is deteriorating day by day. It's alright, don't worry. When you go to Beijing to study, I'll take you to meet the old man."

Song Jun knew that the old man's illness was a serious matter. He didn't take the Tibetan medicine Zhuang Rui mentioned to heart. What good medicine couldn't be found in Beijing? Besides, even his grandson had to go through a check to see the old man, let alone bring anyone else in.

Instead of letting Zhuang Rui drive him, Song Jun hailed a taxi and hurriedly headed to the airport.

Zhuang Rui turned around and went back to the housing management bureau. After filling out the documents and forms, he handed them in through the window in the service hall and received a receipt. Since all the money had been paid, the villa now belonged to him.

Chapter 234 The New Home (Part Two)

Modern people, living in the cramped, steel-enclosed apartments of the city, naturally yearn for the idyllic scenery of lakes and mountains. Yunlong Villa, surrounded by mountains and water, boasts exceptionally beautiful landscapes, making it a dream home for all Pengcheng residents.

Zhuang Rui was no exception. Holding the key to the villa, he felt an urge to go and check it out immediately. However, remembering that he had just told his mother he would be home soon and was afraid she would worry, Zhuang Rui drove home after completing the formalities.

Just as Zhuang Rui drove out of the housing management bureau's gate, his phone rang. He pulled over to the side of the road and answered the call.

"I have to say, you're really not a good friend. You went back to Pengcheng yesterday without even saying goodbye. If Zhou Rui hadn't called me just now, I wouldn't have known..."

Liu Chuan's loud voice came from the phone. This guy was eagerly waiting for Zhuang Rui to come back. Well, he was mainly waiting for Zhou Rui. With Zhou Rui not around, he had to take care of the mastiff kennel and couldn't leave. Speaking of which, he had been calling Zhuang Rui's phone almost non-stop because he couldn't go to Guangdong to meet Lei Lei.

"Alright, stop talking nonsense. I'm going home right away. You can come over now. We'll have lunch together. Oh, and buy some cooked dishes. Don't make my mom cook for you again."

Zhuang Rui interrupted Liu Chuan before he could finish speaking. This guy could be even more long-winded than the neighborhood committee aunties downstairs.

When Zhuang Rui drove his car downstairs, he saw the rather flashy Hummer and couldn't help but call Liu Chuan again, asking him to come down. The reason was simply that he needed Liu Chuan's help with some manual labor.

Zhuang Rui then thought of the red jadeite rough stone in his car. He couldn't leave it in the car forever. It would be a lie to say he wasn't worried about carrying a rough stone worth hundreds of millions every day. Now that he thought about it, he decided to move it to the old house first, and then find a way to go there to cut it open once the villa was properly renovated.

This rough stone is quite large, weighing over 100 jin (approximately 50 kg), too heavy for Zhuang Rui to move alone.

"You're already downstairs, why don't you just go upstairs and finish? Why did you call me down here again?"

Liu Chuan, wearing baggy beach shorts and flip-flops, ran downstairs. He had only been there a few minutes and was just thinking of cooling off in the air conditioning when Zhuang Rui's phone call brought him down.

"Goodness, ancient ships used ballast stones, are you going to put a whole rock on your car while driving?"

Upon seeing the raw stone revealed after the seat was lifted, Liu Chuan gasped. The stone was quite large; Zhuang Rui would have to push it out little by little from the inside.

"Xiao Rui, why are you carrying a stone home like that?" Zhuang's mother was startled when she saw the two of them struggling to carry a stone into the house.

"Mom, the money I used to buy this villa all came from the stones I found," Zhuang Rui explained to his mother after hiding the rough stones under his bed.

"Godmother, Mu Tou really made a fortune this time. He won a hundred million yuan gambling on stones."

Liu Chuan added fuel to the fire, saying that he was extremely regretful for not being able to go to Guangdong. He said he should have gone to be Zhuang Rui's driver himself, and he would have been able to get a share of the profits.

"As long as it's not illegal, money is just a number. Da Chuan, call Xiao Zhou down, let's eat..."

After listening to Zhuang Rui's explanation, Zhuang's mother said calmly that she knew her son had been good at managing money since he was a child and wouldn't spend money recklessly.

After helping his mother set out the food, Zhuang Rui said, "Mom, shall we go look at the house together in a bit? I got the keys."

"I want to go too! I want to stay in my uncle's new house!"

Before Zhuang's mother could answer, the little girl raised her hand high, as if afraid that she would be forgotten.

"Okay, everyone go."

Mrs. Zhuang smiled. Since her granddaughter moved in, the house has become much more lively, and Mrs. Zhuang's smiles have become much more frequent.

After lunch, Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan drove two cars, taking Zhuang Rui's mother and daughter Zhuang Min, as well as Zhou Rui, along to familiarize themselves with the place. Zhao Guodong, who worked at the auto repair shop, also drove over from there, showing how important Zhuang Rui's villa was to them.

The Yunlong Villa property management office is very efficient. After Song Jun helped Zhuang Rui acquire the villa here, they received a notification that the owner of villa number 18 had changed to a person named Zhuang Rui. So when the car arrived at the entrance of Yunlong Villa, Zhuang Rui showed his ID card and drove the car in directly. Compared to the last time he came, the treatment was much better.

"Wow, this...this is even better than Brother Song's villa! Mu Tou, you have to save me a room. Lei Lei and I can come and stay here whenever we want. Damn it, I should have asked Brother Song to buy one like this too."

Liu Chuan parked his car at the gate outside the villa, looked inside through the gate, and couldn't help but exclaim.

"Da Chuan, you're not allowed to swear..."

Liu Chuan stuck out his tongue at Zhuang's mother's words. Seeing Zhuang Rui open the door with the remote control, he quickly slipped inside, not wanting to be scolded by Zhuang's mother with his ear pulled.

The villas in Yunlong Villa are divided into several grades and vary in size. This villa has a swimming pool, but the previous owner renovated it into a pond. In the middle of the pond is an artificial hill that is five or six meters high. A water circulation system was installed from the top of the artificial hill, and a small but beautiful waterfall flows from the top of the hill into the pond. The pond water is clear, and the willow trees by the pond droop into the water, making people feel a touch of coolness in the hot summer.

The pavilions and terraces, which are very characteristic of the Jiangnan region, are built around the artificial hill, while the corridors are made of transparent high-strength glass. Standing on the pond and looking at the schools of fish swimming below, one can almost feel as if they are in a Jiangnan water town, and one's mood will naturally improve.

The villa not far away is a three-story building surrounded by many tall trees, with some vines twining around the thick trees, twisting and turning, giving people the feeling of being in a tropical rainforest. Although we haven't entered the villa yet, the view outside is already breathtaking.

Although the pond wasn't very big and there weren't many trees, they blended together harmoniously. Even Zhuang Rui hadn't expected this villa to be so unique. The 15 million yuan was definitely well spent.

"Xiao Rui, this place is really... nice..."

Once inside, even the usually composed Mrs. Zhuang couldn't help but admire the ingenuity of the villa's former owner. It was a state of mind that money alone couldn't buy.

"Nannan, don't go fishing, be careful not to fall in."

Zhuang Min was startled when she saw her daughter running towards the pond. She quickly followed, only to find a low railing along the edge of the pond that even a four- or five-year-old child couldn't climb over, let alone her daughter. The little girl jumped up and down, pointing at the fish in the pond and shouting something indistinctly.

The white lion, which couldn't move around much in Zhuang Rui's house, started wandering all over the yard, running around every corner. It seemed to know that this was now its territory, and it occasionally let out excited growls, which startled the fish in the pond, causing them to quickly dive downwards.

"Mom, let's go inside and take a look."

Seeing that the group was lingering in the courtyard, Zhuang Rui spoke up. He was actually quite curious about what items Song Jun had left him, saying that they were worth 800,000. Judging from Song Jun's tone, it seemed that they were worth even more than that.

After opening the villa's door with his key, a cool breeze immediately blew out. The air conditioning, which had been shut off, was turned back on after Zhuang Rui became the homeowner. Zhuang Rui was very satisfied with the management office's work.

The entrance to the villa leads directly to the living room, which is laid out similarly to Song Jun's room. However, apart from four old-fashioned chairs and the original decorations, there is nothing else in the room, making it seem empty. Presumably, all the furniture has been moved away.

Zhuang Rui didn't care about that. Emptying the place would be a good opportunity to rearrange things. He wouldn't feel comfortable using other people's things anyway.

Besides the living room, there are three rooms on the first floor, which should be a storage room and a maid's room. They are also empty. There are four rooms on the second and third floors. What surprised Zhuang Rui the most was that the ceiling of one of the rooms on the top floor of the villa was glass. You could lie in bed and look up at the night sky. It seems that the previous owner was a very romantic person.

