

Golden 241

Chapter 241 The Eighteen Tombs of Guanzhong

"Gentlemen, I really didn't mean it. I just said it casually. You don't have to take it so seriously, do you? I admit I was wrong. I apologize to you all..."

Zhuang Rui had originally wanted to witness this field archaeological excavation, but he hadn't expected this little girl to be so difficult, so he started to have second thoughts. He figured if he couldn't afford to mess with her, he could at least avoid her.

"An apology? An apology must be sincere..."

The girl named Qiuqian darted around with her big eyes, then stared intently at the big watermelon in Er Mao's arms.

"Swing, you can't do that, the teacher will scold us if she finds out."

However, the young man named Ying Ning next to them couldn't stand it anymore and said to Zhuang Rui, "It's alright, you guys can leave. It's true that unauthorized personnel are not allowed to enter here."

"How are we considered outsiders? The land you're digging belongs to my uncle. You're the outsiders."

Er Mao was a little indignant. This area used to be a vegetable garden, but it has all been cleared away now. Although the archaeological team compensated Er Mao's uncle's family for the losses, the land does indeed belong to their family.

"Alright, Er Mao, stop talking. Call your sister-in-law over, let's eat watermelon together. It's so big, everyone can have some."

Fearing that Er Mao would continue and the two sides would start arguing again, Zhuang Rui quickly stopped Er Mao and took the watermelon from his arms. The watermelon weighed more than ten kilograms, and it was enough for everyone present to have a slice.

Seeing that Zhuang Rui insisted, Er Mao didn't say anything. Zhuang Rui was Changfa Ge's classmate and a city dweller, so he still respected him.

"Hehe, you should have done this earlier. I'll go call Grandpa to come and eat watermelon."

Seeing Zhuang Rui give in, the girl smiled smugly and walked towards the bottom of the pit. However, after only a couple of steps, she turned back and said, "You gave us the watermelon yourself, we didn't ask you for it.

"Yes, yes, I gave them to you myself, okay?"

Zhuang Rui was both amused and exasperated by the girl, but he wasn't angry. Although she was a bit unreasonable, she wasn't annoying.

"Let's all take a break, work for a little longer, and then continue working tonight."

A voice rang out from the pit, and immediately young women and wives rushed up from the bottom of the pit, surrounding Zhuang Rui and Er Mao. Some of the wives who were familiar with Er Mao even pinched his cheeks and joked with him.

Zhuang Rui was also taken aback by the scene, and quickly used the watermelon knife in his hand to cut the watermelon into more than a dozen pieces, handing them out one by one.

Several people accepted the watermelon and thanked Zhuang Rui. After chatting with them briefly, Zhuang Rui learned that they were all staff members of the local cultural relics department.

"Young man, thank you."

As Zhuang Rui handed over the last slice of watermelon, he noticed an elderly man standing in front of him. The man was quite old, with completely white hair and beard, but he was in good spirits and didn't sweat much despite standing under the blazing sun.

Zhuang Rui waved his hand and said with a smile, "It's alright, I'm just being generous with other people's money, haha. These are watermelons from my classmate's family. Don't mind them, old man. If it's not enough, I'll bring two more over later."

"That's not suitable, let's buy it instead."

The old man looked at the large pit below, thought for a moment, and said, "I reckon I'll have to stay here for another half a month. How about I have my classmate bring two watermelons over every day? Twenty yuan each, what do you think?"

"No need, it doesn't have to be that expensive, five or six yuan is enough."

Before Zhuang Rui could speak, Er Mao chimed in, which made Zhuang Rui look at this teenager with new respect. Just now he had acted like a little miser, but now he was actually asking for less money.

"Then it'll be ten yuan each, Er Mao. You deliver two watermelons here every day, and I'll let your long-haired brother know later."

"Um!"

Er Mao nodded heavily, his earlier resentment long gone. Watermelons weren't worth much in the countryside; anyone passing by a watermelon patch could pick a couple to eat without a problem, as long as the vines weren't damaged.

"Grandpa, come eat some watermelon!"

While Zhuang Rui was talking to the old man, the girl had finished her watermelon and was licking her lips with a hint of lingering satisfaction.

"Here, you can have this, you little glutton." The old man smiled tolerantly and handed the watermelon in his hand to the girl.

"Teacher, please eat this. I haven't eaten mine yet." The student named Ying Ning quickly pulled the old woman's granddaughter away and gave the girl the slice of watermelon that had been given to him.

"Young man, my granddaughter's parents are both abroad, and I don't usually have time to discipline her. I'm sorry you had to see this." The old man had actually overheard their conversation and knew that his granddaughter was being unreasonable.

"Old man, you're too kind. It's nothing. I'm just quite interested in archaeology. I heard there's an archaeological team excavating here, so I wanted to come and see for myself. I misspoke just now."

Zhuang Rui was still somewhat curious about the identity of the old man in front of him. Seeing the attitude of the local cultural relics department staff towards the old man, Zhuang Rui knew that the archaeological excavation work here should be in charge of this old man. However, it seemed a bit too frivolous to bring his granddaughter and students to such a serious matter.

"Hehe, young man, you can use the words 'official thief' to describe your knowledge of archaeology or cultural relics, so you must pay a lot of attention to this topic, right?"

The old man had no taboo against the words "official theft." His thoughts were quite different from others. He believed that digging up a tomb was the same as tomb raiding. Even if it was done in the name of the state, it was still theft. However, the cultural relics excavated by the state were mostly used for exhibitions or research on the social structure of that time, unlike private theft, which was entirely for personal gain.

"Grandpa, I just enjoy collecting things in my spare time. I don't know much about archaeology. I'm thinking of getting a master's degree in archaeology to improve my knowledge."

Although Zhuang Rui had been cramming on archaeology knowledge during this period, he naturally dared not show off in front of the old man.

"Oh? There aren't many people applying to archaeology these days. It's a rather tedious job, and you're often out in the fields. Sometimes you can't even go home all year round. What brings you to this idea, young man?"

The old man was taken aback when he heard Zhuang Rui's words, clearly surprised by Zhuang Rui's answer.

"Hehe, old man, as I just said, I just want to systematically learn about the customs and culture of China throughout history through archaeology. This will also be very beneficial for collecting. It doesn't mean that I will engage in archaeological work in the future."

Zhuang Rui didn't hide his thoughts. With his wealth, there was no need for him to do this job. He could probably enjoy staying in the wild every day, but Zhuang Rui definitely couldn't stand it.

"Which university did you apply to for the archaeology major?" the old man asked casually.

"Peking University, I've heard that it has the strongest faculty..."

The old man's eyes lit up upon hearing this, and he said, "Peking University is not easy to get into. Although the archaeology major is very unpopular, the department head, Old Man Meng, is a stubborn old man."

"Hehe, I did quite well in chemistry in college, and I have some knowledge of Chinese history and classical Chinese, so I believe it shouldn't be a problem. Does the old gentleman also know Professor Meng from Peking University?"

Zhuang Rui said confidently that when he graduated from university, his mother originally wanted him to continue to pursue a master's degree, but Zhuang Rui considered the family's situation and went to work instead. Now, only two years after graduation, he has not lost much of his knowledge and can just review it again.

"Of course I know him. I've known him my whole life. That old man, tsk tsk, he's really hard to deal with. Here's what we'll do, young man, I'll ask you a few questions. If you can answer them, I'll put in a good word for that old man Meng..."

Zhuang Rui didn't notice that when the old man spoke, his eyes, which had seen through the ways of the world, inadvertently revealed a hint of childlike innocence.

"Old man, there's no need for pleading. But I really don't have much experience with postgraduate entrance exam interviews. Please ask me any questions you have. I'll take this as a chance to get some practice."

Zhuang Rui chuckled and said that Uncle De had already spoken to Professor Meng. He and the old man in front of him were complete strangers, so how could he trouble him? Besides, judging from the old man's words, Professor Meng was a bit eccentric. If too many people pleaded on his behalf, it might backfire.

"Alright, then let me ask you, do you know whose tomb this is that we're excavating now?"

Zhuang Rui frowned at the old man's question. There were simply too many large tombs in Shaanxi. Putting aside everything else, from the Qin and Han dynasties to the fall of the Tang dynasty, Shaanxi had been the capital of the country. There were countless famous scholars, emperors, and generals. The old man's question was indeed difficult to answer.

Zhuang Rui looked down into the pit, and spiritual energy emanated from it. However, he found no clues in the soil, only some broken ceramic vessels with very faint spiritual energy. Zhuang Rui couldn't tell what era they were from.

As Zhuang Rui withdrew his spiritual energy, he saw the armed police officers on duty. A thought struck him: with the national cultural relics department taking the lead, local authorities providing full assistance, and armed police protecting the site, this tomb must be extraordinary; it must be an imperial tomb.

The imperial tombs are just too large, spanning from the Qin Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty and involving dozens of emperors. Who knows which one it is?

"The Eighteen Tombs of Guanzhong!"

The term suddenly popped into Zhuang Rui's mind. He recalled a document he had read not long ago that discussed the tombs of eighteen emperors of the Tang Dynasty. It seemed that the tombs of several emperors, such as Emperor Ruizong's Qiaoling, Emperor Xuanzong's Tailing, Emperor Xianzong's Jingling, and Emperor Wenzong's Guangling, were located in this small county town.

The document said that these tombs were all built against the mountain, which was similar to where he was now. However, the document said that Qiaoling was magnificent and had exquisite stone carvings, making it the best of the eighteen tombs in Guanzhong. It shouldn't be that one. As for which of the remaining emperors' tombs it was, Zhuang Rui could no longer guess.

Chapter 242 Professor Meng

"Old man, the above-ground palace of this tomb has been destroyed, but judging from the surrounding earthen mound, the project must have been very large back then. The person buried here must have been of noble status. If I'm not mistaken, it should be one of the three mausoleums of Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, Emperor Xianzong of Tang, or Emperor Wenzong of Tang?"

Zhuang Rui voiced his thoughts, unsure if they were right or wrong. The ancients placed great importance on funerals, and there were simply too many large tombs in Shaanxi. It wasn't just emperors who could build palaces on top of tombs; some feudal lords also had this right.

Zhuang Rui's words caused a look of surprise on the old man's face. Although everyone in the country knows about the Tang Dynasty and can name a few emperors such as Li Yuan, Li Shimin, or Emperor Xuanzong, they can only name a few of the more famous emperors. People like Zhuang Rui who can even name the reign titles are very few and far between.

"Young man, are you referring to the Eighteen Tombs of Guanzhong? There were only eighteen emperors in the Tang Dynasty, how come you only guessed these three?"

The old man neither confirmed nor denied Zhuang Rui's answer, but continued to ask questions.

"Did the Tang Dynasty have a total of eighteen emperors?"

Zhuang Rui wasn't sure if his answer was right or wrong. He had only read it from that document. Just as he was about to answer, the old man's question suddenly echoed in his mind, and he was momentarily stunned.

"This old man is in charge of this archaeological excavation; surely he doesn't even understand these basic questions? Could it be..."

Although the Eighteen Tombs of Guanzhong are well-known, it doesn't mean that there were only eighteen emperors in the Tang Dynasty. Zhuang Rui clearly remembers that from Emperor Gaozu of Tang, Li Yuan, to Emperor Aizong of Tang, Li Zhu, when the Tang Dynasty fell, there were a total of twenty-one emperors.

However, the Huang Chao Rebellion broke out at the end of the Tang Dynasty, after which the court weakened, and various regional military governors held their own power. During the reign of Emperor Zhaozong of Tang, he was manipulated by Zhu Wen, the founder of the Later Liang Dynasty, and became a puppet emperor. He was killed by Zhu Wen not long after. The last emperor of the Tang Dynasty after him, Emperor Aizong of Tang, was poisoned by Zhu Wen and died in Shandong Province, so naturally there is no tomb for him in Shaanxi.

Therefore, looking at all twenty-one emperors of the Tang Dynasty, Wu Zetian was buried in the same tomb as Emperor Gaozong. If we remove the two last emperors, Emperor Zhaozong and Emperor Aizong, there are actually only eighteen tombs. This is the origin of the saying "Eighteen Tombs of Guanzhong".

"Old man, there are eighteen tombs of Tang Dynasty emperors in Guanzhong, but there weren't eighteen Tang Dynasty emperors, were there? I remember there were twenty-one. The Qin Mausoleum of Emperor Xuanzong, the Jing Mausoleum of Emperor Xianzong, and the Guang Mausoleum of Emperor Wenzong are all located nearby. But if you ask me which emperor's tomb it is, then I really can't answer that."

Zhuang Rui sensed that the old man in front of him was a bit cunning and had set a trap for him. If he continued talking, he would definitely get confused. So after telling the old man everything he knew, he frankly told him, "That's all I know. Please don't ask any more questions."

"Not bad, young man, that's a good answer. It's already quite an achievement to know these things. I, this old man, can guarantee that as long as you pass the written test, you will definitely be hired by that old man Meng."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's reply, the old man showed a satisfied expression and even started to take full responsibility, as if he could make the decision himself.

Zhuang Rui was rather skeptical. Even Uncle De and Professor Meng, who had such a good relationship, didn't dare to say such things. He wondered where this old man in front of him got his confidence from.

Just as Zhuang Rui was inwardly complaining, a staff member from the local archaeological department walked over and said to the old man, "Professor Meng, you've rested enough. We can go back after working for a while longer and come back when the sun is about to set."

"Professor Meng...?"

Standing to the side, Zhuang Rui was momentarily stunned upon hearing the staff member's address. Even if he were slow-witted, he knew that this Professor Meng was undoubtedly his future mentor. Moreover, Uncle De had mentioned a few days ago that Professor Meng from Peking University was currently in Shaanxi.

It's no wonder Zhuang Rui didn't expect this beforehand. After all, Shaanxi is so big, and he never imagined that he would run into Professor Meng, a leading figure in the field of archaeology, in this remote mountain valley. This is just too much of a coincidence.

Professor Meng said to the staff member, "Let everyone get started, but be careful. Call me if you find anything..."

"Your name is Zhuang Rui, right?"

