

Golden 251

Chapter 251 Saving the Lord

As soon as Chen Zhi entered the tunnel, he sensed something was wrong. The smoke from seven or eight tear gas canisters was enough to obscure everything within a 70 or 80 square meter area. However, the smoke inside the tunnel was very thin, indicating only two possibilities: either the underground space was too spacious, or there was something else going on down there.

Upon reaching the exit of the tunnel, Chen Zhi turned off the flashlight, plunged headfirst into the tunnel, braced himself on the ground with his elbows, bent his head and back, rolled over, and held his breath, remaining motionless in the darkness. However, the expected attack did not occur.

"Turn on all the flashlights!"

After about a minute, Chen Zhi still didn't hear any sound. At this time, the second group of people came down. Fearing that he would be accidentally injured by his own people, Chen Zhi could only turn on his flashlight. This time, there were five or six people. Four or five powerful flashlights immediately illuminated the tomb passage. However, apart from them, there were no other people present.

"Director Chen, it's a 9mm Browning pistol..."

On the ground below the tunnel, a team member found a bullet casing and, after examining it, drew a conclusion.

Although this 9mm Browning pistol can be considered an antique and is mostly used by collectors, the performance and lethality of the 9mm Parabellum pistol cartridge should not be underestimated, and the group became more vigilant.

The tomb passage wasn't straight; there was a bend every seven or eight meters. The possibility that the criminals were hiding ahead couldn't be ruled out. Chen Zhi gestured to his men, and two of them immediately stepped forward, walking along the tomb passage towards the bend. All of them were wearing bulletproof vests. Chen Zhi also took a helmet from one of the team members and put it on. After all, the gunshots and the shell casings on the ground indicated that the criminals were armed.

Before entering the bend, there was an alloy ladder on the ground. Although its purpose was unknown, no one dared to be careless in this eerie tomb of the ancestors. A SWAT team member carefully climbed the ladder with his submachine gun slung across his chest, his feet not touching the ground at all.

"It's alright, come here... Ah!!!"

The SWAT officer climbed to the top of the ladder, put one foot on the ground, and turned around to call the people behind him to come over. But the place where his front foot stepped was empty. Fortunately, he was facing the ladder and reacted quickly, grabbing the ladder with his hands. However, the sharp pain from his foot made him scream, and the series of flippers hit him hard on the back.

Seeing the situation ahead, Chen Zhi and the others rushed out. However, the ladder could only be passed by one person at a time. After Chen Zhi climbed over, he found that only one hand was holding onto the ladder, and his whole body was covered by the flap.

Unable to lift the trapdoor and rescue the person by himself, Chen Zhi shouted behind him, "Watch your step! Someone come and help..."

Knowing there was a trap on the ground, the group would first extend one foot to test the ground before daring to move forward. What angered them was that the area around the alloy ladder was solid ground, with no trapdoors or anything like that.

Chen Zhi used all his strength to lift the trapdoor upwards. The other two immediately grabbed the collar of the fallen team member and pulled him up. The team member had suffered a severe injury to his foot, and the trapdoor that had flipped over had slammed into the back of his head. He was now unconscious. If it weren't for a strong will that made him hold on to the ladder, he would probably have been swallowed by the trap.

What was shocking was that the police boots worn by this team member had been completely pierced by a sharp object, and blood was dripping down. When they shone their flashlights into the trap below, they also found some torn clothing and bloodstains on the sharp blade inside. Clearly, this place had swallowed up tomb raiders, but their bodies had been taken away.

"Oh shit!"

Chen Zhi cursed, knowing without a doubt that this was a trap deliberately set for them by the people inside.

"No need to go any further, turn around and check carefully..."

The ladder was behind the trap, indicating that Boss Yu and the others weren't inside. Chen Zhi reacted extremely quickly; there must be another exit behind it.

Sure enough, in a hidden spot behind the tomb robber's tunnel, a hole had been pried open in the huge tomb passage stone. After the stones blocking the entrance were removed, the dark opening showed that Boss Yu had escaped from there.