Zhuang Rui searched for a long time but couldn't find the items Song Jun had mentioned. After returning to the living room on the first floor, Zhuang Rui had a sudden thought and walked towards the few yellowed chairs.

When the spiritual energy seeped into the chairs, Zhuang Rui could tell that the delicate wood grain contained a faint spiritual energy. He was certain that the items Song Jun was referring to were these huanghuali chairs.

In recent years, antique furniture made of huanghuali wood has become very popular. A square huanghuali table from the Ming Dynasty can be worth millions of yuan. These four chairs are probably from the Qing Dynasty, but their price is likely to be far more than 800,000 yuan.

Seeing all this, Zhuang Rui became curious about the villa's former owner. The villa's exterior and interior decoration were beyond the imagination of ordinary businessmen. He checked the time; it was already past 3 p.m. Zhuang Rui took out his phone and dialed Song Jun's number.

"Brother Song, is the old man alright?"

Zhuang Rui felt particularly hypocritical at this moment. He clearly wanted to ask about the villa, but he had to find another excuse.

"It's nothing, he's probably just happy to see his eldest grandson. The old man can get out of bed now..."

As soon as Song Jun finished speaking, Zhuang Rui heard a burst of mocking laughter coming from the side through his phone, which he found somewhat amusing.

Zhuang Rui suppressed a laugh and said, "Brother Song, I have a question for you. What did the previous owner of that villa you helped me buy do?"

Chapter 235 You Can Also Find Bargains When Buying a House

"Hey bro, you've come to the right person. Most people wouldn't know this..."

Song Jun seemed to have left the room with his phone; the background noise from the receiver had decreased considerably.

"Let me tell you, if you hadn't been thinking about buying a house, I would have bought that villa myself. You're lucky, kid. Nobody has lived in that house since it was renovated. The previous owner was a real bastard..."

Song Jun told Zhuang Rui everything he knew over the phone, which made Zhuang Rui overjoyed. He hadn't expected that no one had lived in the villa before; it was like paying the price of a second-hand house for a fully furnished villa.

"You can even find bargains when buying a house?"

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui was still somewhat incredulous, but the smile that never left his face showed that he was in a very good mood.

The former owner of this villa was truly unlucky. He was the vice president of a university in Pengcheng and a well-known architect in the country. He had many outstanding works in various cities and was not old, just fifty years old, which was in his prime.

Perhaps because he had been in university for too long, he was restless and decided to take a step back and was transferred to another city to serve as the vice mayor. His rank was the same as before, both being deputy provincial level. However, in his new position, he was the executive vice mayor in charge of urban construction and transportation, a position with real power. Logically speaking, this was a good fit for his major, and the newly appointed vice mayor should have made a name for himself.

However, the former principal, now the newly appointed deputy mayor, although exceptionally talented and originally intending to take office to support local development, has a very low resistance to temptations. After taking office, he was constantly surrounded by glitz and glamour, and gradually lost himself, feeling that his first fifty years had been wasted, failing to grasp the true meaning of life.

In a city's government departments, besides the finance bureau, the urban construction and transportation systems are the most important. Once the deputy mayor relaxes his self-discipline, all sorts of temptations will follow. He lives a carefree life, with his wife at home and other women on the side, as if he has become several years younger.

However, the deputy mayor is indeed a highly intelligent professional. Knowing the proverb "a rabbit doesn't eat the grass near its burrow," he bought a villa in his hometown of Pengcheng, intending to use it as a place to keep his mistress. Money? Needless to say, someone naturally gave him some. Moreover, the mayor made full use of his professional knowledge, telling his beloved on more than one occasion that the interior design of this villa was the most prized work of his life.

Unfortunately, the mayor had the ambition of Emperor Wu of Han to keep a beautiful woman in a golden house, but he lacked the ability to rule the world. Not long after the villa was completed, a letter of denunciation brought him down, resulting in a twenty-year prison sentence, which meant he would spend the rest of his life singing "Tears Behind Bars".

Not counting the value of the villa itself and the cost of the interior decoration, the renovation of the villa's exterior alone reportedly cost more than 20 million. This is why Song Jun said Zhuang Rui was lucky and got a great deal financially. Moreover, the original owner, who is still in prison and crying his eyes out, didn't even get to enjoy this place for a single day.

Such a scandal in the brother city could not be publicized, so Pengcheng was entrusted to auction off the villa. The country's losses should be recovered as much as possible. However, the price of the decoration was difficult to calculate, and with the Song army's interference, it could only be auctioned off at the current house price. Of course, only the Song army participated in the auction.

Some friends might say, "Aren't you just fooling the public by doing this? Auctions should be open and fair. How can you let only one person participate?"

However, their reasons were also quite aboveboard: they acted in accordance with principles, first publishing the auction information in the newspaper before conducting the auction, and there was a notary on site, fully complying with the principles of fairness and openness.

To be fair, Song Jun's behavior wasn't too bad; otherwise, offering eight million would have been reasonable, given that there were no competitors.

Auction time? Well, the auction took place at noon on the same day the newspaper published it. But that's because the neighboring city was in a hurry to close the case, so we also had to consider the actual needs of the neighboring city.

So, Zhuang Rui can be said to have hit the jackpot again. Not only did he find a hidden gem in the cultural relics, but he also stumbled upon a leaky roof. No wonder he was smiling so broadly.

While Zhuang Rui and Song Jun were on the phone, the house-viewing group took a tour of the villa. Although the entire villa was empty, everyone still praised it highly. Liu Chuan even shamelessly fought with Xiao Nannan for a room. It is said that lying in bed at night and watching the stars is a very romantic thing.

"Nannan, let me tell you, big bad wolves will come down from the sky to snatch little girls at night. It's not safe for you to sleep there." Seeing that reasoning wasn't working, Liu Chuan started to threaten her.

"You're lying, the big bad wolf didn't come down from the sky." Nannan remained unmoved.

Liu Chuan scratched his head, feeling that in the stories he had heard, the big bad wolf had entered the house from the sky.

"Da Chuan, that's enough. Stop trying to fool Nannan. My house doesn't even have a chimney, what are you afraid of?"

Zhuang Rui couldn't stand it anymore; this guy's stories couldn't even fool a three-year-old.

Seeing Liu Chuan's persistent look, Zhuang Rui continued, "Da Chuan, let me tell you, the surveillance satellites in the sky can clearly capture images down to one centimeter on the ground. If you want a globally broadcast program, then I'll give you that room."

"Really?"

Upon hearing this, Liu Chuan felt uneasy and stopped mentioning the glass-roofed room. Although he really wanted to watch the stars with Lei Lei, he didn't want their lovemaking to be broadcast live globally.

Seeing the envious look on Zhao Guodong's face, Zhuang Rui smiled and said, "Brother-in-law, why don't you pick a room too? There are so many rooms, you can all stay here sometime."

"Okay, we'll find a room on the third floor, and the entire second floor will be your new home."

Zhuang Min readily agreed. The environment here was indeed wonderful, and it would be a great choice to bring her daughter to stay here for the weekend.

Where's Mom?

Zhuang Rui was about to let his mother choose a room as well, but found that his mother was not in the room.

"I'll stay on the first floor. I'm too old to climb stairs. I'll take my daughter to the yard for a while."

The voice of Zhuang's mother came from the doorway. Compared to the empty room, she preferred to sit in the four-cornered pavilion and watch the fish swimming in the pond.

There was nothing in the empty villa, so there wasn't much point in staying inside. Zhou Rui, Liu Chuan, and the others all left one after another, leaving Zhuang Rui alone in the living room.

"Strange, wasn't there supposed to be a basement? Why can't I find it?"

Zhuang Rui held the blueprints of the villa and examined them carefully. Every villa in this resort had a basement, but the place where Zhuang Rui was standing was supposed to be the entrance to the basement. There was no door at all, just a painting hanging on a wall.

Zhuang Rui reached out to take the painting down, but found that it was hanging on the wall without moving. After trying to pull it down a little, a two-meter square iron door suddenly appeared silently on the floor below the stairs. However, the door was tightly closed. There were three rows of Arabic numerals on the door, so it should be a security door with a combination lock.

Zhuang Rui remembered that among the documents Song Jun had handed over to him, there seemed to be one that mentioned a lock. He quickly opened his bag and started searching. Sure enough, the document contained the password for the basement security door. This door was also quite sophisticated; it was made by a professional security company, and it would be very difficult for an ordinary person to open it without the password.

Zhuang Rui carefully read the description of the security door. After understanding it, he first opened the door using the password in the document, and then reset it. From then on, only Zhuang Rui could open the door.