After explaining to the staff member, Professor Meng looked at Zhuang Rui. Seeing Zhuang Rui nod in agreement, he continued, "A while ago, Brother De from Zhonghai recommended you to me. He practically raved about you. I didn't believe it, but seeing is believing. Not bad. Although you're not formally trained, you have a good foundation. As long as you pass the written test, I'll have no problem with you."

Seeing Zhuang Rui's slight unease, Professor Meng reassured him. He was very satisfied with this student. Although he didn't major in archaeology as an undergraduate, he knew so much about the

history of the Tang Dynasty, which could be described as extensive knowledge and a strong memory. Moreover, he was very alert and meticulous. He had tried to set traps for people in the past, but he never expected that this young man would see through them.

"Thank you, Teacher Meng. Thank you, Teacher Meng."

Zhuang Rui was also very happy. It was just a spur-of-the-moment thing, wanting to see how others did archaeological excavations. He never expected to meet his future mentor here. This saved Zhuang Rui and Uncle De the trouble of making a special trip to Beijing to visit Professor Meng later.

Professor Meng was quite satisfied with his future student. Suddenly remembering something, he asked, "By the way, Xiao Zhuang, is your English okay?"

"English? No problem. I can write and speak. For general professional translation, as long as I know the relevant vocabulary, it shouldn't be a big problem."

Although Zhuang Rui didn't understand Professor Meng's meaning, he still answered honestly.

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Professor Meng nodded and said, "That's good. Review your knowledge of classical Chinese. If you have time in September, come to Beijing and I'll give you some study materials."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement, but he was really puzzled. Did he possess some kind of domineering aura? He had only answered one question, yet Professor Meng was so fond of him?

In fact, Zhuang Rui did not understand that throughout history, not only are good teachers hard to find, but apprentices are also hard to find. Although diligence can make up for lack of talent, a person's talent often determines his future development.

So, although Professor Meng has countless students, apart from his early disciples, he only has a handful of students whom he acknowledges now. These are all students he takes under his wing and teaches carefully, which is completely different from teaching in a large classroom. Now that he has recognized Zhuang Rui's talent, he naturally wants to take him under his wing.

Due to his advanced age, Professor Meng no longer teaches in large classrooms and only supervises a few graduate students. He has also decided that after supervising this group of students, he will no longer recruit graduate students. In a sense, Zhuang Rui can be considered his last disciple.

As for inquiring about Zhuang Rui's English, that's a drawback of China's exam-oriented education system. According to relevant national regulations, English is a required subject for postgraduate entrance exams.

However, many niche majors, such as traditional Chinese painting, have absolutely nothing to do with English. These students often study this major from a young age, so it's normal for them to have poor English skills. This makes it difficult for many experienced professors to accept promising students as their students.

There was once a well-known university professor who, for this very reason, was unable to recruit graduate students for several years. In the end, he resigned from the university in anger, causing a great social reaction.

"It's good that you have confidence. Since we've run into each other, let's come and help out. Let's get familiar with the archaeological site first, so that when we go to the site later, we won't be afraid of the ancient corpses. That would be embarrassing for this old man."

Professor Meng didn't ask Zhuang Rui why he came here, but just gathered the men. In fact, he knew that Zhuang Rui couldn't be of much help, but he just wanted Zhuang Rui to experience the environment. Excavating an emperor's tomb is not a frequent occurrence.

"Girls, you guys come here for a second, don't sneak around."

Seeing that Zhuang Rui had agreed, Professor Meng waved to his granddaughter, who was standing in the distance and looking over at them.

"This is my granddaughter Meng Qiuqian, this is Fan Cuo, and the one wearing glasses is Ying Ning. These two are my graduate students this year. Xiao Zhuang will be taking the entrance exam for my graduate program next year. You all need to get to know each other first. By the way, Xiao Zhuang, although you are older than them, you still have to call them senior brothers, haha." Professor Meng has a very cheerful personality and often cracks a joke.

"Let's still call him Brother Zhuang, and you can just call me Xiao Fan..."

Seeing that Meng Qiuqian next to the mentor was about to speak, Fan Cuo quickly spoke first and settled on his own name.

"What do you mean by 'mistake'? 'Mistake' sounds so much better," the little girl muttered to herself.

Professor Meng glared at his granddaughter and said, "No manners, Xiao Fan. First, tell Xiao Zhuang about the tomb. I need to go and see if the porcelain piece that was just unearthed can be repaired."

"Brother Zhuang, let's go downstairs and talk about it."

Seeing Professor Meng turn and walk towards the shed, Fan Cuo and Ying Ning, apart from the girl, both breathed a sigh of relief. Although Professor Meng usually didn't put on any airs of a teacher, the unintentional demeanor he exuded made the two of them feel somewhat uncomfortable.

Such demeanor is hard to describe in words. It is a kind of personal cultivation and cultural accumulation that can only be revealed after reaching a certain depth. Zhuang Rui felt somewhat ashamed when he stood next to Professor Meng.

"Xiao Fan, whose grave are you digging now?"

Zhuang Rui followed the others to the bottom of the pit. He had just used his spiritual energy to look down and found it to be about seven or eight meters deep, but there didn't seem to be any coffins or anything like that down there.

Chapter 243 Luoyang Shovel

After Fan Cuo and Ying Ning's explanation, and with Meng Qiuqian chattering on and on, Zhuang Rui realized that they were excavating the imperial tomb of Emperor Wenzong of Tang, Li Ang.

The first novel Zhuang Rui read when he was in school was Liang Yusheng's "The Legend of Empress Xuan Ying". From then on, he naturally paid more attention to the Tang Dynasty and often looked up historical materials about the Tang Dynasty. However, the more he learned, the less fond Zhuang Rui became of the Tang Dynasty.

Although the Tang Dynasty was renowned, and even those who went abroad in the early years identified themselves as Tang people, giving rise to the term "Chinatown," the emperors of the Tang Dynasty actually met rather tragic ends. Even the founding emperor Li Yuan, who had made great military achievements, and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang, Li Longji, who led the prosperous Kaiyuan era, were both usurped by their sons and imprisoned and died of depression.

Many of the lesser-known emperors were killed by eunuchs or ministers, and few had a peaceful end. Emperor Wenzong of Tang, the fourteenth emperor of the Tang Dynasty, also met a tragic end.

Everyone knows that the eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty were arrogant and domineering, but the Tang Dynasty was even more so. At that time, political factions were constantly fighting each other, officials were frequently transferred, and the power of the government, even the deposition and life and death of the emperor, were all in the hands of the eunuchs.

Emperor Wenzong of Tang was enthroned by eunuchs. Later, he appointed Li Xun, Zheng Zhu and others, intending to eliminate the eunuchs. In the ninth year of Dahe, Li Xun lured the eunuchs to visit the so-called "sweet dew" in an attempt to eliminate them in one fell swoop. However, the plot was exposed, which instead led to the eunuchs massacring court officials. Afterwards, Emperor Wenzong was further controlled by the eunuchs and died of illness in depression.

The Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period following the fall of the Tang Dynasty was marked by constant warfare, causing immense harm to the Central Plains.

"Xiao Fan, these eighteen imperial tombs in Guanzhong have been documented for a long time, so why are they only being excavated now?"

Zhuang Rui was somewhat puzzled. As far as he knew, all eighteen imperial tombs in Guanzhong, except for the one where Wu Zetian and Emperor Gaozong were buried together, had already been looted by tomb robbers. If the state wanted to protect them, it should have taken action long ago.

"Brother Zhuang, you don't know this, the country has always been extremely cautious about the excavation of cultural relics. It will not easily excavate tombs unless absolutely necessary."

The reason we're here is because Guangdong Customs recently seized a batch of smuggled cultural relics, including a national first-class cultural relic, the Flying Horse of Gansu. According to the arrested antique dealers, these relics came from the tomb of Emperor Wenzong, so we're here to conduct a rescue excavation to see if we can preserve some of the relics.

Xiao Fan didn't say some things. In fact, the root cause of the state's control over the excavation and archaeology of tombs is money. Because the unearthed cultural relics are eroded by soil and damp environment for a long time, the preservation after excavation is very important, which requires a lot of expenses.

Putting aside other things, the annual cost of collecting and maintaining the cultural relics in the Palace Museum is an astronomical figure. Even so, many precious cultural relics are damaged due to improper preservation. Of course, these things are not good to talk about.

If the national level is like this, then local cultural relics and archaeological departments are even more neglected and ineffective, unable to afford the funds to maintain cultural relics. Therefore, some people have proposed to suspend the excavation of the tombs and let the cultural relics remain underground.

However, Zhuang Rui believes these are all nonsense. The longer cultural relics remain underground, the greater the chance of damage and theft. If some people simply cut back on eating and drinking a few less times, the money allocated for cultural relic protection can be saved. Of course, the leaders will not adopt such suggestions. Drinking is also a necessity for revolutionary work. Don't think that drinking like a big shot every day is comfortable.

"By the way, the Flying Horse of Gansu you mentioned earlier is an artifact from the Han Dynasty, and only one has ever been unearthed. How come you say it was unearthed from Emperor Wenzong's tomb? Is it a later imitation?"

When it comes to cultural relics, Zhuang Rui can be considered a semi-expert, and he is naturally familiar with the famous Flying Horse of Gansu.

The Flying Horse of Gansu, unearthed in Weiwu County, Gansu Province in 1969, is an outstanding work that integrates sculptural art and bronze casting techniques during the Eastern Han Dynasty. It represents the highest artistic achievement of the Eastern Han Dynasty in the history of Chinese sculpture.

The bronze horse in the artwork has its head held high, its four hooves churning, its tail raised high, and its mouth open as if neighing. Three of its hooves are off the ground, and its right hind hoof rests on the back of a swallow that is flapping its wings and taking flight. The swallow looks back in surprise, echoing the horse's movements. The horse's head is slightly turned to the left. Due to the lightness of its hooves and the fluttering of its mane and tail, it seems as if it is a celestial horse soaring through the sky. The swallow is unaware of the weight of the horse and is startled by its speed. Its bold conception and romantic technique give people a breathtaking feeling and are truly amazing.

However, Zhuang Rui had only heard of one such work being unearthed, so he had some doubts about the "Flying Horse" that Fan Cuo mentioned.

Fan Cuo shook his head and said, "It's not a later imitation. After authentication, that Flying Horse is almost identical to the one in the Gansu collection in terms of size, shape, and material. This means that more than one artifact was made in the Han Dynasty. That's why my teacher came; he also wants to know if this artifact was truly unearthed from a Tang Dynasty tomb..."

"Everyone's up here, time to rest. Brother Fan Cuo, you're always slacking off..."

The little girl's voice came from above, and the people at the bottom of the pit rushed up. It was already close to noon, and the sun was too strong, so they would wait until four or five o'clock in the afternoon, when the sun was about to set, to dig for a while longer.

"Er Mao, go pick two more watermelons..."

Although he hadn't done any work, Zhuang Rui still felt parched. He took out fifty yuan from his pocket and handed it to Er Mao.

"No, no, Brother Zhuang, I can't take your money."

Er Mao waved his hands repeatedly. He would have accepted the money if it came from the archaeological team, but he dared not accept it if Zhuang Rui took it out.

"Here, this is what the archaeological team bought. Go and come back quickly..." Zhuang Rui knew what Er Mao was thinking and stuffed the money into his hand.

"Hey, I'll be right back." Er Mao jumped up like a rabbit and ran quickly towards the melon patch.

When Er Mao returned, he was followed by several women, each carrying two baskets. They were there to deliver food. The archaeological team had been staying in Liujiashuang for some time. Since it would take more than two hours to travel back and forth at noon, they didn't go back. Instead, they spent a little extra money to have the villagers deliver the food to them.

Zhuang Rui was also hungry, and he ate the simple farm-style dishes with relish. However, Ying Ning and the others were getting tired of eating the same food for several days. They barely ate any of the dishes and went to eat the watermelon that Er Mao had brought.

After the meal, Zhuang Rui, Ying Ning, Fan Cuo, and the others gathered around Professor Meng, while the staff and the local women went to find a shady spot to cool off. The armed police, however, ate a few slices of watermelon and then dutifully resumed their guard duties.

"Professor Meng, are you sure this place is the location of Emperor Wenzong's tomb? The unearthed items look quite ordinary to me..."

Zhuang Rui just went to look at the broken porcelain shards that were laid out together and marked. Although the craftsmanship was quite exquisite, they did not seem to be royal sacrificial items. Moreover, his spiritual energy could now penetrate to a depth of about ten meters in the ground, but he did not find any precious cultural relics below.

Professor Meng was not angry at Zhuang Rui's question. After thinking for a moment, he said, "Tombs in the Tang Dynasty were generally built against mountains. For example, the joint tomb of Empress Wu and Emperor Gaozong Li Zhi was built in the mountains."

We are now at the end of this mountain range, a place of auspicious geomancy where mountains and water embrace each other. Emperor Wenzong's tomb should be here. However, after more than a thousand years, it has suffered from wars and been robbed several times, making it difficult to deduce the location of the underground tomb from the above-ground structures.

The reason we're digging here is because we previously discovered a tomb raider's hole nearby, and after testing, the soil here is also mixed soil. However, the area where the tomb raider's hole appeared has already been completely dug out, and the unearthed items are not of much value and don't prove anything. Perhaps we've been digging in the wrong direction..."

Professor Meng had already considered the issue Zhuang Rui raised. Judging from the artifacts unearthed so far, it seemed to be a burial tomb. However, they had already explored the area within a few hundred meters and found that only here was the soil mixed with various colors. In other places, when they went down seven or eight meters, they encountered a layer of rock, making it impossible for there to be a tomb.

"Xiao Fan, Ying Ning, take the Luoyang shovels and go a little further away, then dig some more holes, making sure to keep them at a straight distance from the sealing layer."

Professor Meng pondered for a moment and assigned tasks to his two disciples. In fact, he had this idea after digging out the cross section of the tomb, and Zhuang Rui's words prompted him to make up his mind.

However, this was quite painful for Fan Cuo and Ying Ning. Digging a hole with a Luoyang shovel was no less strenuous than digging in the soil. After digging seven or eight meters deep, both arms would become sore, numb, and weak.

"I'll go with you..."

Zhuang Rui also stood up. He was mainly interested in the legendary Luoyang shovel and wanted to see it for himself.