As the security door opened, the lights inside immediately turned on, presumably voice-activated. Zhuang Rui could see a wooden staircase extending down from the doorway.

"Damn, is this a basement or a treasure room?"

Just looking at the seclusion of the basement, Zhuang Rui decided that he would move his red jadeite rough and the imperial green jadeite he got from Yang Hao's stall into the basement. As for the place to cut the stones, Zhuang Rui also had his eye on it. He could put a small stone-cutting machine in the garage, close the garage door, and no one would know what was going on inside.

The basement wasn't large, only a dozen square meters, with two air vents, allowing cold air to reach inside without making people feel stuffy. There was also a row of shelves inside, like the kind used in antique shops to display antiques. Perhaps because they weren't very valuable, the investigators didn't remove them.

This made things convenient for Zhuang Rui; the whole place was a ready-made collection room. It seems that the previous owner was not only accomplished in architecture but was also very likely a collector. The only pity was that the shelves were all empty, without even a scrap of paper left.

After leaving the villa, Zhuang Rui was so busy for the next few days that he barely had time to sit down. He had to buy more than a dozen beds for the villa alone, and everyone had their own opinions, so the styles couldn't be the same. Even Qin Xuanbing, who was far away in England, subtly expressed her wishes: "Well, the newly released waterbeds seem pretty good."

There was no other way. Apart from his niece, who was a junior, everyone else was older than him. To satisfy everyone's needs, Zhuang Rui even drove to Nanjing. After three days, he finally filled the villa.

As for tidying up the room, Zhuang Min will take care of it. There are still five days until Lao San's wedding, and Zhuang Rui will be driving to Shaanxi tomorrow.

Chapter 236 Oil Rat (Part 1)

After her son resigned from Zhonghai, he became even busier than before. He had only been home for a few days and was already leaving again. Although Mrs. Zhuang was a little reluctant, she didn't say anything, only reminding Zhuang Rui to drive carefully.

Actually, if it weren't for attending Lao San's wedding and then immediately going to Shanxi for the International Tibetan Mastiff Exchange Conference, which required bringing the Tibetan Mastiff along, Zhuang Rui would have already planned to fly to Shaanxi. The initial excitement of driving would have long since worn off.

Although Zhuang Rui hasn't owned the car for very long, he's been driving long distances all the time. After each trip, he's practically falling apart from exhaustion. Spiritual energy? Please, that can only relieve physical fatigue; it doesn't help with highly stressed nerves.

Because Zhou Rui and Liu Chuan had to prepare for the Tibetan Mastiff exchange meeting, Zhuang Rui had to drive alone this time. The journey from Pengcheng to Weishi in Shaanxi Province was more than 800 kilometers, which was a considerable challenge for him. There was a section of the road that did not have a highway and was a mountain road that required absolute concentration. If he was not careful, the result would be a fatal accident.

We got on the highway from Xiaoxian County in Anhui, then drove straight to Shangqiu and into Henan. We passed through Lankao, Kaifeng, Zhengzhou, and Luoyang to Lingbao in Shaanxi. The whole way was on the highway, and Zhuang Rui was driving very fast. We set off at around 6 a.m., and now it's only 1 p.m., so we've already entered Shaanxi.

After carefully driving along a not-so-easy road, passing through the famous Tongguan and Huaxian counties, Zhuang Rui finally arrived at Lao San's hometown, Weishi, Shaanxi.

The journey passed through many historical cities, especially in Henan, which witnessed the rise and fall of many dynasties. Zhuang Rui felt a little regretful; if he had more time, he could have traveled at a slower pace and probably found many good items in those cities.

Weishi City, located in eastern Shaanxi Province, boasts a long and rich history. For over two thousand years, from the Zhou and Qin dynasties to the Han and Tang dynasties, it served as the capital region for twelve dynasties. Agriculture, animal husbandry, handicrafts, commerce, and transportation were all relatively developed, giving rise to many famous ancient towns and cities. It also served as a gateway to Xi'an, earning the reputation of "a vital passage through Shaanxi and a thoroughfare connecting eight provinces."

Weishi is renowned for its agriculture, boasting vast land, a mild climate, abundant sunshine, and moderate rainfall. Arable land accounts for 96% of its total area, providing favorable conditions for the comprehensive development of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, sideline production, and fisheries, and for the regionalization, commercialization, and modernization of agriculture. Among these, the total output of grain, cotton, and oilseeds ranks among the top in the province, earning it the title of "Granary of Shaanxi."

Lao San and Zhang Rong both come from a county under Weishi. After graduating from Zhonghai, they took the civil service exam and started working in their hometown. Lao San works in the Grain Bureau, and Zhang Rong works in the Finance Bureau. Both are considered good positions, as both departments are important in the local area.

Zhuang Rui drove directly to the entrance of Zhang Rong's workplace. He saw Zhang Rong standing under a tree at the entrance, looking around. He parked the car, rolled down the window, and asked, "Sister-in-law, where's Third Brother? Does he really want you, his new bride, to show your face in public?"

"Keep talking nonsense. Something came up at Changfa's workplace and he had to go back to work overtime. He should be back tonight. Let me take you to his place to stay first. It's a rented house in the county town, so it's not very convenient."

Zhang Rong opened the car door and got in. She didn't know what her husband's company was up to. They had called Liu Changfa to the office yesterday, but he hadn't shown up for two days. If Liu Changfa hadn't called back, she would have thought her husband had been kidnapped. Of course, this thought only came to her after she received the 1 million yuan. Before, who would have kidnapped her penniless husband?

"Why don't you buy a house in the city? The house prices shouldn't be too expensive, right?" Zhuang Rui started the car and asked casually.

"You make it sound so easy. We never had the money to buy a house before. Long-haired parents built a house back home, and they're drowning in debt. I've been looking at houses these past few days, but it won't be ready for the wedding. Even if we buy one and renovate it, it'll take several months."

Zhang Rong's family is from the county town. They originally planned to pool their money to buy a house in the county town, but Liu Changfa's parents refused to agree and insisted on building a house in their own home. They spent a lot of money, but they might not have time to live there in the future.

Zhang Rong has a good temper and can understand the thoughts of the third son's parents. If it were someone else, they would probably have made a scene long ago. It was only when she was talking to Zhuang Rui that she grumbled a few words.

The third brother's family lived in the countryside, nearing the border of Lintong. By the time they arrived, it was almost dark. A small village with smoke rising from chimneys and the sounds of roosters crowing and dogs barking appeared before Zhuang Rui's eyes.

When Zhuang Rui drove into the village, a group of naked children suddenly appeared out of nowhere, chasing after the car and playing around. Several stray dogs also joined in the fun. On both sides of the village's narrow road, there were adults squatting at their doorsteps with bowls of rice in their hands, loudly scolding the children, but their eyes were also fixed on Zhuang Rui's car, full of curiosity.

Following Zhang Rong's directions, the car was parked in front of Lao San's house. The children who had been chasing the car then scattered, but they didn't leave. Instead, they stood at a distance and looked in this direction.

In the countryside, the most important thing for people getting married is the house. If parents can't build a house for their son, they will be looked down upon. Although Liu Changfa spent a lot of money on college, his family still borrowed money to build him a bungalow next to their old house. It had one bedroom and five rooms, and a yard outside. It was the best house in the whole village.

Actually, Lao San and Zhang Rong might not be able to live here. It's still 20 or 30 kilometers away from the county where they work, and it's too inconvenient to go back and forth.

The third son didn't want the house built at the time, but the whole village only had one college graduate, and his daughter-in-law was also a college graduate, which was a great source of pride. So, Liu's father sold everything he owned and borrowed a lot of money to build it. If it weren't for the million yuan that Zhuang Rui gave him, the third son's salary would probably have belonged to someone else for the next four or five years after he and Zhang Rong got married.

After Zhuang Rui and Zhang Rong got out of the car, Liu Changfa's parents came out of the house to greet them. Both of them were in their early fifties, and they looked a bit older, probably because they had been doing farm work for many years. Knowing that Zhuang Rui was their son's classmate, they were very enthusiastic. Together with their younger siblings, they surrounded Zhuang Rui and welcomed him into the house.

"Kid, your big dog is something else! No one in our village can compare. Come on, come and eat, are you hungry?"

Seeing the white lion following behind Zhuang Rui, Liu's father looked on warily and herded the children into the inner room, fearing that the white lion might suddenly attack and hurt them.

Knowing that their son's classmates were coming, the third son's parents had prepared the meal well in advance and were waiting for them.

"It's alright, Uncle, this dog doesn't bite."

Zhuang Rui was also somewhat helpless. Now that the white lion was too big, it was not very convenient for it to go anywhere. In this rural area where stray dogs roamed everywhere, it even managed to scare people.

Thinking about this, Zhuang Rui had a headache. When he went to Beijing to study in the future, this white lion would be a big problem. It had been with him since it was born. If he left it in the manor, he was afraid no one would be able to control it.

The dishes and wine prepared by Liu's father were all specialties of Shaanxi. The dishes were beef and mutton, and the wine was Xifeng wine, which is a famous wine in Shaanxi and is not usually served to guests. The main dish was hot noodles with minced meat sauce, sprinkled with scallions. The aroma made Zhuang Rui's appetite soar. He didn't stand on ceremony and sat down at the table. He poured wine for Liu's father, and the two of them drank together.

Zhang Rong then prepared food for the white lion. She knew that this was Zhuang Rui's treasure. She prepared a full plate of bones with bits of meat on it and brought it out. However, Zhuang Rui had to take it and put it on the ground before the white lion would eat it. Even at home, the white lion would only eat the food that Zhuang Rui's mother asked for, and it wouldn't even smell other people's food.

Liu's father was a man of few words, a simple and honest countryman. He just kept urging Zhuang Rui to drink. Xifeng liquor had a strong aftereffect, and after the meal, Zhuang Rui had drunk quite a bit before going to sleep in Lao San's new house.

In the countryside, it's considered taboo for girls to sleep in the new house used for weddings. However, there's no such taboo for young men. Lao San didn't stay in the new house for a single day, but Zhuang Rui took the lead.

After driving all day, Zhuang Rui was exhausted. Coupled with the effects of alcohol, he fell into a deep sleep and slept soundly until the next morning when he was awakened by the noise from the yard.

In rural areas, wedding banquets still follow the old customs of the past, with a continuous feast where one table finishes eating before the next person is served. Dishes are served one after another, and a lot of things need to be bought, so preparations need to be made several days in advance. All those noisy people are there to deliver the dishes.

"Third Brother, when did you get back?"

Zhuang Rui got up and walked into the yard, where he immediately saw the third brother offering cigarettes to people.

"I got back late last night. I didn't wake you up since you were already asleep. I'm so sorry, there was an emergency at work that I only managed to deal with yesterday."

The third brother turned around and saw Zhuang Rui, and quickly ran over. Of course, the other brothers from the same family were taking care of things over there.

Zhuang Rui knew the nature of Lao San's job and couldn't help but feel a little strange. He asked, "Aren't you in the finance department? What business is it of yours if it's urgent? We're getting married soon, why would we bother you?"

"Don't even mention it, we're about to become famous all over the country..." The third brother's expression was a little strange.

"What's wrong? Tell me..." Zhuang Rui became interested.

"Hey, a bunch of tomb raiders are neglecting their duties. Instead of digging up so many ancient tombs, they've turned to stealing oil like rats. They've almost emptied an oil storage tank in our county. They called me over yesterday to tally up the losses."

"Tomb raiders stealing oil? Cooking oil?"

Hearing what the third brother said, Zhuang Rui also felt somewhat incredulous.

Chapter 237 Oil Rat (Part Two)

The world is so vast and full of wonders. After listening to what the third brother had to say, Zhuang Rui was speechless for a long time, realizing how shallow his knowledge truly was. →

As is well known, Henan and Shaanxi have been home to many imperial tombs and the tombs of generals and ministers since ancient times. For example, the Mangshan Mountains north of Luoyang in Henan and the eighteen Tang Dynasty tombs around the Wei River in Shaanxi have given rise to a very special profession: tomb raiding.

Although tomb raiding has existed since ancient times, as far back as the Three Kingdoms period during Cao Cao's time, it was even granted official titles, called "Captain of Tomb Raiders" and "General of Tomb Raiders." The position of Captain was quite high, second only to the General in the army, and he was in charge of a special army. The General of Tomb Raiders was a master of tomb raiding, with a salary of up to two thousand shi (a unit of grain). In modern times, there was the tomb raiding general Sun Dianying. These people are all representative figures of "official tomb raiders."

However, in today's society, "official thieves" have disappeared. It is impossible for anyone to excavate ancient tombs on a large scale to enrich themselves, as this is not allowed by law.

Those who sneak into desolate mountains and tombs under the cover of darkness are called "private thieves" or "civilian thieves." This mainly refers to the tomb raiding activities of individuals or groups. Most of these people get to know each other through mutual benefit, but many more are relatives and friends. They work in the fields during the day and raid tombs in the dark at night. They usually act like law-abiding citizens and are difficult to be discovered.

After generations of "family business" were passed down, these people's families evolved into tomb raiding families. Even in modern times, there are still many tomb raiding families in Shaanxi, Henan and other places.

As we can see from the above introduction, "official theft" is not subject to the law, while "private theft" is illegal. They dare not be as blatant as their ancestors and usually act only in the dead of night.

The most concentrated areas for tomb raiding are Shaanxi, Henan, and Shanxi provinces. Due to the increased efforts of the government to crack down on tomb raiding in recent years, tomb raiders have now broken up into smaller groups, usually consisting of two people: one digs the tunnel and passes the burial goods out, while the other clears the soil and keeps watch. These groups are often brothers from the same family.

Weishi is located in the heart of the Guanzhong Plain, the area of the Eighteen Imperial Tombs. Naturally, it has no shortage of professional tomb raiders. In the county where Lao San lives, there is a

man surnamed Hu who comes from a family of tomb raiders. He organized a group of unemployed people from the streets, set up a gang, and began to carry out group tomb raiding.

Initially, they excavated several large tombs, reaping considerable wealth and acquiring many precious artifacts. However, these were all locals, born and raised in the area, and lacked connections to sell them. They were pressured into lowering their prices by unscrupulous collectors, taking significant risks but making little money. Furthermore, the government intensified its crackdown on tomb raiding, and patrols began appearing around many important mausoleums. 08kj.

With their source of income cut off, the group, who were used to idling around, started to feel the pinch. As the saying goes, "When people's hearts are scattered, the team becomes difficult to lead." A train runs fast only because of its locomotive. Boss Hu of the tomb raiding group also racked his brains and began to look for new projects. He had to make sure that his brothers had something to eat.

Don't break into houses? We organized a few times, broke into three houses, and found a total of 92.8 yuan. We were chased by someone with a kitchen knife for three streets. One of our brothers was almost hit by a car. The risk was too high and the reward was too low, so we gave up.

Robbing on the road? That requires strength. The brothers can dig holes and pits, but this is hard work. The first time they tried, they were beaten to a pulp by two brothers from the countryside who came to the market early in the morning. Later, they found out that the two brothers were well-known martial arts masters in the area, so that idea was also cut off.

What? Start a small business? Are you kidding me? Ask three different people what one plus one minus one plus one equals, and you'll get three different answers. Expect them to start a business? They'll lose everything.

To maintain team cohesion, the leader racked his brains for several days without coming up with any ideas. One day, while out for a walk, he inadvertently saw the county grain and oil station's warehouse, and a thought struck him.

As everyone knows, Weishi is known as the granary of Shaanxi Province. Its grain and oil reserves are among the best in the country, with several large grain warehouses and many oil tanks with a capacity of tens of tons.

Of the basic necessities of life—clothing, food, shelter, and transportation—food comes second. People need to eat every day, and oil is indispensable. The boss, driven to desperation, turned his attention to cooking oil.

After Hu returned, he immediately convened a group meeting, which all key personnel had to attend. The topic of discussion was: how to get cooking oil out of the heavily guarded grain and oil warehouse?

"Let's rob it!"

Some people start speaking without thinking, and what they get in return is a bunch of middle fingers. What a joke! These grain and oil reserves are under national protection. There's a whole squad of armed police guarding them. What are you going to use to steal them? A Luoyang shovel? You'll be met with a burst of bullets.

"We can cheat. We can get some fake delivery orders, drive a few trucks, and pick up the goods openly."

The person who came up with this idea used to be an employee of the Shaanxi office of the China branch of the Asia division of the Global Documentation Group. Although he himself had never committed fraud, most of the people who sought his document services were professionals, and he had learned quite a bit about related skills.

The suggestion was unanimously praised, and Boss Hu also highly commended the idea. This showed that everyone had put their minds to it, and we would be making a living by doing mental work from now on. So the tasks were divided up: the person who made the fake documents naturally went to prepare the relevant documents, while the others went to contact trucks or find buyers. Instantly, everyone's enthusiasm was mobilized.