The term "Luoyang shovel" has always been associated with tomb raiding. There are different opinions about who invented it. One of the more reliable theories is that it was invented by Li Yazhi, a tomb raider from a rural area near Luoyang, Henan Province, in the early 20th century.

Around 1923, Li Yazhi, a villager from Mapo Village, went to a market in Mengjin, a place near his home. After wandering around for a while, he squatted down by the roadside to rest. It should be noted that Li Yazhi made a living by tomb raiding, so he often thought about tomb raiding.

By chance, he saw a steamed bun shop not far from him. The person selling steamed buns was preparing to make a small hole in the ground. The tool he was using to make the hole caught Li Yazhi's attention because he saw that this iron tool, which was only 2 inches wide and shaped like a U, could stir up a lot of soil every time it was poked into the ground.

Li Yazhi, who had extensive experience in tomb raiding, immediately realized that this tool was much easier to use than the iron shovel he usually used to explore ancient tombs. Inspired by this, he made a paper model of the tool, found a blacksmith to make a physical copy based on the model, and that's how the first Luoyang shovel was born.

Chapter 244 Site Exploration and Selection

For a long time after its invention, the Luoyang shovel was used for tomb raiding.

The Mangshan Mountain in Luoyang, Henan Province, is filled with towering tombs, leaving almost no room for an ox to lie down. The underground burial objects are extremely rich. Before the liberation, almost every corner of the mountain was explored by the Luoyang shovel, and a large number of unearthed cultural relics were lost abroad.

In 1928, the renowned archaeologist Wei Juxian, after witnessing firsthand the use of the Luoyang shovel by tomb raiders, applied it to archaeological drilling, which played an extremely important role in the excavation of famous ancient city sites in China such as Yinxi and Yanshi Shangcheng.

In the 1950s, Luoyang became a key city for construction. When factories were being selected, they often encountered ancient tombs. Using machines to drill and sample was time-consuming and labor-intensive. So, construction workers used this concave probe to accurately detect more than a thousand ancient tombs.

Today, the Luoyang shovel is a symbol of Chinese archaeological drilling tools, and of course, an indispensable piece of equipment for tomb raiders.

Learning to use the Luoyang shovel to identify soil quality is a fundamental skill for every archaeologist. Professor Meng did not stop Zhuang Rui and his two disciples from exploring the soil, wanting him to get acquainted with the use of the Luoyang shovel first.

"Xiao Fan, why are all these Luoyang shovels different?"

Zhuang Rui followed the two to the place where the Luoyang shovels were placed. Upon inspection, he found that there were more than ten small shovels on the ground, about 20 to 40 centimeters long and about 5 to 20 centimeters in diameter. However, some of them had blunt bottoms, while others looked like crescent shovels, which were different from what he had heard.

"Brother Zhuang, these are used to detect different tombs. This one is called a heavy shovel, which is specifically used to detect Han tombs. Because a horse trampling a flying swallow was unearthed here, the teacher suspected the existence of a Han tomb, so he brought it here."

Fan Cuo then pointed to a shovel that resembled the crescent-shaped shovel used by Lu Zhishen in the Water Margin and said, "This is called a flat shovel, also known as a Luoyang shovel. Tang Dynasty tombs used this.

As Fan Cuo explained, he and Ying Ning selected two Luoyang shovels and then handed one to Zhuang Rui.

Seeing Zhuang Rui examining the Luoyang shovel in his hand, Ying Ning explained, "Brother Zhuang, don't be fooled by its simple appearance. It's actually quite complicated to make, requiring nearly twenty steps, including blank preparation, firing, heat treatment, shaping, and blade sharpening."

The most crucial step is shaping the curve during molding. It requires careful hammering; if you're not careful, the shovel won't be able to pick up any dirt, and it'll be ruined. It can only be made by hand. The one you have in your hand is a treasured possession of your teacher; the rest were provided by the local cultural relics department..."

After Zhuang Rui took it, he found that it was just a shovel head. There were hollow, internally spiraled threads on the head of the shovel, which was probably used to connect the wooden rod.

For easy carrying, these Luoyang shovels are all detachable, and even the wooden handles can be chosen according to your height. These wooden handles are specially made, usually high-quality white ash wood, which is extremely tough and can be easily bent without breaking.

"Brother Zhuang, use this. It was specially made by the teacher for his Luoyang shovel."

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to bend down to choose a wooden pole, Fan Cuo handed him a leather case about 60 or 70 centimeters long. Zhuang Rui reached out and took it, feeling that it was somewhat heavy. When he opened it, he found that it contained a hollow threaded steel pipe about half a meter long.

After removing the steel pipe, Zhuang Rui discovered that there was more than one steel pipe inside, but rather layers nested together, somewhat like a fishing rod, which could be extended at will. At the end of the steel pipe, there was a buckle with a rope about the thickness of a thumb tied to it, neatly coiled around it.

How to use it? It's not like you need someone to teach you. Zhuang Rui pulled out three sections of steel pipe, aligned them with the threaded ends, and tightened them. He measured them and found they were about two meters long. He weighed them and found they weren't too heavy, so they should be fine to use. Zhuang Rui put the remaining steel pipes back into the leather case and slung the case diagonally over his shoulder.

Zhuang Rui took the white waxwood pole Luoyang shovel that Ying Ning had attached. Compared with the one in his hand, it was about half the weight. However, this white waxwood pole was more than two meters long, and it was far less convenient to carry than the tool in his hand. In fact, there are many types of Luoyang shovels now. For example, the electric Luoyang shovel that has recently appeared is like a small drilling machine.

"Brother Zhuang, let's move a bit further away. The area within two or three hundred meters of this place has already been explored."

Fan Cuo and Ying Ning each carried a Luoyang shovel and wore straw hats. If you didn't look at their clothes, they would be no different from farmers who worked year-round.

"Within several hundred meters, this is the only place with mature soil?" Zhuang Rui was somewhat puzzled. It's possible that a tomb could be built under that mound.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's question, Ying Ning turned around and replied, "That's right. In other places, when we went down more than ten meters, we encountered a layer of rock, and the same was true below the soil layer. We probed very carefully, and apart from the topsoil, there was nothing else."

"Perhaps the tomb isn't that deep. I've heard that in ancient times, tombs that were seven or eight meters deep were very rare."

As soon as Zhuang Rui said this, he realized something was wrong. A tomb seven or eight meters deep was definitely not suitable for a royal mausoleum. He didn't know about other tombs, but the underground palace of the Thirteen Tombs was dozens of meters deep.

"We basically drill a hole every three to five meters. If there's something down there, we'll definitely bring it up..." Ying Ning knew that Zhuang Rui knew nothing about archaeological excavation, so she explained it to him.

Upon hearing Ying Ning's words, Zhuang Rui realized that the Luoyang shovel could not only identify the soil quality underground, but also bring up objects from the tomb.

If, during the excavation, ceramic burial objects such as cups, bowls, plates, and pots, or items made of iron, gold, or wood, are encountered, these can be brought up. From these objects, it can be determined whether there is a tomb below. Archaeologists can then use these items to deduce the nature and layout of the underground artifacts.

Even more so, experienced tomb raiders can judge the underground conditions by the different sounds produced when the Luoyang shovel strikes the ground and by the feeling in their hands. For example, solid walls and hollow tomb chambers and passageways are naturally very different.

Some tomb raiders, with just a Luoyang shovel, can accurately dig a hole into the main burial chamber where the coffin is placed. When it comes to the use of the Luoyang shovel, most archaeologists are probably far inferior to those tomb raiders who have inherited the skill.

Which way should we go?

Zhuang Rui asked the two of them. He had been standing on the burial mound and looking around. It seemed that only the place they were digging now was a feng shui treasure land. Further along the mountain range was the tail of the dragon vein, which rose up to form a small hill. Logically, it shouldn't be there, because when choosing a burial site with a dragon vein, people usually choose a solid feng shui treasure land at the head and tail to gather qi, rather than severing the dragon vein, which is a major taboo in feng shui.

"Let's go take a look at that little hill. It's the only one around here that hasn't been explored yet..."

"Wait, wait for me, I want to go too!"

A voice came from behind the three of them. It was Meng Qiuqian, the little girl, who had followed them up, holding a Luoyang shovel in her hand, looking quite professional.

"Aren't you afraid of getting a tan? Like an African?" Fan Cuo, who was used to bickering with the little girl, couldn't help but tease her.

"Don't worry, I have sunscreen..."

Meng Qiuqian proudly waved her little fist at Fan Cuo, leaving the others speechless. So this was a vacation, she even brought sunscreen.

Meng Qiuqian ignored Fan Cuo and moved closer to Zhuang Rui, saying, "Brother Zhuang Rui, you're about to take my grandfather's graduate entrance exam. I'll be your senior then. Could you ask your Tibetan Mastiff to be a little more affectionate towards me?"

Zhuang Rui was immediately in a bind upon hearing this. This girl actually had designs on White Lion. Not to mention her, even Liu Chuan, who had watched White Lion grow up, had never received a kind word from White Lion, let alone this girl.

"Hey, Qiuqian, it's not that I don't want to help you, but you know Tibetan mastiffs have a bad temper. They don't listen to anyone except me. I think you should stay away from them, otherwise with your skinny arms and legs, it would be troublesome if they got bitten off."

Zhuang Rui was afraid that the girl would tease the white lion, so he deliberately exaggerated a bit, hoping to scare her.

"Hey, wait a minute, girl, you're not Professor Meng's student, you're just here for fun. Besides, we're not even twice the same age, you should call me 'Uncle-Master,' why should I call you 'Senior Sister'?"

Zhuang Rui suddenly thought of this question and blurted it out.

"Fine, don't help me then. But you expect me to call you 'uncle'? No way..."

The little girl pouted, glared fiercely at Zhuang Rui, then rummaged in her bag for a while and took out a bag of beef jerky, intending to feed it to the white lion. However, seeing the white lion's size, she didn't dare to get close. When she was still three or four meters away from the white lion, she threw the beef jerky over.

To everyone's surprise, the white lion didn't even glance at Zhuang Rui and ran ahead, making the little girl stomp her feet in anger.

This hill is not far from the excavation site, only four or five hundred meters away. The hill is covered with kiwi trees, which are in bloom at this time of year. The entire hill is covered with small yellow flowers, which looks very beautiful from a distance.

As the group approached, they discovered that someone had built a fence around the small hill, with wire tied to it, presumably to prevent wild animals from damaging the fruit trees.

"Woof...woof woof..."

Before we even got close to the fence, we heard loud barking from inside, and then two large, muscular wolfhounds rushed out from the woods.

"roar....."

The white lion that had been following Zhuang Rui let out a low growl, and the two wolfhounds immediately tucked their tails between their legs and disappeared into the orchard.

"What are you yelling for, you stupid dog? Why don't you go and bite me!"

A man's voice came from inside the orchard.

Chapter 245 One Thing Subdues Another

"Is anyone living here? I haven't seen anyone here for so many days?"

Fan Cuo said with some surprise, they knew the orchard was contracted by the villagers, but this was only the fruit trees' flowering season, so there was no need to guard it. Besides, they had been there for a week and hadn't seen anyone come or go.

"What are you doing? Get lost if you have nothing to do. Damn it, you can't even sleep peacefully."

Amidst a chorus of curses, a man emerged from the orchard, his steps unsteady. He reached the railing, grabbed the waist-high railing, and finally regained his balance.

How can you talk like that?

Fan Cuo was somewhat annoyed by the scolding. Just as he walked to the railing to argue with the man, the man suddenly stood up straight and met Fan Cuo's gaze. Startled, Fan Cuo involuntarily took several steps back.

At this moment, Zhuang Rui also saw the man's appearance clearly, and his heart skipped a beat. The man in front of him stood up straight and was half a head taller than Zhuang Rui, probably more than 1.9 meters tall. He was only wearing a pair of briefs and had a strong, muscular body. The arm he was holding onto the railing was probably thicker than Meng Qiuqian's waist.

What truly terrified them was the man's appearance. Half of his face looked normal, but the other half, from the eyes down to his neck, was completely black. If it weren't for the bright sunlight overhead, not only Fan Cuo and the others, but even Zhuang Rui would probably have been scared into turning and running away.

If a normal person saw this ghostly face in the dead of night, it would give them a heart attack.

"Is this the legendary two-faced face?"

The group took a few steps back, the thought popping into their minds. However, they had rarely heard of a face with two sides that could grow all the way up to the neck.

"That's how I talk, so what? You disagree?"

The man slammed his large, fan-like hand heavily on the railing, his eyes wide and bulging like donkey testicles as he stared intently at Comrade Xiao Fan, who had just spoken. With his other hand, he reached down to his groin in a rather unseemly manner, and the others could clearly see a few fine hairs fall to the ground from between his fingers.

Not only did Meng Qiuqian turn her face away long ago, but even Zhuang Rui couldn't stand it anymore. This guy was just too damn awful.

"We're from the national archaeological team. Please open this barrier; we need to go in and take some soil samples..."

Seeing Fan Cuo and Ying Ning's expressions, Zhuang Rui knew the two students were frightened. This wasn't surprising; if Zhuang Rui had encountered someone like that a few years ago, when he first graduated, he probably would have run away as well.

The man completely ignored Zhuang Rui and cursed at the crowd with a fierce look: "What are you taking... this bird of a feather? This is our family's contracted orchard, understand? It's privately contracted. You want to cause trouble? Get lost, all of you. If you make me angry, I'll cripple you little brats."

Seeing that he couldn't reason with this person, Zhuang Rui pulled the others a few steps back and whispered to Fan Cuo, "Xiao Fan, go and call the child who came with me earlier."

Fan Cuo agreed and turned to run back the way he came.

Seeing that only one person had left while Zhuang Rui and the others remained, the man became enraged and shouted at the two wolfhounds behind him, "Get out of here! Tiger, Big Yellow, go and bite them!"

The two wolfhounds charged forward a few steps, but the white lion suddenly let out a low growl, scaring them so much that they darted back into the woods and wouldn't come out no matter how much the man called out to them.

"Damn it, you useless things, I've been feeding you for nothing."

The man, cursing, turned and went into the orchard. Zhuang Rui and the others breathed a sigh of relief. They couldn't reason with this scoundrel; if he really beat them up, they would only suffer the consequences.