Who knew that after everything was ready, a problem arose when they went to pick up the goods. They didn't understand the process and thought that having the delivery note was enough. However, when there are large quantities of goods to pick up, they usually notify the customer by phone in advance and then confirm by fax. As a result, they didn't need to pick up the goods, and the deal fell through. Fortunately, those people ran away quickly and were not caught.

The truck driver got arrested? Please, don't treat us guys like idiots. This whole thing is obviously a mess, and you can't trace it back to the driver.

Even without work, life goes on. Supporting such a large group of people, the money in hand is dwindling. After being locked up in his room for three days, Boss Hu actually came up with a plan: "What do we do? Professional tunnel diggers!" This seemed promising.

So, a shop about a hundred meters away from the grain and oil station was rented by Hu Laoda's men at a high price. What did they sell? Audio and video products. Every day, two large speakers were placed at the entrance of the shop, playing popular songs. This made the staff of the grain station very happy. They could listen to free music every day, and their work was not so boring.

What were Boss Hu and his gang doing? They were digging a hole in the yard behind the shop, of course.

Hu Laoda personally surveyed the terrain and accurately measured the distance between the shop and the grain station. He also obtained the properties of the soil layers using a Luoyang shovel. The group of people were eager to get back to their old business.

Because he was familiar with the process, things went smoothly. Moreover, Boss Hu's professional knowledge was truly impressive. Half a month later, a tunnel 1.5 meters high and 2 meters wide was dug beneath the grain and oil warehouse.

The warehouse was naturally locked up, and it was rarely opened. To be honest, it really fed a lot of rats. When Boss Hu personally dug a hole in the ground, he almost thought he had entered a black cave. It was full of rats, some of which were so big they were almost like spirits.

This warehouse is a combined grain and oil storage facility. Grain is stored on the east side, and several huge oil tanks are on the west side. Boss Hu estimated the area and then filled in the hole. He drilled directly from below to the bottom of the oil tanks, used an oxyacetylene torch to cut a hole in the ground of the oil tanks, and installed a valve. As soon as the valve is opened, the oil will automatically flow into the oil drums below.

That wasn't enough. In order to keep up with modern standards, Boss Hu sent people to install double rails in the tunnels and specially made vehicles that could be pushed on the double rails. This greatly improved the efficiency of stealing oil.

Cooking oil is something people consume every day. Even now, let alone back in 2004, people in rural areas don't buy salad oil or peanut oil from supermarkets. So, Hu Laoda Grain and Oil Group was officially established and opened for business. Moreover, it developed very well. Due to its cheap price and high quality, it quickly opened up the market, and people from all around were able to use the grain and oil they provided.

With money in hand, life improved. In just half a year, Boss Hu and his gang became rich, driving around in cars and acting all high and mighty. But they were grateful for what they had earned. In just half a year, Boss Hu and his gang had made more than 20 million yuan, which was much more lucrative than tomb raiding. This strengthened their resolve to change careers.

Boss Hu didn't forget to develop new businesses. After stealing and emptying four oil tanks in a warehouse, he started to expand his business again, emptying all four warehouses in the grain and oil station. He is already preparing to open branches in other counties and cities, and wants to develop this business extensively.

A friend said, "If something is missing from the warehouse, how could the managers of the grain and oil station not know?"

They really didn't know. In their words, if so much grain was eaten by rats, it should be counted as a loss. Besides, grain is cheap and hard to move, so Hu Laoda and his men didn't touch it much. As for oil, it was a reserve material. Who would open an oil tank to check if the oil was low? That would be crazy.

As the saying goes, if you walk by the river long enough, you're bound to get your shoes wet. Just half a month ago, a certain leader was coming to inspect the key national grain and oil reserve unit. Everyone from the county head to the ordinary staff of the grain and oil station got busy. Rat extermination and cleaning were carried out in a great manner. In order to ensure that the leader's inspection was a complete success and that there were no mistakes, even the oil tanks were inspected.

This inspection revealed a shocking truth: nine out of the twelve oil tanks in the entire grain and oil station warehouse were completely empty. This was a serious matter.

Because the leaders' inspections needed to be kept secret, the rat extermination and cleaning operations could not be done superficially. Therefore, the theft of grain and oil was reported to the local government leader in a very confidential manner.

"Investigate! Investigate thoroughly!"

This was a matter of life and death for him, and he was very serious about it. After the county criminal police brigade moved in, they immediately discovered the special valve under the oil tank. Following the clues, they found that the tunnel was also exposed.

To be honest, Boss Hu and his gang were a bit too unprofessional in their work, or rather, they were getting too carried away with their success. After six months without any problems, they had completely relaxed. They had originally sent two underlings to monitor the grain and oil station, but now they didn't bother with it at all. In their eyes, the grain and oil station was just a money tree.

Having discovered the root of the problem, things became much easier. In order not to alert the enemy, they did not dig through the tunnel, but instead secretly set up surveillance and search around the area, casting a wide net. In less than two hours, the video store came into the sights of the investigators.

Boss Hu was unaware that he was being watched. Coincidentally, the oil in the new warehouse's oil tanks was almost empty again. In order to keep the business going, Boss Hu, who no longer operated the equipment himself, came to the shop to prepare to open another tunnel. This kind of professional task still required his guidance.

With the boss present, department managers and key company personnel naturally followed suit, making the arrest proceed exceptionally smoothly. Within half an hour, the entire group, from the CEO to the sales and general staff, was apprehended without exception.

The funniest thing was that, because the sound system in the store was so loud, when the criminal police team entered the backyard, those guys were still chatting at the top of their lungs. They probably wouldn't have heard a few shots fired.

When something like this happens, it's natural to conduct an emergency interrogation overnight and to tally up the national losses. If the losses can be recovered, wouldn't the leadership's responsibility be lighter?

The third brother was transferred there because of this incident. He spent two whole days calculating and finally came to the conclusion that a total of more than 40 million yuan worth of edible oil reserves had been lost.

"Third Brother, this matter is truly... truly..."

After hearing this, Zhuang Rui thought for a long time but couldn't find the right words. At first glance, it sounded ridiculous, but upon closer inspection, it was a complete man-made disaster.

The third brother smiled helplessly and said, "Alright, anyway, if the sky falls, there are always taller people above. It has nothing to do with your third brother. By the way, youngest brother, I've been quite busy these past few days and haven't had much time to spend with you. If you're bored, have Er Mao take you for a stroll in my field. The watermelons are ripe now, so you can eat as much as you want."

"Third Brother, why are we being so polite? You go ahead and get busy. I'll take White Lion for a stroll in the fields later." Zhuang Rui rarely comes to the countryside, so he found it quite novel.

"Hmm, a scientific expedition team has come not far from my melon patch. I'll have Er Mao take you to see what's going on."

The third brother was a little embarrassed, but now that he was going to be the groom, he had to personally entertain the relatives and friends who came, otherwise people would say he was impolite. So he could only ask Zhuang Rui to do it.

Chapter 238 Feng Shui Patterns, Rustic Charm

There's no hustle and bustle of city commuters, no roaring traffic, no scorching heat emanating from steel cages baked by the sun. In the countryside mornings, a gentle breeze blows, smoke rises from distant village chimneys, and the occasional crowing of roosters and barking of dogs breaks the silence, giving one the feeling of stepping into a traditional Chinese ink painting.

The white lion became excited and ran around Zhuang Rui quickly. Its posture was very elegant. Even while running, its huge head was held high, like a noble king looking down on his territory. Every now and then, they encountered a few stray dogs, who tucked their tails between their legs and hid by the roadside, trembling.

Shaanxi is arid and has little water, but a branch of the Wei River happens to pass through this small village. In the distance, the mountains rise and fall like dancing dragons, extending all the way to the

edge of the village, which is very vivid. The winding Wei River, like a jade belt, gently floats past Zhuang Rui's eyes and then flows slowly eastward.

The books Zhuang Rui had been reading during this period mainly focused on classical Chinese language and Chinese geography, but also included some treatises on feng shui. In his view, the feng shui of this place seemed to match some of the statements in the books.

The distant mountains form an embracing shape, and are also embraced by the Wei River, forming a "water-embracing pattern." To its northwest, there are continuous mountain ranges that block the northwest winds blowing from Gansu, forming a "mountain-encircling pattern."

Although Zhuang Rui wasn't an expert in feng shui, he could still tell that this was truly a feng shui treasure land, surrounded by mountains and embraced by water. It was a feng shui layout that brought both wealth and nobility. According to the book, such a place would definitely contain the tombs of emperors and generals. No wonder Lao San had mentioned that there was a scientific expedition team here.

"Brother Zhuang, please sit down. I'll go pick out a watermelon for you. Our watermelons are all sandy-fleshed, big, and sweet..."

Before they knew it, Zhuang Rui and Er Mao, who was leading the way, had arrived at the third brother's melon patch. Everywhere they looked, melon vines covered the ground, and beneath the thick, lush leaves, they could see rows of round watermelons.

Near the dirt road in the melon patch, there was a thatched shed with a bamboo bed inside, probably where the night watchman lived. Er Mao had Zhuang Rui sit on the bed while he went to the field to pick watermelons.

"Hmm? Where's the white lion?"

Zhuang Rui didn't stay in the shed, but followed Er Mao carefully into the melon patch. When he turned around, he found that Bai Shi was nowhere to be seen.

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to shout, the white lion came running from a distance, like a white lightning bolt. It had only been in sight for a few seconds when it was in front of Zhuang Rui.

To Zhuang Rui's surprise, the white lion was carrying a large, fat rabbit in its mouth. As if to show off, the white lion placed the rabbit in front of Zhuang Rui and rubbed its big head against Zhuang Rui's body, almost smearing the blood from its mouth onto Zhuang Rui's clothes.

"Brother Zhuang, your big dog is amazing! The rabbits around here usually stay near their burrows, making them very difficult to catch. I'm afraid even the wild boars in the mountains couldn't beat your big dog..."

Er Mao exclaimed in surprise when he saw the rabbit, which weighed at least five or six pounds. He looked at Zhuang Rui with envy. For children who had lived in the countryside for many years, being able to raise a powerful hunting dog was a very prestigious thing.

Zhuang Rui bent down, picked up the dead rabbit, and glanced at it. The rabbit's body had been completely bitten through by the white lion, with several bloody holes exposed in the front and back. He casually handed it to Er Mao and said, "Brother Er Mao, take this rabbit back with you. It'll be a good dish."

The reason Zhuang Rui picked up the rabbit first was because he knew that the white lion would never allow Er Mao to reach out and take its prey. If Er Mao had made that move before, the white lion would probably have pounced on him long ago. Of course, without Zhuang Rui's order, he would not bite.

Er Mao took the rabbit and ran happily towards the shed.

Zhuang Rui patted the white lion's head affectionately, pulled an apple from his pocket, and threw it far away. Without waiting for a command, the white lion darted out like lightning, catching the apple in mid-air with its mouth before it hit the ground. It hopped back, only to deliver a core to Zhuang Rui's hand.

Looking at the white lion beside him, Zhuang Rui felt a strange feeling. If this had happened before, he would definitely have been regarded as a spoiled brat who drove dogs and trained hawks.

"Brother Zhuang, come and eat some watermelon..."

After patting and tapping around in the melon patch, Er Mao picked out a large watermelon weighing over ten kilograms, laboriously carried it into the shed, and called out to Zhuang Rui.

"If we take this melon back to the village and soak it in the well at the village entrance for a few hours, it will taste much better."

As Er Mao spoke, he used a watermelon knife from the shed to cut open the watermelon. The watermelon was ripe, and before he could even cut any further, the whole watermelon split open, and juice flowed all over the ground.

"Mmm, delicious. Er Mao, how do you know this melon is ripe?"

Zhuang Rui praised the melon as he ate it. It was sandy and sweet inside, and the sweetness went straight to his heart. Zhuang Rui used to see other people tapping the watermelon a few times when they bought it, and he would try to do the same when he bought it. However, he had no idea what the significance was; he just did it to fit the occasion.

Turning his head, Zhuang Rui saw the white lion staring at him expectantly. He quickly put the other half of the watermelon on the ground. Even if it was only half, he and Er Mao couldn't finish a watermelon weighing more than ten kilograms.

Er Mao, munching on a watermelon and wiping his mouth with his sleeve, mumbled, "Brother Zhuang, if you tap a watermelon and it makes a 'plop' sound, it's ripe and will spoil if you don't eat it soon. If it makes a 'thump' sound, it's ripe but can still be kept for a few more days. If it makes a 'clang' sound, it's not ripe yet. If you buy watermelons this way from now on, you're guaranteed to be right."

Arriving in this tranquil countryside, Zhuang Rui seemed to have returned to his childhood. After eating a slice of watermelon, he went into the melon patch and, following Er Mao's instructions, started tapping on the melons one by one, having a great time. He thought to himself, "If I learn this trick, I'll never buy unripe melons again."

"roar!"

Just as he was having a great time, Zhuang Rui suddenly heard the roar of the white lion, which startled him. He quickly stood up. He knew that the white lion never roared, so this sound meant that the white lion was extremely angry.

Looking in the direction of the sound, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but chuckle. The white lion was about four or five meters away from him, scratching at a hedgehog in the melon patch with its paws.

This must be an adult hedgehog, all gray, with its quills completely bristling. It curled up in a ball, lying motionless on the ground. The white lion seemed to have suffered a loss, occasionally poking at it with its paws. After being pricked by the quills, it quickly retreated a few steps.

Upon seeing Zhuang Rui approach, the white lion stopped going forward and instead began to growl at the hedgehog. It was probably quite helpless; for this creature covered in thorns, it was like a dog trying to bite a hedgehog—it couldn't find a way to bite. It hadn't been paying attention earlier, and when it bit down, its mouth was pricked quite badly.

"Brother Zhuang, tell your big dog to step back a bit, I'm going to catch it. This thing is wicked; it always steals our melons, and it always picks the big ones..."

Er Mao also ran over at the sound. When he saw that it was a hedgehog, his eyes lit up. He told Zhuang Rui to keep the white lion in check, but he turned around and ran back to the shed.

Zhuang Rui also wanted to see how he caught the hedgehog, so he called the white lion back. The hedgehog could sense the threat from the white lion and remained curled up, motionless.

When Er Mao came out of the shed, he had a tattered burlap sack and a stick in his hand. He walked up to the hedgehog, opened the sack, and used the stick to push the hedgehog, which was too scared to move, inside. Zhuang Rui was dumbfounded. He thought it would be difficult to catch, but it was so easy.

"Brother Zhuang, this hedgehog meat is delicious, even more fragrant than rabbit meat. I'll have Sister-in-law Long Hair cook it for you tonight."

Er Mao was very excited to have caught the hedgehog. After tying the sack shut, he held it in his hand and kept swinging it around.

Zhuang Rui waved his hands repeatedly upon hearing this. Although he loved meat, he still avoided this animal covered in thorns.

Zhuang Rui played in the melon patch for a while, then remembered the scientific expedition team that Lao San had mentioned. He was a little curious, since scientific expeditions in the field were most likely about cultural relics archaeology or ancient tomb excavation. So he said to Er Mao, "Brother Er Mao, where is that scientific expedition team? Let's go take a look."

"It's not far from here. Look, just over that little hill ridge. I'll take you there."

Er Mao is Liu Changfa's younger cousin. His task today is to keep Zhuang Rui company. He is very happy to be with Zhuang Rui. First, he got a rabbit, and then he caught a hedgehog. Now he can brag to his friends when he returns to the village.

"Er Mao, why are you picking watermelons again? I really can't eat any more."

Zhuang Rui had eaten so much of that small piece of watermelon that he was feeling quite full. Now that he saw Er Mao squatting there picking at the watermelon again, he quickly went over to stop him. Even though it wasn't worth much, he couldn't let it go to waste.

"Brother Zhuang, my sister-in-law is working over there. I'll bring a watermelon for them to eat."

Er Mao didn't look up. He skillfully picked a watermelon, held it in his arms, and tightly gripped the bag containing the hedgehog.

"Work? What kind of work? Aren't you a scientific expedition team? Why are you doing work?"

Zhuang Rui was somewhat confused. Shouldn't men be hired to do the work? Judging from Er Mao's words, it seemed that women were the ones doing the work.

"They paid fifty yuan a day to help them dig the pit. I did it for a day, but the second day they didn't need the men to do it anymore; it was all the old women from the village who were there."

Er Mao seemed somewhat dissatisfied. For them, as children, they wouldn't see fifty yuan all year round. He considered himself stronger than those old women.

Chapter 239 Trouble Comes from the Mouth

As the saying goes, "Looking at a mountain makes a horse run itself to death," and that's absolutely true. Although the distance didn't seem far, Zhuang Rui and Er Mao walked for almost an hour before finally reaching the ridge, which was entirely covered in yellow earth. If Zhuang Rui hadn't secretly channeled spiritual energy into his legs, he probably wouldn't have been able to walk any further. →

Looking at Er Mao, who was full of energy and no different from before, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but sigh inwardly. He was a grown man, yet he was not as stamina-suppressive as this teenager.

Standing on the ridge, Zhuang Rui realized that this ridge, which was more than ten meters above the ground, did not seem to be an extension of the mountain range, but rather looked more like a mound of rammed earth.