Less than a minute later, the masked man ran out again, carrying a bottle of liquor in his left hand and a machete in his right, the tip of which was pointed at Zhuang Rui and the others. He cursed, "If you don't get out of here, I'll cut you all down with one knife each."

Zhuang Rui was initially somewhat afraid of this man, but now his temper flared up. He and his men hadn't done anything wrong, and the fruit trees in the orchard weren't bearing fruit yet, so why were they acting like they were guarding against thieves?

"Try killing me then?"

Zhuang Rui took a few steps forward, gripping the Luoyang shovel tightly in his hand. He was a little nervous, but it would be too embarrassing to be scared away by this scoundrel.

"Brother Zhuang, don't bother with this guy. Let's go back and talk to the people in the village."

Standing beside him, Ying Ning pulled Zhuang Rui aside. He didn't even dare to look the man in the eye; he was just too humiliating. Ying Ning didn't know if he would be able to sleep that night.

"Kid, you think I wouldn't dare? Don't you dare run away!"

With a "thump," the masked man gulped down the remaining half-bottle of wine, tossed the bottle aside, braced himself against the railing with his left hand, and leaped off, lunging fiercely at Zhuang Rui.

"Waaah..."

Before the man could even get close to Zhuang Rui, the white lion, which had been lying prone on the ground, leaped out like lightning. Its entire body soared into the air, and its front paws slammed into the masked man's right hand, which was holding a knife. The knife flew from the man's hand, and before he could even react, the white lion's massive body was already pinning him down.

"Oh my god!"

The masked man was now fully sober. When he opened his eyes, he saw a gaping maw biting at his neck. Hot breath sprayed onto his face, and the gleaming white teeth were as sharp as daggers. He had no doubt that this bite would tear his neck in two.

The white lion's claws had already dug into the skin of the masked man's shoulder, but the physical pain was far less intense than the fear in his heart.

The man with the grotesque face closed his eyes in despair, awaiting death. After a good ten seconds, the imagined pain did not come. The man slowly opened his eyes and saw a pair of green eyes still staring intently at him. His shoulders were being pressed firmly to the ground by the big dog's paws. He couldn't muster any of the strength he usually prided himself on.

If it were Zhuang Rui, he certainly wouldn't dare to look into that yin-yang face so closely. However, in the eyes of the white lion, there was no such thing as beauty or ugliness. It was just waiting for Zhuang

Rui's order to tear this man's throat apart. Its beastly nature made the white lion's blood boil, and the gasps it exhaled gradually became rougher.

"Spare me, spare me, help me, help me..."

Zhuang Rui prevented the white lion from biting down, but he also didn't let it let go. After about three minutes, the masked man finally couldn't hold on any longer. The white lion's eyes, which looked like they were looking at a dead man, completely broke down his mental defenses. His arrogant demeanor from before had disappeared, and he started yelling for help at the top of his lungs.

"Grandson, who do you think you are, your grandfather? Why aren't you being arrogant anymore?"

Zhuang Rui was genuinely annoyed by the man's insults, but now he was in a great mood. He also had a bit of a wicked sense of humor and hadn't had enough of the grimace-faced man's cries for help. So he wouldn't let Bai Shi get up, took out a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and started smoking contentedly.

"You're the grandfather and I'm the grandson, okay? You should make this big guy let me go first."

The man with the grimacing face was almost crying when he spoke. He was brave but not stupid; he cared a lot about his life.

This man's name is Yu Sansheng. He is from Luoyang, Henan Province. He is the third child in his generation. His name was given to him by his grandfather, and it was taken from the story of Zengzi's "examining oneself three times a day." The original intention was to encourage him to reflect on his actions when he grew up.

However, Yu Sansheng was never one to be trifled with from a young age. Coupled with his tall and burly stature, most people gave him a wide berth, which fostered his domineering personality. His level of education was limited to being able to write his own name; as for what it meant, one would have to ask his dead grandfather.

Yu Sansheng's face was originally the same as that of an ordinary person, but an accident disfigured him.

More than a decade ago, he went with Boss Yu to plunder a royal tomb in Hubei. Normally, given his size, it would be difficult for him to squeeze into the tomb, so he would usually keep watch outside. However, the tomb that Lao Ba dug that time was relatively large, and given his size, he was able to go down into it.

Normally, when tomb raiders break into a tomb, one person goes in to retrieve the items while another person stays outside to catch them. However, since Boss Yu has many men, usually two people go in while three to five people keep watch outside.

Yu Sansheng had also followed Yu Laoda to plunder more than ten ancient tombs, but he had never gone down into one himself. He was often ridiculed by Lao Ba, and feeling resentful, he finally went down with Lao Ba that time.

It was a tomb where an emperor and empress were buried together. However, once inside, they discovered a tomb robber's hole, meaning that at least one group of tomb robbers had visited the site over the past thousand years. The tomb had been almost completely emptied. One of the two coffins was empty, with the body dragged out and bones scattered all over the ground. The lid of the other coffin had also been opened halfway.

Most ancient tombs that have survived to this day have been looted, so the two weren't too disappointed. They prepared to open the coffin lid and take a look, and if there was nothing there, they would leave quickly.

Yu Sansheng was strong, and it was his first time going down into a tomb. In order to show off his strength and courage, he went up and lifted the coffin lid without Lao Ba's help. Everyone was stunned.

Inside the large coffin were two corpses. The clothes on both corpses had rotted away. The flesh of one corpse had completely decayed, revealing slightly grayish bones. However, the other female corpse was completely blackened, emaciated, and her muscles had not rotted. Her eyes were gone, staring at the two people outside the coffin with a pair of dark eye sockets.

What intrigued the two even more was that several objects were visible between the two corpses. When a strong flashlight was used to illuminate them, jade pendants and gold hairpins were visible, suggesting that there were quite a few interesting items.

"Hey big oaf, aren't you supposed to be brave? How come you're dumbfounded when you see a dried corpse? I'll go up there and learn from the boss what you do, hahaha..."

Lao Ba was short and naturally somewhat insecure. Although he and the tall Yu Sansheng were cousins, the two had never gotten along. Seeing Yu Sansheng's appearance, he couldn't help but make a mocking remark.

"Move aside, I'll take the body out, you go get the things."

Yu Laosan, feeling embarrassed by Lao Ba's words, climbed up.

In ancient times, the coffin and outer coffin were integrated, meaning that there was an outer coffin outside the main coffin, which was actually a larger coffin.

After climbing onto the coffin, Yu Laosan bent down to lift the female corpse out. He had heard many stories about corpses in tomb raiding, so he wasn't too scared. However, he didn't expect that the wooden coffin, after thousands of years of erosion, was already too weak to withstand the weight.

With a "crackling" sound, the coffin beneath Yu Laosan's feet suddenly shattered. This shattering caused Yu Laosan, who was bent over, to fall headfirst into the coffin.

Yu Laosan instinctively reached out his right hand to support himself inside the coffin, but unexpectedly, he pressed it against the female corpse's abdomen. To his horror, as the female corpse's abdomen bulged, a stream of black viscous liquid spurted out of the corpse's mouth. Because the distance was too close, Yu Laosan only had time to close his eyes and turn his face to the side before the other half of his face and neck were sprayed directly into him.

"It's come back to life!!!"

The burning pain made Yu Laosan scream, which frightened Lao Ba so much that he dared not continue to retrieve the items. He quickly pulled Yu Laosan up from the tunnel and rushed him to the hospital that night.

Upon examination, the black liquid on Yu Laosan's face was found to be a toxic liquid. Although it was not life-threatening, the black color had seeped into his skin and could not be removed.

Later, Boss Yu and Lao Ba went down into the tomb themselves. After careful observation, they concluded that the female corpse must have been given a deadly poison before burial to prevent it from decaying. The corpse next to her was likely left by tomb robbers, probably because they were contaminated by the poison in the corpse's stomach when they moved it.

The reason why Yu Laosan did not die after being sprayed with the toxin may be because of the long time that had passed and the amount of toxin was not very large, which caused only a burn to the skin and was not fatal.

The once perfectly fine young man became like a ghost. He couldn't even find a wife. He would go to the hair salon to relieve his pent-up desires, but the ladies would always make excuses. From then on, Yu Sansheng's personality became increasingly irritable and eccentric.

However, facing a ferocious beast the size of a calf and the danger of death, the cowardice in the face-wearing man's heart was revealed.

Yingning and the little girl, who had just seen the masked man jump over the railing and had already run dozens of meters away in fright, were now stunned. They hadn't seen the whole process of the white lion tackling the masked man; they were just worried about Zhuang Rui while running away and glanced back, only to find that the arrogant guy was already lying on the ground, shouting for help.

This is exactly like using brine to curdle tofu; one thing subdues another.

Chapters 246-247: Father Murder and Mother Murder

"Brother Zhuang, your Tibetan Mastiff is really amazing!"

Seeing that the danger had passed, the two quickly ran back. The little girl's affection for the white lion was overflowing; she looked as if she wanted to rush over, hug, and kiss it.

"Don't go over there..."

Zhuang Rui grabbed Meng Qiuqian. The White Lion had only managed to subdue this man by surprise. If he were to let him go, the White Lion might hurt him if it tried to subdue him again.

"My goodness, whose dog is that? Pull it away quickly, someone's going to get hurt!"

Just then, Er Mao and Fan Cuo arrived, panting heavily, followed by an old woman who was one of the people who delivered lunch. Upon seeing the person and dog lying on the ground, she couldn't help but shout loudly.

Zhuang Rui ignored the old woman and instead asked Er Mao, "Er Mao, is this person from your village? Why is he trying to attack people with a knife right away?"

"He's not from our village. This is Yu Laosan, a relative of a family in our village. Brother Zhuang, come here, I'll tell you..."

Er Mao glanced at the man on the ground, pulled Zhuang Rui a dozen meters away, and whispered to Zhuang Rui about the man's background.

It turns out that Yu Laosan came to Liujiazhuang a year ago. He was a relative of Yu Laoda from Henan. Because he was rather ugly, he couldn't stay outside anymore, so he came here with Yu Laoda to make a living.

Farmers are generally simple and honest. Although Yu Laosan looked rather frightening, no one laughed at him. Who knew that Yu Laosan had a bad drinking habit? When he was drunk, he liked to pick fights and often harassed the young wives and girls in the village.

Liu Family Village is a place where martial arts are passed down through generations, and there are many martial arts masters in the village. After teaching Yu Laosan a lesson a few times, Yu Laoda used the excuse that this relative was too troublesome and sent him to this mountain valley to look after the orchard.

Er Mao, fearing someone might die, whispered to Zhuang Rui, "Brother Zhuang, let him go. We're here; he won't dare cause trouble..."

"White Lion, come here..."

Zhuang Rui called out, and the white lion stuck out its blood-red tongue and licked Yu Laosan's face before releasing its paws and running back to Zhuang Rui's side.

"Murder! Someone's been bitten to death!"

This lick really scared Yu Laosan. He started howling again. After shouting a few times, he realized that the big dog was gone. He quickly got up, but before he could even stand up straight, he scrambled over the fence. He didn't even realize that his shorts, which were covering his body, had fallen down to his knees. He looked at the white lion next to Zhuang Rui with lingering fear.

"rogue....."

The little girl spat and turned her face away.

"Let us in. We just need to take some soil samples; we won't damage your orchard..."

When Zhuang Rui heard that the orchard was indeed contracted by people from Liujiashuang, he didn't want to cause too much trouble with them, after all, he was still Lao San's guest.

"You think you can just say you won't cause any damage? What if those Luoyang shovels you're carrying damage the tree roots? This orchard is contracted by my older brother. Nobody is allowed to come in without his permission."

Yu Laosan also came to his senses at this time. Although he dared not go out to cause trouble again, he was still very arrogant and refused to let Zhuang Rui and the others in no matter what.

"Luoyang shovel?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned when he heard the term from Yu Laosan. Although he had heard of the famous Luoyang shovel before, he would not have recognized it as such if he had not seen it with his own eyes. Why could Yu Laosan recognize it so easily?

Perhaps they've all seen too many tomb raiders in Shaanxi, Zhuang Rui thought, recalling what Er Mao had once told him, and found an explanation, though a sliver of doubt remained in his heart.

"Yes, this is an orchard contracted by the Yu brothers in our village. If you go in and dig randomly, who will be responsible for the losses?"

The middle-aged woman who came with Er Mao also spoke in favor of Yu Laosan. However, Zhuang Rui found it strange that among the three or four old women who came to deliver the food, only she came to stand up for him.

"Xiao Zhuang, you guys dig some exploratory holes around here first to check the soil quality. Don't argue with the villagers."

Professor Meng also received the news and came over, leaning on a hiking stick.

"Grandpa, this person is unreasonable and even acts like a hooligan!" the little girl complained. She had never seen anything so ugly before, and her heart was still pounding.

Professor Meng ignored his granddaughter and instructed Zhuang Rui and the others, "Alright, it's too hot today. You guys take some samples of the soil around here, and then we'll head back."

Zhuang Rui and the others agreed and each found a spot to probe downwards with their Luoyang shovels. When Yu Laosan saw that the group no longer wanted to enter the orchard, he turned around and went back, cursing.

Taking soil samples with a Luoyang shovel is also a physically demanding task. At the beginning, you have to use all your strength to smash the shovel down. After the Luoyang shovel is inserted into the soil, it is lifted up, and a cylindrical tube of soil will be brought up from the middle of the semi-circular shovel.

When Zhuang Rui first started digging, he found it quite difficult. However, after digging a small pit about 20 to 30 centimeters in diameter and about two meters deep, he found a trick. It turned out that the deeper he went, the easier it became. Once the hole was deep enough, he could use the inertia generated by the Luoyang shovel itself to penetrate into the soil, and he only needed to lift the shovel up.

Professor Meng also followed Zhuang Rui, teaching him how to exert force and generate power. There is also a trick to it; you can use the weight of the Luoyang shovel to strike it down with very little force.

After Professor Meng's instruction, Zhuang Rui grasped the knack and his movements became more skillful. In addition, he could use his spiritual energy to eliminate the soreness and weakness in his arms, so he basically repeated the same action like a robot, leaving the little girl next to him dumbfounded.

While Xiao Fan and Ying Ning were still struggling with the first exploratory hole, Zhuang Rui had already started digging the third exploratory hole. The first two were dug to a depth of fourteen or fifteen meters, and after the little girl's examination, no mature soil was found in the soil brought out by the Luoyang shovel.

Zhuang Rui is also learning to distinguish between fertile soil and raw soil, which is an important basis for discovering whether there are underground tombs.

Topsoil can also be called multicolored soil because when digging a grave, topsoil and raw soil of different colors are dug out from the pit. After burial, these mixed soils are backfilled into the pit, forming what is known as multicolored soil. Under normal circumstances, if the soil brought out by the Luoyang shovel is multicolored soil, there is a high probability that there is a grave below.

Furthermore, the distribution of the burial pit can be discerned from the mixed soil. If the mixed soil is thin and scattered, it may be a tomb passage. If it is thick, concentrated, and plentiful, it may be a burial chamber. Thus, by examining the soil, the burial chamber can be located.

As for how to distinguish between mature soil and raw soil, it requires some experience. Simply put, some mixed soil may contain cultural relics such as weeds, construction waste, and human remains, while native soil does not.

Of course, some mixed soil is also relatively pure, so you need to observe the soil quality carefully. Generally speaking, soil contains capillaries. The capillaries in mixed soil are disordered, while the capillaries in native soil are basically vertical.

These things are difficult to grasp intuitively through oral or written descriptions. Under the guidance of the little girl, Zhuang Rui identified the soil brought out by the Luoyang shovel one by one and understood the raw soil. However, after digging four exploratory holes more than ten meters deep, he still did not find any mixed soil.

Although Zhuang Rui would use his spiritual energy to examine the underground conditions before each location he chose to dig with his Luoyang shovel, the soil always felt the same to him. Occasionally there would be some rocks or rotten tree roots, but there were no tombs.

"Thump!"

With a dull thud as the Luoyang shovel struck the soil, Zhuang Rui quickly pulled the rope with both hands, lifting the shovel up and tapping it on the ground a few times to scatter the soil it had brought up.

This was already his fifth exploratory burrow. The others nearby were already dumbfounded. Zhuang Rui looked like a refined and gentle man, but no one expected that he had such great strength and endurance. No wonder he dared to compete with that burly man with the two-faced expression earlier.

"Ahem... Xiao Zhuang, take a break. Rome wasn't built in a day. When we get back to the excavation site, I'll show you the mottled soil..."

Professor Meng was also finding Zhuang Rui's enthusiasm a bit overwhelming. When he was young, he would need to rest for half a day after digging two exploratory holes. He never expected that this young man was not only knowledgeable but also a fierce warrior.

"It's alright, I'm not tired, Professor Meng. I'll rest after I finish this caving."

While casually chatting with Professor Meng, Zhuang Rui picked up the Luoyang shovel again. The exploratory hole they were digging was now very close to the orchard. Judging from the length of the rope that had been lowered, the hole was now fourteen or fifteen meters deep.

"Hmm, the color of this soil is a bit off?"

Zhuang Rui noticed that the tube of soil brought up by the Luoyang shovel didn't crumble after hitting the ground; instead, it stood upright in a cylindrical shape, and the soil's color was brown, completely different from the soil sample he had just taken.

Zhuang Rui squatted down and used his hands to pry open the soil. He saw that the brown color was in the form of a line. He rubbed it with his fingers and it immediately turned into powder, which didn't seem like soil at all.

Professor Meng's expression turned serious. He looked around and said, "This brown color isn't soil."

"Not soil?" Zhuang Rui was taken aback.

"Yes, these are the marks left after the wood rotted in the soil. You can see that the edges are very neat and the grain is straight. It's not wood that died and rotted naturally, but rather wood that has been processed."

As Professor Meng spoke, he stood up and looked at the orchard not far away, almost to himself, saying, "It really is that place. I wonder how much can still be left."

"What did you say?" Zhuang Rui didn't hear Professor Meng's words clearly.

"It's nothing, just go tell them they're done for the day..."

Professor Meng did not answer Zhuang Rui's question. He stomped on the clod of earth, broke it up, and turned to leave, leaving a bewildered Zhuang Rui standing there dumbfounded.

"This...isn't it said that there are tombs below the Five-Colored Soil? How did they leave?"

Zhuang Rui was somewhat puzzled by Professor Meng's actions. Weren't they here to excavate the imperial tomb? Judging from Professor Meng's appearance, he didn't seem to care much about the location of the tomb. Seeing Professor Meng walking away, Zhuang Rui had no choice but to follow.

Back at the excavation site, Professor Meng called out to everyone, packed up their tools, and headed back. The villagers were all happy; after all, they only got fifty yuan a day's work, so who wouldn't be happy to do less work? They walked back to the village in groups of three or five.

"Xiao Fan, I found some mature soil in the cave I was exploring earlier, so why did Professor Meng call me back?"

Zhuang Rui had been keeping this question in mind, so he asked Fan Cuo, who was walking beside him.

"Perhaps the teacher has other ideas? Brother Zhuang, listening to the teacher is the right thing to do."

It's often said that graduate students are just their supervisors' employees. Fan Cuo and Ying Ning only need to work on their research projects with their professor; they don't need to worry about anything else. In any case, Professor Meng treats them well. They eat and live at his home and receive a few hundred yuan in living allowance every month. Compared to those students who are exploited by their supervisors and don't get a penny, they are much better off.

Zhuang Rui could only keep his questions to himself. More than an hour later, the group returned to the village. The county officials all had motorcycles and drove directly from the village back to the county. Professor Meng and the others also returned to the farmhouse they were renting. Zhuang Rui noticed that their place was not far from Lao San's house, only three or five households away.

Zhuang Rui asked around and found there were still vacant rooms available, so he simply went to Lao San, told him about it, and moved in with Professor Meng and the others. After all, he couldn't keep occupying Lao San's new house forever.

...

"Woof...woof woof..."

"Don't call out, it's Big Foot Sister-in-law! You've brought back the food?"

When Old Yu heard the dogs barking in the yard, he quickly came out and tied up the two wolfhounds.

"Brother Yu, I ran all the way back to tell you that the archaeological team wanted to dig in your orchard, but I stopped them. You'd better think of a solution quickly, because the fruit will be ripe in two months."

As soon as Yu Laoda opened the courtyard gate, the old woman who had just delivered food to the archaeological team started gesturing excitedly at him, spitting all over his face.

"Hehe, Big Foot Sister-in-law, they're government officials, can we stop them? I really have to thank you for this today. By the way, my nephew got married the year before last, and I happened to be visiting relatives in Henan. Here, take this money, consider it my gift money."

A sinister glint flashed in Yu Laoda's eyes, but he quickly concealed it. He pulled a crumpled hundred-yuan bill from his pocket, feigned distress, and handed the money to Big Foot Sister-in-law.

"Oh dear, I can't accept that. Just give me thirty or fifty yuan. A hundred is too much..."

Big Foot Sister-in-law said she was sorry, but she had already taken the money. She pinched it between two fingers and shook it. After hearing the crisp sound, she put the money in her pocket with satisfaction, muttering, "I say, Yu brothers, go and find the secretary. We can't let those people do whatever they want. We've planted fruit trees for several years. If they're all cut down, what a huge loss that would be."

"Hey, Big Foot Sister-in-law, don't you know? I'm an honest person, and I'm not good with words. If the government really wants to do this, there's nothing I can do. The Party Secretary isn't even familiar with us, you see..."

Old Yu looked worried and rummaged around in his pocket for a while before finally finding a fifty-yuan note, which he insisted on giving to Big Foot Sister-in-law.

“This orchard was contracted to you by our village. We’ve been losing money for the past few years, as everyone can see. Don’t worry, Yu brothers, I’ll go to the Party Secretary’s house tonight. Your second uncle will definitely give me face.”

Big Foot Sister clutched the money in her hand and patted her chest, saying that she hadn't expected Boss Yu to be so generous. Just a few days ago, he had told her to be careful of the archaeological team when delivering food, so they wouldn't dig up her orchard. And he had already given her 150 yuan. She had to help out, otherwise, she would feel a bit uneasy about taking the money.

Old Master Yu rubbed his hands together, looked at the cold stove in the house, and said a little embarrassedly, "Then I really have to thank you, Sister-in-law Big Foot. Have a meal here before you leave. Look, my wife isn't home, I'll go buy some groceries."

"No need, brother, just wait and see. I'll go to my second uncle's place later and make sure they don't touch your orchard." Big Foot Sister-in-law looked at the family's impoverished state, secretly pursed her lips, and walked out.

After thanking the old woman profusely and seeing her off, Yu Ku's face darkened. He looked around, turned back, closed the courtyard gate, and hurriedly went into the house.

It's no exaggeration to say that Old Master Yu's family was extremely poor. They had three single-story houses and a courtyard. Apart from a bed, a cabinet, and a dining table in the main house, there was hardly any other furniture. It wasn't always like this, but a few years ago, when Old Master Yu contracted that orchard, he sold off all his belongings, and the news spread throughout the town.

After returning to his room, Yu Ku closed the door tightly, plunging the room into darkness. Without turning on the light, Yu Ku grabbed a pair of scissors from the table, walked to the bedside, and knelt down. He tapped on a blue brick under the headboard, and after hearing a hollow echo, he inserted the scissors into the gap and pried the brick up.

The brick was hollow underneath, and Yu Ku reached inside to take out a small handbag before standing up.

Opening the handbag, besides a stack of hundred-dollar bills and a mobile phone, there was also a delicate handgun, only the size of a palm. If a gun enthusiast saw it, he would definitely recognize it at a glance as the Browning pistol known as the "Thunder in the Palm." Next to the pistol, there was a magazine full of bright orange bullets.

Instead of using his pistol, Boss Yu took out his cell phone, turned it on, and, seeing that there was a signal, made a call.

"Brother, what's the matter that requires a phone call?"

The phone rang with Lao Ba's somewhat deep voice.

"We'll make our move at 8 p.m. the day after tomorrow. Tell Xiao Si to come to our house at noon the day after tomorrow and bring the detonators and explosives. Also, have Xiao Qi prepare a car and meet us at the pillbox in Sanlitun, the village, that night."

Yu Ku gave a series of orders. If you turned on the light, you would see that his originally honest face had become somewhat distorted and ferocious.

"Brother, what's going on? Didn't we agree to start working after those archaeologists left?"

Lao Ba asked in confusion on the phone, "I just left Yu Ku's place this morning, I didn't expect you to change your mind this afternoon."

"There's no time. Those archaeological team members should have discovered that the royal tomb is under the orchard. If it weren't for Lao San stopping us today, they would have gone in. I can only stall for three to five days. Any later and it might be exposed. Have you forgotten what else is buried down there?"

Boss Yu's voice was somewhat sinister, which made Lao Ba on the other end of the phone tremble. Of course, he knew what was buried in that forest. He had dug the pit himself when the five bodies were buried.

"Brother, let's get out of here now. The money we've earned over the years is enough for us to live on abroad for the rest of our lives." Old Eight felt a chill run down his spine when he thought of the guy who had turned into fertilizer for the fruit trees.

Upon hearing Lao Ba's words, Yu Ku flew into a rage, a murderous glint in his eyes. He lowered his voice and cursed fiercely, "Bullshit! I've been plotting here for seven or eight years, how could I give up? If Lao Liu hadn't been caught, the stuff would have been taken long ago. Damn it, thank goodness Lao Liu is dead, otherwise we'd all be in trouble..."

Thinking of the people Yu Ku had personally strangled to death, Lao Ba dared not offend Boss Yu any longer and quickly replied, "I understand, brother, please put it down. I'll take care of everything..."

"Yes, if anything changes, don't make this call. Same as always, send a telegram to the village saying there's an emergency in Henan..."

After giving his instructions, Boss Yu hung up the phone, turned it off, changed the SIM card, put the phone back in his bag, and took out a small notebook from under the stack of hundred-yuan bills. He then flipped through it and looked at it.

It turned out that there were seven or eight passports hidden under the money, not only Yu Ku's own, but also those of several of his subordinates. They were all kept with him in case things went wrong one day, so they could escape abroad. However, some of those people are no longer alive.

By now, everyone should understand that Yu Ku's parents actually came from a family of tomb raiders in Luoyang, Henan. During the great upheavals that swept the country in the last century, the Yu family, who had been digging up graves before liberation, were also affected. Helpless, Yu's father, who had just gotten married, fled to Liujiazhuang with his wife.

The quiet life in Liujiazhuang made Yu's father forget his origins, and he lived there for more than 20 years. However, after the reform and opening up, Yu's father missed his family and took his eldest son back to Henan to visit relatives. When he returned, he found that his brothers, who were originally dirt poor, had all become wealthy.

Upon inquiring, Mr. Yu learned that during the great upheaval more than 20 years ago, one of his cousins had smuggled himself to Hong Kong. A few years ago, he returned to his hometown to visit relatives and encouraged his family to resume their old business. This cousin was specifically responsible for excavating in Hong Kong, which led to the discovery of several ancient tombs and a significant increase in the family's wealth.

Having lived a quiet life for decades, Yu's father didn't want to get involved anymore. He wanted to take his son back to Liujiazhuang, but Yu Ku, who was usually quiet and somewhat listless, refused to go back this time and insisted on making his way in the world.

Unable to dissuade his son, Yu's father had no choice but to return to Liujiazhuang alone. Yu Ku, like a bird released from its cage, witnessed a new world he had never known before.

Following one of his cousins, Yu Ku displayed an unparalleled aptitude for tomb raiding. He learned things very quickly and seemed to have an innate understanding of feng shui and geomancy, which were difficult for ordinary people to comprehend. After raiding several ancient tombs with his cousin, Yu Ku was able to find tombs independently.

After about four or five years, Yu Ku, relying on his innate talent for tomb raiding and the skills he had learned from the martial arts masters of Liu Family Village since childhood, ousted his uncle from the position of head of the family and firmly grasped the tomb raiding gang.

After Yu Laoda took power, and with the domestic economy booming, his tomb-robbing gang became even more rampant. In the early 1990s, their footprints covered Shaanxi, Henan, Hebei, Shandong, Xinjiang and other places, and a large number of precious cultural relics flowed abroad through his hands.