Rammed earth is a term used in archaeology, which Zhuang Rui often encounters in related books.

In ancient times, there were no building materials such as cement or lime, so city walls and foundations were often made of rammed earth.

Rammed earth is compacted layer by layer using rolling logs, resulting in a dense structure that is generally harder than raw soil. Unlike raw soil, its color is not uniform and it contains ancient artifacts. Its most distinctive feature is its ability to be layered, much like paper, and the ramming pits can be seen on the surface, often with fine sand particles on the surface of these pits.

The rammed earth layer is essentially the same as the modern foundation. In ancient times, palaces and other buildings were often constructed on the rammed earth layer. Around the palaces and the rammed earth layer, there were often the tombs of emperors. In the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, there are still nine-tiered rammed earth buildings that are more than 30 meters high.

Zhuang Rui once read a report that on a unique and desolate grassland at the foot of Helan Mountain, there was the mausoleum of the Western Xia emperors and the burial tombs of princes and nobles. Among the vast and magnificent mausoleum ruins, the tallest and most eye-catching building was a 23-meter-high rammed earth mound shaped like a steamed bun.

Compared to this, the rammed earth layer beneath Zhuang Rui's feet wasn't as high, but its area was much larger. Historical records mention soldiers in heavy armor galloping across this layer to make it thicker and more compact. Perhaps over a thousand years ago, such a grand spectacle took place here.

"Brother Zhuang, look, all the people from our village are over there..."

Zhuang Rui looked in the direction Er Mao was pointing. About a hundred meters away from them, there was a simple shed. Next to the shed was a large pit, which was not very deep. Standing on the rammed earth mound, Zhuang Rui could see more than ten people squatting in the pit, busy at work. Because the distance was not close, Zhuang Rui could not see clearly what they were doing.

About ten meters away from those people, there were four fully armed police officers. They also saw Zhuang Rui and Er Mao and were looking over at them warily.

"Aren't those people just trying to take the treasures out of the ground? People from our village have tried to dig them up before, but they were arrested by the government. These people aren't afraid; they even have soldiers standing guard for them."

Er Mao was somewhat indignant. In his view, things in the land naturally belong to whoever digs them up. Why should others be able to dig them up, but they couldn't?

"Are there tomb raiders in your village too?" Zhuang Rui asked curiously, unaware of this.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Er Mao angrily retorted, "That's not grave robbing! It's just our own farmland. We dug things up while digging, how is that grave robbing? The government is being unreasonable; they even sent people to confiscate everything..."

"Hehe, Er Mao, there are regulations. Excavated cultural relics belong to the state and cannot be privately kept. Although the farmland you cultivate belongs to you, it doesn't mean that the things underground belong to you..."

As Zhuang Rui walked toward the expedition team, he casually explained to Er Mao.

"Then they can just dig openly? Who knows if they'll dig it up and hide it themselves?" Zhuang Rui hadn't realized that Er Mao was such a hothead.

Er Mao glanced around and whispered to Zhuang Rui, "Brother Zhuang, let me tell you, one of the people caught stealing oil in the county town is from our village. He's a relative of ours. Yesterday, his wife even went to Brother Changfa to plead for him."

Zhuang Rui now understood that someone in Er Mao's family had been arrested. He stopped explaining and headed straight for the group of people.

"Stop right there, what are you doing?"

The two men were only twenty or thirty meters away from the dug pit when they were stopped by an armed policeman. The combination of the two men and the dog was a bit hard for them to understand. Er Mao was naturally a villager, and they had met him before, but judging from Zhuang Rui's clothes, he was definitely not. Moreover, even these soldiers were intimidated by the big dog.

"My sister-in-law is working over there, and I came to deliver a watermelon. This is our honored guest, not someone who is stealing. Why won't you let us pass?"

Er Mao shouted at the top of his lungs. He wasn't afraid of these soldiers. He had a gun too, and he even had an old cannon at home for hunting wild boars.

The armed police officers exchanged glances and nodded, indicating that they could go over. When they were assigned to this post, they were instructed not to have any conflicts with the locals unless they were disrupting the archaeological excavation site. Although Zhuang Rui was not a local, he did not look like someone who was there to rob.

Upon closer inspection, Zhuang Rui realized that the pit was not shallow at all. It had been dug into a stepped shape, descending layer by layer, and was very flat, so it looked shallow. In fact, its diameter and depth should be three or four meters.

The pit was about forty square meters in area. More than a dozen middle-aged women were digging the soil, some with small shovels the size of their palms, and some even with brushes, slowly brushing away the soil. Zhuang Rui was dumbfounded. The tools they were using looked like children's toys. How did they dig such a big pit?

Er Mao seemed to sense Zhuang Rui's confusion and said from the side, "Brother Zhuang, we men dug these pits. After we finished, they chased us away as if we were trying to steal something. They, on the other hand, openly took away what they dug out. Why should they do that..."

Er Mao still harbored deep resentment over that fifty yuan a day, and kept thinking about it.

Zhuang Rui was too lazy to explain to Er Mao, who was only a teenager, and casually said, "What they did was official theft, what you did was private theft, they're not the same."

Before Zhuang Rui could finish speaking, a clear voice rang out from beside him: "How dare you talk like that? We were commissioned by the State Administration of Cultural Heritage to conduct a rescue excavation. How have we become government thieves? Explain yourself, or I'll never forgive you..."

Zhuang Rui heard a crisp Beijing accent and inwardly groaned. What he had meant as a joke had been overheard. This was truly a case of loose tongues causing trouble.

Judging from the voice, it should be a young girl. However, the girl was wearing a straw hat and was facing away from the sun. Zhuang Rui didn't care about her appearance at first, and thinking about what he had just said, he realized that it was indeed a bit inappropriate. So he decided to go down and explain to the girl.

"Don't come down! This is an archaeological excavation site. Not just anyone can come in." The girl waved her hand, leaving Zhuang Rui in an awkward position, unsure whether to go up or down.

"Ma'am, our Brother Zhuang didn't say anything," Er Mao said, unable to stand by and watch, trying to explain for Zhuang Rui.

"Who's the eldest sister? Pshaw, pshaw, I'm an invincible young beauty."

The girl was upset by the word "big sister," so she climbed out of the pit and took off her straw hat.

"Big sister, what do you mean?" Er Mao only understood the word "呸" (pǐ), and didn't understand the meaning of the following words.

"I told you not to call me 'big sister' anymore, and whatever you mean is exactly what I mean."

The girl stomped her feet in anger, but she couldn't do anything about Er Mao. She turned her anger on Zhuang Rui and said, "You just called us government thieves, and we haven't settled accounts with you yet."

It wasn't until the girl turned to him that Zhuang Rui could see her face clearly. He couldn't help but admire her in his heart. She was indeed an invincible beauty. She had big eyes, long eyelashes, and a slightly upturned nose. Her pouting lips, which were a little angry, added to her cuteness. Her feigned anger was actually quite pleasing to Zhuang Rui's eye. However, this was just pure appreciation, because the girl seemed a bit young, probably only eighteen or nineteen years old.

"What are you looking at, Brother Wu Cuo, Brother Ying Ning? Someone's here to cause trouble!" The girl glared fiercely at Zhuang Rui, and her words almost made him trip over.

"To cause trouble?" Zhuang Rui had no such intention; he simply wanted to come and see for himself.

"I told you not to call me Cuowei, my name is Fan Cuo!"

As the voices spoke, a tall boy walked up from below.

"Hehe, Fan Cuo's full name is Fan Le Cuo, so it's not wrong to call you Brother Cuo Cuo."

The girl had completely forgotten about Zhuang Rui at this point, and started joking with the boy with a smile.

"Swing, you're bullying people again. If your grandpa finds out, you'll definitely get a scolding."

The girl called out two names just now, and the one speaking now must be Ying Ning. These two names are really unique, Zhuang Rui thought to himself.

There are indeed people with the surname Ying, and they are quite famous. There was a former Minister of Culture with the surname Ying, and two of his younger relatives are doing very well in the entertainment industry. Zhuang Rui often sees news about them.

"I didn't bully anyone, Brother Yingning. This person said we were government thieves..."

The girl named Qiuqian only then remembered why she had called out to the two of them, and turned her anger towards Zhuang Rui.

"Sir, you know the terms 'official thief,' so you must be quite knowledgeable about archaeology, right? Isn't it a bit inappropriate for you to speak like this?"

The boy named Ying Ning looked to be about twenty-two or twenty-three years old, like a student, but he spoke with a rather mature and somewhat intimidating manner.