No one would have guessed that the eldest son of the Yu family, who was a dull old man in Liujiazhuang and whose eyes would glaze over at the sight of young women, was actually a man who frequented luxury hotels, rode in high-end cars, and had been to Hong Kong and the United States several times. He even kept several college students as mistresses, putting on the airs of a successful man.

Despite his success outside, Boss Yu was not complacent. Like a cunning rabbit with three burrows, he used Liu Family Village as his safe haven. Every time he returned to Liu Family Village, he was dressed in rags, looking like he was doing very poorly, which even fooled his parents and younger brother.

In the mid-1990s, when Yu Laoda returned home, he overheard his father talking about the origin of Liujiazhuang while drinking with him. It turned out that it was originally the place where the guards of the Tang Dynasty imperial tombs lived, and it gradually evolved into the Liujiazhuang we know today.

The presence of a guard army meant that this place was the location of an imperial tomb. Old Yu couldn't help but have an idea. In the following days, he ran to the mountain valley every day. With his knowledge over the past few years, he naturally recognized that auspicious place.

Yu's father also came from a family of tomb raiders and had lived here for decades. He had long since figured out where the imperial tomb was, but he did not want to disrupt their peaceful life. When he discovered his son's actions, he immediately understood what Yu Ku had been doing all these years.

After discovering Yu Ku's motives, Yu's father severely reprimanded his son, saying that if he dared to rob the imperial tombs, he would put aside his own family ties and report him to the police.

In fact, Yu's father only wanted to dissuade Yu Ku from his idea, but he did not expect that Yu Ku had committed heinous crimes over the years and had several lives on his hands. If any one of them were exposed, he would definitely be shot.

A cold-hearted person like Yu Laoda cannot tolerate the slightest threat. After being warned by his father twice, he finally decided to kill his parents. He found an opportunity to secretly poison their food, and then pretended to be a filial son and grandson, crying and wailing as he buried them.

For the sake of the imperial tomb in the mountain valley, Boss Yu settled down in Liu Family Village and waited for an opportunity to dig a tunnel at the place where Professor Meng was digging, but that was not where the imperial tomb was located.

Chapter 248 Full of Mechanisms

Due to the numerous imperial tombs in Shaanxi, it became a haven for tomb raiders in the 1980s. After the 1990s, local authorities intensified their crackdown on tomb raiding, offering rewards for reporting such activities. In places like Liujiazhuang, patrol teams frequently passed through.

Therefore, Boss Yu was very careful and it took him five or six years to find the exact location of the imperial tomb. So last year, Boss Yu used some means to sublet the orchard that was originally contracted by someone else at a high price.

With the orchard as cover, Boss Yu quickly located the underground palace. To his ecstatic surprise, this underground palace, which was very likely the mausoleum of Emperor Wenzong of Tang, had never been looted. This meant that a large number of precious cultural relics inside would belong to him.

The reason why Boss Yu came to this conclusion was that after they opened up the tomb passage, they found that it was a tomb carved into the mountain, consisting of three parts: the tomb passage, the tomb pit, and the tomb chamber. For tombs like this, one can only enter through the tomb passage by finding the right direction, and it is impossible to enter the tomb chamber by digging a hole in the tomb wall.

More importantly, after entering the tomb passage, they found no tomb-raiding holes dug by others, nor any traces of outsiders having entered. In addition, they surprisingly found a series of trapdoors used for anti-theft in the passage.

Linked trapdoors are typically used in large tombs, usually set up in the tomb passage. Their width is roughly the same as the width of the tomb passage, and their length often exceeds one meter. Such dimensions make it difficult for unsuspecting tomb raiders to cross them, leaving them with no way to escape and ultimately causing them to fall into the trap.

The structure of the trapdoor is actually quite simple: wooden planks are laid over the pit, with heavy objects hanging on both sides. Once a person steps on them and falls into the trap, the trapdoor will automatically return to its original state, quietly waiting for the next tomb raider to disturb the tomb.

Some multi-tiered trapdoors are even more ingeniously designed, with an axle installed in the middle of the trapdoor. Once a person triggers the mechanism, their body is already suspended in mid-air, unable to move backward.

The traps under the trapdoors are usually dug quite deep to prevent tomb raiders who fall in from climbing back up. The bottom of the trap is usually covered with sharp blades, such as knives, guns, and cones, with the tips pointing upwards. If anyone falls down from above, they will hardly escape being pierced through the heart by the blades.

In their efforts to explore the tomb passage, Yu Laoda and his gang suffered heavy losses. At the time, there were two people walking in front of them: one was Lao Ba, and the other was a gang member surnamed Cui.

As mentioned earlier, the members of these tomb raiding gangs are basically family members, and the Yu family is no exception. However, a few years ago, when the demand for goods from Hong Kong was urgent, only three or four people in the family were engaged in this business, so they recruited a few more members from outside.

All five men were surnamed Cui and were from Luoyang, Henan. They were originally a small tomb-raiding gang, but later joined Yu Laoda's gang. The man in front stepped on the trapdoor and was swallowed up by it before he could even react. The people above could only hear a scream of agony.

Old Eight reacted quickly. When he missed a step, he pushed the man surnamed Cui and used the momentum to flip his body backward, thus escaping with his life.

After the group carefully opened the flap, they shone their flashlights on the man below and saw that he had several sharp blades piercing his chest. He was already dead beyond any doubt, and his condition was gruesome.

After this incident, Boss Yu and the others did not dare to continue down and instead returned to the ground to discuss the matter.

Then another problem arose. The deceased was surnamed Cui, and before he died, he had been pushed by Lao Ba. Afterwards, the other men surnamed Cui glared angrily at Lao Ba and almost came to blows. Only after Yu Laoda intervened were things calmed down, but everyone still harbored resentment.

Yu Laoba was Yu Ku's cousin and had always followed Yu Laoda wholeheartedly. In addition, he was exceptionally talented. Although he was short, he had a unique advantage in tomb exploration and digging tunnels. He was always the one who went down into the tomb to retrieve burial objects. Therefore, Yu Laoda often showed favoritism towards Laoba in his words.

The Cui brothers were resentful, so they proposed to the eldest brother, Yu, that they should disband their gang, go their separate ways, and never set foot in Shaanxi again.

Upon hearing this, Yu Laoda was immediately filled with murderous intent. How could he possibly let these people leave alive? He had even eliminated his own parents for the sake of this imperial tomb, and he would never give these people a chance to leak the news.

However, given Boss Yu's shrewdness, he naturally wouldn't show it on his face. He immediately agreed with a smile, saying that since they were brothers, they should have some food and drinks that night to part on good terms.

That evening, Boss Yu set out food and drinks in the orchard and ate and drank with everyone. The Cui brothers knew Boss Yu very well and were not without their guard. They would not touch any of the dishes that Boss Yu had not touched. The wine was fine, though, because Boss Yu was drinking from the same bottle.

Who knew that even with such precautions, they still fell into Boss Yu's trap. The wine was drugged, but Boss Yu and his men had taken the antidote beforehand. After drugging the Cui brothers, Boss Yu revealed his true colors and personally strangled them to death, then buried them under the fruit trees to be used as fertilizer.

After dealing with the Cui brothers, Yu Laoda and his men sneaked back into the tomb passage. Using long wooden poles, they located the interconnected trapdoors and ordered several foldable and extendable alloy ladders. They placed the ladders over the trapdoors and were then able to pass through.

After passing through a series of trapdoors, Boss Yu and his group still couldn't enter the tomb chamber because they encountered a huge rock blocking the entrance. This is a common tactic used in Han and Tang dynasty royal tombs. More than ten huge rocks, each weighing over a thousand kilograms, blocked Boss Yu and his group's way.

Seeing the huge rock blocking his way, Old Yu was not angry but happy. This meant that the imperial tomb had definitely not been visited by anyone before. He was quite patient. Under the pretext of guarding the orchard, he built a wooden house in the orchard and settled down there.

Each day, one person would stay upstairs to keep watch, while two others would go down into the tomb passage. Because there were so many huge stones, using explosives could very likely cause the tomb passage to collapse. The only option was to use a ground anchor drill to crack the boulders little by little, and then transport the rubble to the surface.

It took more than a year to clear away all the huge rocks blocking the way. Just as Boss Yu was about to deal with the last obstacle, the Zilai Stone, a major incident occurred outside.

Yu Laoda and his accomplices had been robbing tombs for over a decade, accumulating a considerable number of valuable artifacts. They also maintained constant contact with overseas entities, smuggling cultural relics out of the country one after another.

Originally, this matter was handled by Yu Laoda himself. However, since Emperor Wenzong's mausoleum was near Liujiazhuang, if he was not there, leaving Yu Laosan and a few others would easily arouse suspicion. So, he handed over the business of trading with Hong Kong to his cousin Yu Laoliu. Unexpectedly, the smuggling of Han Dynasty artifacts failed, and Yu Laoliu was shot dead on the spot for violently resisting arrest.

Apart from the core members of Yu Laoda's tomb raiding gang, who were his own brothers, the rest were all peripheral members. Their names and origins were completely unknown. Originally, with Yu Laoliu dead, the clues would have been lost.

However, Yu Laoliu was not cautious enough. Once, after drinking, he mentioned the mausoleum of Emperor Wenzong of Tang to his subordinates. The subordinates were arrested by the police, which led some people to believe that the Flying Horse of Gansu came from Emperor Wenzong's tomb. In order to protect the other cultural relics in Emperor Wenzong's tomb, Professor Meng and others came here.

Originally, when the archaeological team arrived in Liujiazhuang, Yu Laoda had already considered leaving. However, in the following days, he discovered that the place the archaeological team was excavating was the same place where he had previously dug a tunnel to steal treasures. They did not find the real imperial tomb, which gave him a glimmer of hope. He thought he could wait until the archaeological team left, retrieve the items from the imperial tomb, and then leave.

However, the information that Big Foot Sister-in-law had just told him gave Boss Yu a bad feeling, as if a big net was being cast upon him. But his greed still made Boss Yu decide to take action to open the last mechanism, the self-closing stone, the day after tomorrow.

The reason for choosing the day after tomorrow was that it was Liu Changfa's wedding day in the village. Firstly, firecrackers would be set off, which would cover up the sound of the explosives. Secondly, many guests would come to Liu Family Village, so his men would not be conspicuous if they sneaked in. It would also help them escape after the crime was accomplished. Boss Yu had already taken all these factors into account.

The key issue now is whether the archaeological team can be delayed until the day after tomorrow to conduct their exploration of the orchard. Old Master Yu knows that if the village agrees to let the archaeological team dig holes in the orchard, with the help of those armed police officers, he simply cannot stop them, and the secret will inevitably be exposed.

After putting his passport back into his bag, Boss Yu took out the gun, hesitated for a moment, and then put it back. In the sweltering heat of the countryside, most men were shirtless, wearing only shorts, so there was nowhere to hide a gun.

Crouching down, Old Yu put the bag back into the hidden compartment under the blue bricks. After laying the bricks back on, he grabbed a handful of dust, sprinkled it on, blew on it, and checked that there were no flaws before standing up, opening the door, and going out.

After leaving his house, Old Yu went straight to the village store, took out 100 yuan and bought four bottles of 48° Xifeng liquor. He put the 20 yuan change in his pocket and carried the liquor to the village secretary's house.

"Second Uncle, I've come to see you. I didn't bring much, but I did bring you a few bottles of wine."

Upon entering the village secretary's house, Old Yu shouted and placed the wine in his hand on the table.

Chapter 249 Southern and Northern Schools

"You're already here, why bother buying wine? You've lost a lot of money these past few years contracting the orchard, haven't you?"

The second uncle Yu Ku mentioned was about sixty years old, not very tall, with a wrinkled face, and was holding a long pipe, puffing away.

"That's right, Uncle. You know, I've been working away from home for so many years and only managed to save a little money. I even sold all the valuables in the house to raise enough money to lease the orchard. But today, Aunt Big Foot said that those archaeologists want to dig up the trees in the orchard. How am I supposed to live now..."

As soon as Yu Ku entered, he began to complain. He squatted down by the threshold, rubbed his eyes with his dirty hands, and put on a pitiful look.

"Well, don't worry, kid. Si'er's wife just told me about this too. But others haven't dug it up yet. Don't worry, even if they want to touch your orchard, they'll compensate you. Didn't Er Mao's uncle's melon patch on the east side get several thousand yuan in compensation?"

Secretary Liu took a puff of his pipe, tapped the butt against the edge of the table a few times, and the burnt-out ash fell to the ground.

"Second Uncle, my orchard cost tens of thousands of yuan, and it'll be fruiting in just two months. It can't compare to that melon patch..."

Old Yu pulled out a crumpled pack of Golden Monkey cigarettes from his pocket, stood up, and offered one to Secretary Liu.

"Why can't you understand? The price for a melon patch is the price for a melon patch, and the price for an orchard is the price for an orchard. Do you think the village would let you suffer a loss? They haven't come to me yet. I'll focus on the long hair issue these next few days, and we'll talk about it after this is over..."

Secretary Liu did not accept the cigarette offered by Old Man Yu. Instead, he grabbed a handful of loose tobacco from his pipe, stuffed it into the bowl, and then lit it with a match.

The village secretary, Liu, and Liu Changfa are somewhat related. Liu Changfa is the first person from Liujiazhuang to be admitted to university in many years. In ancient times, he would have been a top scholar. Because of this, people from Liujiazhuang spoke louder in the surrounding area. In addition, his wife was from the city, so the village was going to make a big fuss about it. As the village secretary, he was the one in charge.

Having received confirmation, Boss Yu chatted with Secretary Liu for a few more minutes before turning away with a cheerful smile. As he left, a smug look appeared in his eyes. He knew that once that brat Liu Changfa got married, he would have already flown far away.

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Professor Meng and his group rented a large courtyard house with four rooms. The original owners had moved to relatives' homes to pay the 800 yuan monthly rent. One room was for the little girl, another for Professor Meng, and the remaining two rooms were originally shared by Xiao Fan and Ying Ning, but after Zhuang Rui arrived, they squeezed in together, leaving one room empty for Zhuang Rui.

The dinner was delivered by Liu Changfa. After learning that Professor Meng would be Zhuang Rui's future mentor, he came to pay a visit. However, as the groom, he had too many things to do and was pulled away by someone after only a few words.

"Damn it, how am I supposed to sleep like this?"

The nights in the countryside weren't hot, but the mosquitoes were so numerous that Zhuang Rui couldn't stand it. The white lion had thick fur, so it wasn't afraid of them, but Zhuang Rui had only been lying down for a few minutes when he was bitten by seven or eight mosquitoes, which were unbearably itchy.

Zhuang Rui ran to the other people's rooms and saw that they all had mosquito nets. Helpless, Zhuang Rui decided to make do in the car for the night and buy mosquito nets the next day.

"Hey kid, can't sleep?"

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to slip out of the yard with the white lion, Liu Changfa walked in, followed by a man. However, because it was late and there were no streetlights in the countryside, Zhuang Rui couldn't see the man's face clearly.

Zhuang Rui told the truth: "There are too many mosquitoes, I can't sleep. I'll make do in the car."

"Come on, let's go to your room, I'll help you get rid of the mosquitoes."

The third brother chuckled and waved his hand. Zhuang Rui noticed that he was holding a handful of hay in his right hand and a basket on his left.

What puzzled Zhuang Rui was that the third brother did not introduce the person following behind him, and the person did not greet Zhuang Rui either. After entering the courtyard, he went directly to Professor Meng's room, knocked on the door, and went inside.

Zhuang Rui didn't have time to care what the man did. He was pulled back to his room by Lao San, who closed all the windows and then found a brazier. He lit the dry grass in his hand and threw it in, and a thick smoke immediately rose up. Lao San quickly pulled Zhuang Rui out of the house and closed the door tightly behind him.

"Third Brother, what kind of grass is this?" Zhuang Rui could guess that this thing was probably used to repel mosquitoes, but apart from mosquito coils, this was the first time he had ever seen grass used to repel mosquitoes.

"Hehe, this stuff is called mugwort. In our rural area, we didn't have mosquito coils to buy, and we couldn't afford them. We used this stuff instead. It's much more effective than mosquito coils, and it doesn't cost any money. You can just grab a handful by the roadside. In the summer, every household dries it to repel mosquitoes."

The third brother returned to the courtyard, took the contents of the basket out, and placed them on the stone platform in the center of the yard. They were some cooked food and a few bottles of beer.

"Youngest brother, I'm sorry for what I did this time. I've been too busy. Why don't you stay in the county town tomorrow? There's a guesthouse there that's quite nice."

The third brother felt a little embarrassed when Zhuang Rui came this time. When he went to Guangdong a while ago, he stayed in a hotel and ate in a restaurant, but when he came to his own place, he couldn't even find a place to sleep.

"Third Brother, don't be so formal. Neither Wei Ge nor I have ever lived in the countryside before. This is a good experience for us. It's fine to stay here. Alright, I'll call those two guys out for a drink."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand. He was speaking from the heart. It was the first time he had ever lived in the countryside, and it was indeed quite a novel experience. Zhuang Rui got up and called Xiao Fan and Ying Ning out. Meng Qiuqian, that little girl, also came out to join in the fun. However, Professor Meng's

door remained tightly closed, and the voices of two people could be faintly heard. No one knew who those people were or what they were discussing with Professor Meng.

...

Professor Meng sat upright in his chair, shaking his head repeatedly, and said to the people in front of him, "No, we can't let them enter the tomb first and then take action. That would cause immeasurable damage to the Wenzong Mausoleum."

"Old Meng, we've been following this gang for a long time, but the members are scattered and rarely gather together. If we don't wipe them out in one fell swoop, who knows how many more national treasures will be smuggled abroad, causing immeasurable harm..."

The middle-aged man tried his best to explain to Professor Meng that his name was Chen Zhi, and he was a deputy director of the Anti-Smuggling Division of the Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department, specifically responsible for combating smuggling. He was the one who cracked the major cultural relic smuggling case involving the Flying Horse of Gansu.

Three years ago, Guangdong police had cracked several cases of smuggling national treasures, but they failed to catch the main culprit. It was not until then that Yu Laoda came into Chen Zhi's sights. After a meticulous investigation, Chen Zhi was almost certain that the disheveled Yu Ku in this village was the powerful Yu Laoda outside.

However, in recent years, Boss Yu had not made any unusual moves, and Chen Zhi lacked sufficient evidence. Furthermore, their tomb-raiding gang rarely gathered together, which prevented the middle-aged man from taking action against them until this raid in Guangdong.

"That's your police's business. I'm only concerned with ensuring that Emperor Wenzong's tomb isn't damaged. Xiao Chen, this is the first Tang Dynasty emperor's tomb that the country plans to excavate, and they also plan to build a palace here for tourists. It's of great significance. An underground tomb absolutely cannot suffer the slightest damage."

Professor Meng's job is to protect Emperor Wenzong's tomb from being damaged by criminals. As for other matters, they are not within the scope of the old man's consideration. Professor Meng had already cooperated with the police when they went to excavate the worthless burial pit. However, the idea of

waiting until the tomb raiders entered the tomb chamber before making arrests is something Professor Meng cannot accept under any circumstances.

Due to differences in geographical environment and historical heritage between the North and South, tombs in the South and the North are also different. This has led to tomb raiders being divided into two factions, the South and the North. The Southern faction of tomb raiders is more skilled in technology and makes more use of feng shui in the process of finding ancient tombs, emphasizing observation, listening, questioning, and palpation.

"Looking" naturally refers to examining the feng shui, while "smelling" involves distinguishing the presence or absence of a tomb by observing different smells. Some might say, "Isn't this nonsense? Can a person have a dog's nose?" However, although it sounds mysterious, it does have some factual basis.

The soil and filling materials used in tombs varied throughout history, resulting in different smells. For example, tombs from the Qin and Han dynasties were often filled with mercury and cinnabar was used for preservation. However, tombs from the Tang and Song dynasties onwards were typically coated with blue clay. The smells emitted by these special substances may be difficult for the average person to detect, but tomb raiders who made a living from tomb raiding for generations could keenly identify these smells and thus further pinpoint the location of the tomb.

There was a Guangzhou man named Jiao Si, a representative of the Southern School, who was incredibly accurate in finding burial sites. He could determine the location of a tomb by listening to the wind and rain, distinguishing the sound of thunder, and observing the color of grass and mud traces.

Once, Jiao Si and his gang of tomb raiders were searching for tombs in the wild. It was noon when lightning flashed and thunder roared in the sky. Jiao Si immediately ordered his men to scatter and observe the thunder and lightning from different locations, remembering the characteristics and reporting back to him. Jiao Si himself stood on a high place to observe the feng shui and the earth's energy.

After the rain stopped, someone returned and reported to him that during the thunder, he felt something floating under his feet and heard an echo from the ground. Jiao Si immediately determined that there was an ancient tomb there, and a large one at that. After a group of tomb raiders dug it up, it turned out to be the tomb of a Han Dynasty king or nobleman.

In this process, Jiao Si used two techniques from the Southern School of Tomb Raiding: "observation" and "cutting".

Friends, don't think this is nonsense. The use of feng shui and geomancy to find tombs has been verified countless times and is often based on a lot of facts. This is also the foundation of the Southern School of Tomb Raiders.

Northern tomb raiders, on the other hand, are more rough and unrefined. Their most distinctive feature is the tools they use. Few Northern tomb raiders rely on feng shui to determine the location of tombs. They trust the Luoyang shovel in their hands more. Therefore, some people say that the Luoyang shovel is the symbol of Northern tomb raiding.

Another common tool in the Northern School is the axe, used for excavating tombs, especially for large Han Dynasty tombs with "Huangchangticou" (a type of ancient Chinese tomb structure), where the axe is an indispensable tool.

In addition, when archaeologists excavate tombs, they often find chisels, rakes, picks, shovels, sickles and other tools in tombs that have been previously looted. These are the tools that the Northern School of Tomb Raiders were adept at using to steal and plunder tombs.

Whether it's searching for or excavating tombs, the Northern School doesn't employ much technical skill; they simply rely on sharp tools, hence their reputation for being crude and unsophisticated. This is something that Southern tomb raiders look down upon.

People like Yu Laoda typically excavate tombs by digging a tunnel and then using an axe or chisel to break open the burial chamber. Explosives are also frequently used.

Compared to the northern faction, the northern tomb raiders caused more serious and thorough damage to the tombs. That's why Professor Meng firmly disagreed with Chen Zhi's opinion and decided to catch the tomb raiders after they had succeeded.

Chen Zhi was helpless against Professor Meng's stubbornness. After all, Professor Meng was an expert who enjoyed special allowances from the State Council and was not someone he could order around. If the old man insisted on excavating Emperor Wenzong's tomb, he would not be able to stop him. In that case, it would definitely alert the enemy.

"Old Meng, how about this? Give us two more days to set up the net, and we'll definitely bring these criminals to justice the day after tomorrow."

Chen Zhi and his team had already gathered some information about the tomb raiding gang and analyzed that they had not yet opened the tomb and entered the burial chamber. However, based on their judgment, Boss Yu and his men should make their move within the next few days, so Chen Zhi made a guarantee to Professor Meng.

...

The next day, Professor Meng and the others, as usual, took a group of old women from the village to the excavation site. Zhuang Rui couldn't leave today because Wei Ge and Lao Si were both arriving that day. He arrived early and was entrusted with the task of receiving them by Lao San.

Wei Ge and Lao Si had never lived in the countryside before. They followed Zhuang Rui to the melon field and saw the archaeological excavation site. The day passed quickly. The two of them naturally stayed with Zhuang Rui that night, but they simply laid two more straw mats on the ground, which was quite convenient.

On the day of Liu Changfa's wedding, Zhuang Rui's car was used to pick up the bride, and Wei Ge dressed up as a young man to be the best man. They were busy all day long. The wedding of the third son was a happy event for Liujiazhuang. Many people from the neighboring villages who were related to him also came to celebrate. In addition, the bride's family members also came, which made Liujiazhuang a lot more unfamiliar.

As night fell, the banquet at Liu Changfa's house continued unabated, with guests coming and going in an endless stream. Just then, three people, two tall and one short, took advantage of the moonlight and quietly slipped away from the back of the village towards the back mountain.

Chapter 250 Arrest

The wind is strong today. Although a crescent moon hangs in the sky, it's frequently obscured by low-hanging dark clouds, making visibility very low, if not pitch black.

A strong wind blew through the orchard, making the branches rustle. Three figures quickly jumped over the fence surrounding the orchard and entered the orchard. The shadows of the trees hung down, like ghostly figures.

"shut up!"

A low shout stopped the two wolfhounds that were charging at him. The originally ferocious wolfhounds, upon seeing Boss Yu, surrounded him and wagged their tails, but Boss Yu waved them away.

"Big brother..."

Yu Sansheng, reeking of alcohol, came to greet us. His half-black, half-white face, set against the night, looked even more like a ghost, definitely capable of stopping children from crying at night.

They were night owls. Yu Laosan always slept during the day and drank after waking up. After all, he was the only one left in this desolate wilderness, and several of his former comrades were buried not far away. No matter how bold Yu Laosan was, he still needed to numb himself with alcohol.

Yu Laoda didn't reply. He glanced at the wine bottle in Yu Laosan's hand, raised his hand, and slapped Yu Laosan across the face. The tall and strong Yu Laosan was actually spun around on the spot by the slap. When he regained his balance, half of his cheek was already swollen up.

"Damn it, you good-for-nothing! What time is it now? You still dare to drink? If you mess this up, I'll send you to the underworld to keep the Cui brothers company."

Yu Laoda's vicious words immediately sobered Yu Sansheng up. He didn't dare to utter a word and stood in front of Yu Laoda with his head down, like a primary school student listening to a teacher's instruction.

"Same as always, Sansheng, you keep watch up here, and Lao Si, you go to the orchard. Ring the bell if anything happens, and keep everyone alert..."

Yu Ku took out two copper bells the size of walnuts from his backpack and handed them to the two men. However, the metal tongue inside the bells was held in place by a thin thread that wrapped around the bells many times. After receiving the bells, Lao Si and Yu Sansheng skillfully untied the thread that wrapped the tongue and held the bells in their hands to prevent them from making a clear sound.

Although walkie-talkies are available now, the bell can carry a long distance in the quiet night. Boss Yu and his men have long been used to using it. After all, if something happens, there might not be time to talk on the walkie-talkie. The bell is different; it can be thrown on the ground and will make a sound.

After giving his instructions, Boss Yu put down his backpack, took off his tattered clothes, revealing a black diving suit that clung to his skin, and then took out a mask from his bag and put it on his head, leaving only his eyes exposed.

The eighth brother was dressed in the same way. Their clothes were specially made so that they wouldn't get dirty and could protect their skin from being scratched by gravel or other objects.

Moreover, in Boss Yu's backpack were items such as a jack and a gas mask. Many main pit tomb chambers contain toxic gases due to long-term sealing. Boss Yu had been eyeing this Wenzong tomb for more than ten years and was quite well prepared.

"Let's go..."

Old Yu glanced indifferently at the dark woods outside and went into the wooden house built in the middle of the orchard first.

The wooden house was about ten square meters in size. To prevent it from getting damp from the ground, the floor inside was paved with blue bricks. There was a bamboo bed at the back, a table in the middle, and a pile of wine bottles near the door. Next to the bottles was a stove, but the fire inside had long been extinguished, and it was unclear how long it had been unused.

Old Master Yu squatted down and pried up the blue bricks on the right side of the stove one by one. After prying off about ten bricks, two grooves were revealed in the ground. Old Eight and Old Third Yu went to the left side of the stove and pushed it forcefully to the right.

With a series of "clicking" sounds, the stove, which seemed to be fixed to the ground, slowly slid more than a meter to the right, revealing an opening more than a meter wide in its original position.

Before Yu Ku could give any instructions, Lao Ba took out a miner's lamp, put it on his head, and ducked into the hole. His figure quickly disappeared from the ground, and the originally dark hole began to glow.

"Third brother, let's go in and push the stove back."

Old Master Yu had already gone down halfway when, for some unknown reason, he popped back out and gave an order to Old Master Yu.

"Understood, brother. Take this bell with you."