Chapter 240 Boss Yu

The village where the third brother, Liu Changfa, lives is called Liu Family Village. It's said that the villagers have lived there since the Tang Dynasty. Although over a thousand years have passed, most of the villagers still share the surname Liu, with only two having different surnames.

One of the families, surnamed Zhang, is said by the older generation to have been a soldier under Li Zicheng during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. After his defeat, he came to the village in hiding. Zhang is the second largest surname in the village, accounting for about one-fifth of the families.

There is another family with the surname Yu. There is only one family with this surname in the village. They are also from outside the village. The older people still remember that in the 1960s, a young couple fled famine and came to Liujiazhuang.

In that fervent era, Liujiazhuang, due to its remote location, was not greatly affected. The couple settled there. Since both of them were educated, they taught the village children to read and write in their spare time. The villagers were very honest and respected the educated, and over time, they came to regard this family as one of their own.

The couple seemed to have resigned themselves to their fate. They had two sons here. Except for the 1980s when the husband took the eldest son out to find relatives, the husband stayed in the village to teach until the 1990s. The couple were the first teachers of the third son, Liu Changfa.

However, after the couple retired as private school teachers, they suddenly fell ill in the mid-1990s and both passed away. This saddened the villagers, who rallied to give them a grand funeral.

Their two sons, the elder named Yu Ku and the younger named Yu Hao, married girls from the village back in the 1980s, making them sons-in-law of Liu Family Village. Thanks to their parents' connections, no one in Liu Family Village treated them as outsiders, and they were even related to several other families.

The eldest son of the Yu family went to work outside for seven or eight years after getting married, but I heard he didn't earn much money. After returning home, he honestly farmed. He was a good man, but it's a pity he later had a mentally challenged son who is now over eight or nine years old and only knows how to smile foolishly when he sees people.

The eldest son, Yu Ku, was calm and composed, and usually behaved very honestly. He didn't earn any money working, so after returning home, he would work diligently to support his family. However, every now and then, he would go out for a trip, which was not short, sometimes lasting three to five months. He would tell the villagers that he had found his parents' relatives in Henan and was going to visit them.

Although the Yu family's life wasn't exactly good, they had no problem eating. The second son, on the other hand, was somewhat frivolous. Although he was also married, he was always thinking about getting something for nothing and frequently went to the county town, where he made a bunch of shady friends.

The case of the stolen cooking oil at the county's grain and oil station involved Yu Lao Er, who is currently being held in the county's detention center. Yu Lao Er's wife, who has some relatives with Er Mao's family, contacted Liu Changfa last night, thinking that Liu Changfa, who works in the county, could help. However, it turns out that Lao Er is just a low-level civil servant and has no right to get involved in this matter.

"Brother, you have to think of something to save our second son! If he gets convicted, how are we going to survive..."

Unlike Liu Changfa's joyous celebration, Yu Ku's house was filled with mournful cries, and Yu Lao Er's wife was even singing a drawn-out lament.

"Sister-in-law, you go back first. I'll think of something else. Crying won't help. Honey, you go home with your sister-in-law and take our son with you. Stay there tonight and don't come back."

With a smile on his face, Yu Laoda saw off Yu Laoer's wife, who was crying her eyes out.

"So who's going to cook for you today?" his wife asked before leaving the house.

"If you're not going to starve, then don't ask."

A cold glint flashed in Yu Laoda's eyes, making his wife's heart tremble. She quickly pulled her simple-minded son aside and walked out with her head down, tripping and falling as she crossed the threshold.

Others may not know, but she knows better than anyone that her husband, who seems like an honest man, is actually ruthless. The reason her son is mentally challenged is because she was beaten so badly by Boss Yu when she was pregnant that she almost miscarried. However, after her son was born, he also became mentally challenged.

Yu Laoda's wife had considered divorce, but Yu Laoda threatened to kill her entire family if she dared to even think about it. This terrified her so much that she never dared to mention it again. However, as long as she didn't provoke him, Yu Laoda treated her and her daughter fairly well, occasionally giving her a few hundred yuan from who-knows-where to spend.

"Yu brothers, the second brother is already in jail, aren't you going to do something instead of buying meat to eat?"

After seeing his mentally challenged son and daughter-in-law off, Old Yu wandered to the village store, took out fifty yuan, and bought a few cooked dishes.

"Brother Liu, I'm so worried about my second brother's situation, but our relatives from Henan are coming, and we can't just not entertain them. Otherwise, they'll say that Liu Family Village has no manners, won't they? Don't you think that makes sense?"

Old Yu had a bitter smile on his face, which made people feel a little sorry for him.

"Yes, that makes sense. Don't be too hasty. The second son brought this upon himself. Here, take this."

The shop owner found some newspapers, wrapped up the chopped cooked vegetables, and handed them to Boss Yu.

"Alright, Second Brother, I'll head back now. Why don't you come over for a couple of drinks?"

Old Master Yu called out to Second Brother Liu, and after seeing him wave repeatedly, he turned and walked home.

When Yu returned home, he looked around, locked the gate to the yard, untied the chain of the wolfhound, and then went inside.

"Big brother, we can't just ignore what happened to the second brother. How about I find someone and spend some money to get him out of trouble?"

In the seemingly empty room, a voice suddenly rang out. It turned out that a person was sitting upright on a chair in the corner of the room. However, this person was rather thin, probably only about 1.5 meters tall. If you didn't look closely, you might mistake him for a child.

The eldest brother didn't reply. Instead, he drew the curtains on the only window in the room, then placed the cooked food on the table and said, "Manage? How? Make us sit in here too? I've told the second brother many times that if he stays here steadily for another three years, I guarantee he'll have no worries about food and drink for the rest of his life. If he doesn't listen to me as his older brother, how can I manage him?"

The short man hesitated for a moment, then stood up, opened the packets of cooked food, and said, "But what about our matter..."

He had barely opened his mouth when Boss Yu waved his hand, interrupting him.

"There's no buts. He doesn't know anything, which is good. It can help us divert attention. I had a feeling a while ago that we were being watched, but now that this has happened, everyone's attention is definitely on them."

"As long as we can get it done quickly, no one will be able to trace it back to me. Then we'll be able to move freely, whether we stay or leave. After we finish this job, even if the brothers want to go abroad, it won't be a problem."

At this moment, Yu Laoda's eyes were full of ruthlessness. If the people in the village saw him, they would definitely think that he had become a different person. Was this still the same Yu Laoda who used to smile at everyone and was indecisive in doing things?

"Brother, we need to arrange this in advance. Should we send my nephew out first?" The short man pulled out a bottle of Xifeng liquor from somewhere, took out two bowls, and filled them both.

"Xiao Ba, when did you become so fussy? We're doing things that put our lives on the line, how can we care about such things?"

When Old Master Yu heard about his foolish son, his brows furrowed, his eyes narrowed, and he glared at the short man with displeasure.

"Brother, I'm just saying. Whatever you say, I'll do it your way."

Seeing Yu Laoda glare at him, the short man trembled in fear, spilling a lot of the wine he was holding, and hurriedly tried to explain.

"Okay, you leave in a bit. Tell the people below to stay home and behave themselves. Nobody is allowed to cause trouble, or I'll skin them alive. After the archaeological team leaves, we'll hurry up and take everything out. We might as well not stay here then."

Old Yu picked up his wine bowl, clinked it against the short man's, tilted his head back and downed it all in one gulp. Without even using chopsticks, he grabbed some cooked food from the table and started eating.

After they had eaten and drunk their fill, the short man named Xiao Ba left. He seemed to have a quirk: he liked to walk close to the wall and his feet were very light. Because of his small stature, even in broad daylight, few people noticed him after he left Old Master Yu's house.

"Wife and son?"

After Xiao Ba left, Boss Yu continued drinking alone, a sinister smile occasionally appearing on his face. If anyone saw his expression now, they would definitely feel a chill run down their spine.

After leaving Liujiashuang in the 1980s, Yu Laoda was taken to Luoyang, Henan by his father. It was then that he learned about his origins and realized that his usually kind father was not so good after all.

During those seven or eight years, Yu Ku came into contact with a world he had never dreamed of. With his extraordinary patience, quick wit, ruthless methods, and harmless disguise, he rose from the ashes and took over the family's ancestral business.

Women? Yu Ku has kept several young, beautiful, and educated virgins in various places. He has also given birth to two sons. Why would he care about his wife, who is not presentable, and his foolish son?

Speaking of women, there's a pretty young lady in the archaeological team that's been there for almost a week. Boss Yu downed a bowl of wine, and his eyes became a little glazed.

Meanwhile, the girl who was considered pretty good by Boss Yu was standing with her hands on her hips, making things difficult for Zhuang Rui, who had gotten himself into trouble for his loose tongue.