Yu Sansheng handed the bell to Yu Ku. After seeing Yu Laoda go downstairs, Yu Laosan threaded the end of the thread through a hollow part of the stove and tied it to the table leg close to the ground. Then he pushed the stove back to its original position and put the blue bricks that had been pried up back on the ground one by one.

After finishing all this, Yu Laosan took out a bottle of wine from under the bed and started drinking it with the braised meat on the table. It wasn't that he was careless, but he had done so much work that he had hardly ever encountered any problems. Based on Yu Laosan's experience, they wouldn't come up for at least two hours, so he figured he might as well have a little wine instead of just sitting there doing nothing.

Yu Laosi, who was keeping watch outside the orchard, wasn't so comfortable. The orchard was teeming with mosquitoes, and he couldn't stay in one place at all, constantly swatting away the mosquitoes that were biting him.

...

Liujiazhuang is located in a remote area, with mountains to the west. Apart from married daughters returning to their parents' home, few people come here.

But today was an exception. Not only people from the surrounding villages, but even people from the county town drove up in their cars. The reason was that Liu Changfa was getting married. A large group of his classmates and colleagues came, and the banquet had been going on for a day. Occasionally, cars would drive into Liu's village.

About two miles from Liujiazhuang, there is a tulou (earthen building) by the roadside. It is the kind of building that is constructed by mixing mud and straw with water. After drying, it becomes very sturdy. In the past, many people's houses were like this.

A Santana sedan was parked on a haystack behind the Tulou (earthen building) around 5 p.m., hidden in the shadows of the Tulou and haystacks. When it got completely dark, it was completely concealed in the darkness.

The Santana's front window was open, and a bright spot flickered in the night.

Yu Laoqi had just returned from Wuhan yesterday. After his older brother was killed in Guangdong, the Yu family tomb raiding gang immediately dispersed to all parts of the country. They had money and residences in different cities. Apart from Yu Laoda, no one else knew about them.

However, over the past six months, Yu Laoqi has always felt uneasy and has dreamed of his brother several times. If it weren't for the fact that his passport and money were in Yu Laoda's hands, he would have already run away abroad.

Yu Laoqi got out of the car, stubbed out his cigarette, and started urinating on the haystack. Just as he shivered and was about to pull up his pants, he suddenly heard a whooshing sound behind his ear. Before Yu Laoqi could react, a pair of large, iron-like hands grabbed his neck and shoved him down onto the haystack where he had just urinated.

Ignoring the stench emanating from his mouth, Yu Laoqi struggled desperately, shouting, "What are you doing? What are you doing?!"

"pull over."

Yu Laoqi's struggles were in vain. A pair of handcuffs quickly handcuffed his hands behind his back, and then his body was pulled to the front of the car, his head pressed hard against the front of the Santana. A beam of strong light shone on Yu Laoqi's face, and Yu Laoqi, with his eyes half-closed, had a look of despair on his shocked face.

"Yu Zhenjiang?"

A male voice rang in Yu Laoqi's ear. Hearing his real name, Yu Laoqi stopped struggling in vain. He could now see clearly that he was surrounded by armed police officers, and a police car drove up.

"Take him away and interrogate him immediately. Report back to me if anything comes up..."

Chen Zhi waved his hand, and Yu Laoqi was taken to the police car, where the old pre-trial investigator would deal with him.

"Squad Leader of Criminal Investigation, what's the situation with the main culprit?" Chen Zhi asked a middle-aged man in plain clothes beside him.

"Director Chen, we have already arranged for people to follow them. They just left the village and headed towards the back mountain. It's pretty much as we predicted. They should make their move tonight."

The Criminal Investigation Brigade was sent by the Shaanxi police to support the brother unit in the arrest. The people monitoring Yu Laoqi's actions in the village were all from the Criminal Investigation Brigade. Because of his different accent, Chen Zhi had to remotely direct the operation from outside the village, except for one meeting with Professor Meng, to avoid alerting the suspect.

...

The tunnel that Lao Ba dug was sloping, leading from the ground into the tomb passage. It was more than ten meters high, about the height of a three-story building. After descending into the tomb passage, Lao Da immediately released the bell in his hand, letting it hang vertically in the air at the entrance of the tunnel.

The tomb passage is about 1.6 meters high and more than 2 meters wide, which was necessary for placing the coffin at the time. Yu Laoda had to bend over to walk through it. There was even a drainage ditch on the side of the tomb passage. According to Lao Ba's analysis, this was very likely connected to an underground river.

Using the light of the miners' lamps, Lao Ba and Yu Lao Da walked one after the other into the depths of the tomb passage.

Although the entrance to the tomb passage was sealed off by Yu Laosan, the air inside the tomb passage was not stuffy. Having operated here for several years, Yu Laoda had done more than just quarrying huge stones. He had even had Lao Ba make three ventilation shafts. Yu Laoda had thoroughly explored the entire perimeter of the Wenzong Mausoleum.

The tomb passage is 28 meters long, and the sides and top are made of stone bricks that fit together tightly and are smooth and flat. It can be seen that this tomb of Emperor Wenzong is no less impressive than those royal tombs that have been unearthed.

In fact, Emperor Wenzong was imprisoned by eunuchs and was not valued during his reign. Originally, his tomb would not have been of such a scale. However, according to custom, a new emperor would build his own mausoleum as soon as he ascended the throne, and Emperor Wenzong was no exception.

Moreover, after Emperor Wenzong was imprisoned and died by eunuchs, these eunuchs, in order to avoid public criticism and to prove their innocence, also gave Emperor Wenzong a grand funeral. Therefore, Emperor Wenzong's tomb is no less magnificent than that of the previous emperors.

Five meters ahead of the tunnel, a ladder made of alloy was laid out on the ground. Lao Ba and Yu Ku carefully climbed over the ladder. Below them were a series of trapdoors. The Cui brothers had been trapped here the first time they entered this place.

After getting over the series of trapdoors, Boss Yu turned around and pulled the ladder over, because there was another place like this ahead, and he could fall if he wasn't careful.

The two walked for nearly ten minutes to cover a distance of more than twenty meters before arriving at the main gate outside the tomb. It was a white marble stone gate, which was a pair of doors made of

whole pieces of white marble that fit together perfectly. Only a few millimeters thick blade could be barely inserted into the gap between the doors.

On each of the two doors, there is a bronze qilin head on the left and right. The heads have wide-open eyes and each holds a bronze ring in its mouth. Over a thousand years of erosion have made the rings rusty.

This door was the last obstacle between Boss Yu and the tomb pit. If the archaeological team hadn't moved into Liujiazhuang, Boss Yu would have opened the door long ago. Although there was a self-locking stone blocking the door, it couldn't stop the tomb raiders.

The self-locking stone is a simple yet ingenious anti-theft device; to put it more bluntly, it is a bolt that locks the tomb door from the inside.

However, the ancients still put some thought into making the stone door lock automatically from behind them.

They first shaped the top and bottom of the stone door hinges into spherical shapes, then carved a raised groove in the same place between the two stone doors, at the same level as the door seam. Finally, they carved a groove that was shallow in the front and deep in the back on the stone paved ground not far from the central axis inside the door.

Before closing the stone door, people would place a fairly wide stone strip in the groove in the ground and slowly tilt it forward until it made contact with the stone door. After people withdrew from the tomb, the stone strip, with the pressure of its own tilt and the "ball bearings" at the end of the door hinge, would automatically push the stone door to close until its top fell into the groove on the shoulder of the stone door.

At this point, anyone who wanted to push the stone door open from the outside would be indulging in wishful thinking.

Many people have visited the Ming Dingling Mausoleum in Beijing. The gate to the underground palace of that imperial mausoleum was also sealed with a self-locking stone. In order to enter the underground palace, the archaeologists spent a lot of effort and finally opened the gate by referring to the talons used by ancient tomb raiders.

The so-called "knob" is a metal device with a long handle at one end and a semi-circular shape at the other. When opening the tomb door, the knob is inserted through the gap in the door, and then the semi-circular part is placed on the self-locking stone. The self-locking stone is slowly lifted up while the tomb door is pushed until the self-locking stone stands upright on the ground, at which point the tomb door can be fully opened.

However, not everyone who wants to open the tomb door will rack their brains to find a way to break the mechanism of the self-closing stone. In 1928, when Sun Dianying was looting the Dingdong Mausoleum of Empress Dowager Cixi and the Yuling Mausoleum of Emperor Qianlong, he also encountered a self-closing stone blocking his way. At that time, the bandits tried everything they could to open the tomb door but could not. In the end, they could only use explosives to blast it open. At that time, the stone door collapsed with a crash and landed on the stone coffin containing Qianlong's remains, which had drifted to the tomb door due to rising groundwater.

Later, during the excavation of Empress Dowager Cixi's tomb, Sun Dianying, fearing further damage to the treasures inside, mobilized more than forty people to forcefully break open the tomb door with thick, round logs. After the tomb door was opened, the self-locking stone inside was broken into several pieces.

When Yu Laoda saw the tomb door, he originally wanted to open it using the same method as opening the Dingling Mausoleum. However, things didn't go as planned. Lao Liu's failure in Guangdong and the arrival of the archaeological team left him with no time to specially order that kind of tool, so explosives became his first choice.

One meter above the ground, at the spot where the stone door blocks the entrance, Yu Laoda had already chiseled out a fist-sized, about 20-centimeter-deep round hole. This was where he planned to place the explosives.

Old Yu dared not act as recklessly as Sun Dianying when he raided tombs. Several hundred meters away from here, there was a squad of armed police guarding the excavation site. If there was too much noise, it would definitely alert them.

The self-locking stones are usually not very big. Boss Yu wanted to use the impact force generated by the explosion of explosives to break the self-locking stone at the entrance. He had used this method before when he was robbing Ming and Qing tombs. At a depth of more than ten meters from the ground, the noise was not very loud.

The light in front of the stone gate was a bit dim. Boss Yu took out two glow sticks from his backpack, bent them, and threw them on either side of the stone gate, which immediately made it much brighter. Boss Ba stood in front of the gate, took out detonators, explosives, and sealing tape from his backpack, and prepared to fix them in the center of the stone gate.

"Eighth Brother, slow down, our fuse isn't long enough, let's use this instead..."

Yu Laoda suddenly stopped Lao Ba, walked over, put the detonators and explosives into his backpack, and stuck the clay-like thing he was holding onto the stone door, pressing it in so that a large part of it seeped into the door crack.

When Lao Ba saw what Yu Ku was holding, he couldn't help but take a few steps back. He recognized the thing; its full name was C4 plastic explosive, or C4 or plastic bomb for short. Its main component was polyisobutylene, which was made by mixing gunpowder with plastic and had great power.

Plastic bombs are made of a mixture of high-performance explosives such as TNT, SEM-TEX, and white phosphorus. They can be ground into powder, filled into rubber materials, and then extruded into any shape. If an adhesive material is attached to the outside, they can be placed in very concealed locations and stick firmly to the surface like chewing gum. Hence, they are called cruel "chewing gum".

These plastic bombs are resistant to high pressure, squeezing, and even waterproof. Except when detonated by a specific fuse, they will not explode automatically if exposed to high temperatures or fire. Unlike gunpowder bombs, they will not easily injure the user if they are hit by a small impact.

The plastic bomb in Boss Yu's hand was bought from the Hong Kong black market years ago. It can easily evade X-ray security checks. He brought three with him back then, and now only this one remains.

After sticking the bomb to the door, Boss Yu took out a small metal piece, about the size of a fingernail and resembling a watch battery, and carefully inserted it into the plastic bomb in the crack of the door. Then he called out to Boss Ba, and the two of them quickly retreated.

They retreated all the way down to the bottom of the tomb before stopping. After putting on a gas mask, Yu took out a car remote from his pocket, exchanged a glance with Lao Ba, and pressed it hard.

A muffled "boom" resounded, and the ground beneath Boss Yu's feet trembled almost imperceptibly. The commotion was not significant; it's likely that unless one was standing directly above the blast point, no one would have felt the ground shake. Even the copper bell hanging next to Boss Yu remained silent.

"It's done!"

Yu Ku excitedly waved his fist, a greedy look in his eyes. However, he did not rush forward. Instead, he stood quietly in place, waiting for the gas in the tomb to dissipate before entering.

...

Yu Laoda, who was underground, had no idea that the wooden house above him was already packed with people, and Yu Laosan, on whom he had placed his hopes, was now being pressed to the ground like a dead dog.

Only then did Yu Laosan remember his eldest brother's words: drinking can lead to trouble. In fact, when Yu Laosi was captured, the copper bell had already been rung. Yu Laosan also heard the clear sound of the bell and the barking of the dog. However, his mind was a little sluggish after drinking. Instead of ringing the copper bell immediately, Yu Laosan went to the door to look around. He was then rushed up by the police who had been lying in wait at the door and was pinned to the ground.

The tremor from beneath their feet startled everyone in the wooden house. Yu Laosan, who had been pinned to the ground, seized the opportunity to break free. Without even standing up, he crawled to the table and pulled hard on the rope connecting the copper bell to the ground.

Although Yu Laosan was subdued immediately, the signal had already been sent out.

"Ring ring, ring ring..."

The crisp sound echoed through the tomb passage. Yu Laoda and Lao Ba, who had already reached the flip-up door, immediately changed their expressions and hurriedly retreated.

"Quickly, find the entrance to the tomb..."

Chen Zhi didn't have time to interrogate Yu Laosan. He kept giving orders. Although they had already trapped the criminals, Chen Zhi still didn't dare to be careless. If the criminals felt they had no way out and went so far as to destroy the tomb, he would have no way to explain it to Professor Meng.

Following the line connecting the copper bell, the tomb-raiding hole under the stove was soon revealed. The dark entrance was completely dark, and Chen Zhi and the others dared not go down rashly, because according to their information, this tomb-raiding gang was armed.

Chen Zhi snatched a megaphone from a policeman next to him and shouted into the tunnel, "Listen up, you're surrounded! Put down your weapons..."

Before he could finish speaking, a gunshot rang out from below the tunnel, but since the tunnel was sloping, the shot couldn't reach the people above.

Tear gas!

A look of anger appeared on Chen Zhi's face. Immediately, several armed police officers stood above the tunnel and fired several tear gas canisters downwards. Then they pulled over the straw mat that Yu Laosan used to sleep on and covered the tunnel entrance.