"You two follow me. The rest of you take him upstairs and tell the people above to expand the search area. Send one group into the mountains to search, and the other group to guard the exit of Liujiazhuang. Don't let a stranger out."

Chen Zhi led the way into the tomb raider's tunnel. He never expected that Boss Yu would be so cautious, having left himself a backup plan inside the tomb passage. This made him extremely regretful. If Boss Yu had escaped, the difficulty of capturing him would have increased significantly.

The tunnel was over forty meters long, winding like a rat hole. When they emerged from the ground, Chen Zhi discovered that they had left the orchard, and there were trampled marks on the grass next to the tunnel.

Chen Zhi picked up the walkie-talkie and shouted, "This is Chen Zhi. All groups, report your situation."

"One team found nothing and is now searching the back of the mountain..."

"The second team is on their way to set up a checkpoint at Liujiazhuang, but they haven't found anything..."

"Team three is in position and has not found anything..."

The message coming through the walkie-talkie made Chen Zhi anxious. If there had been people guarding the perimeter earlier, Boss Yu would probably have been captured by now.

"Bring a police dog over."

The night was too dark, and with only a flashlight in hand, it was impossible to follow the tracks on the ground to make a chase. Chen Zhi was somewhat helpless. He could only hope that the capture team could set up a roadblock before Boss Yu escaped from Liujiazhuang.

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Before Chen Zhi went to the orchard behind the mountain to make the arrest, he had already searched Yu Laoda's house, but found nothing. However, no one expected that Yu Laoda would not run out of the village directly, but would return to his house.

After emerging from the backup tunnel, Boss Yu realized that Old Seven, who was waiting at the village entrance, was probably doomed as well. He immediately told Old Eight to leave the village on his own. They had a specific way of communicating, and once they got out, they would definitely be able to get in touch.

However, Boss Yu had to go back to his home because he didn't have the black handbag with him. He needed to get his hands on the fake passport and other things inside.

At this moment, Boss Yu was not too panicked. In his more than ten years of tomb raiding, he had encountered many more dangerous situations than today. In his opinion, the police were definitely at the tomb, and his home was the safest place.

What pained Yu the most was that although he had opened the tomb of Emperor Wenzong, he didn't even have time to take a second look at it. All his hard work of more than ten years was ruined in an instant, which made his heart bleed. He also hated the archaeological team. If it weren't for them, he would have already broken through the tomb and fled far away.

Thinking about these things now was useless, and Boss Yu had no intention of going out to take revenge on the archaeological team, after all, his own life was more important.

There are no streetlights in the countryside, so it gets pitch black at night and there are hardly any people around. Yu Laoda hugged the wall and quickly arrived at his door. Instead of going in, he picked up a clod of dirt from the ground and threw it into his yard.

There was no barking of dogs, nor did anyone question him. Old Yu used both hands to pull himself up over the courtyard wall and flipped himself into the yard.

Just as he expected, there were signs that the house had been ransacked, but no one was left behind. Boss Yu didn't dare to delay. He bent down and took out the handbag, then found a new set of clothes to change out of his tight-fitting clothes and put the money and passport from the handbag on his body.

After thinking for a moment, Boss Yu took off his shirt, took out the detonators and explosives from his backpack, and wrapped them around his chest. A thief should be prepared to get caught, but for Boss Yu, if he couldn't escape, it was better to take a few more people with him than to be locked up for months and shot.

After packing up, Boss Yu threw his backpack and handbag into the room, put his right hand in his trouser pocket, and casually opened the courtyard gate and walked out. However, in his right trouser pocket, he was tightly gripping the handle of the Browning pistol.

"Third brother, have you eaten yet?"

"Sister-in-law Ruhua, are you going to Changfa's house for a free meal again?"

Along the way, Boss Yu greeted the villagers calmly, while these villagers were clearly unaware of the arrest operation against him that day.

When he reached the village entrance, Old Yu's previously calm face turned serious, and he stopped in his tracks. He casually turned around and walked back the way he came.

At this moment, there were two police cars parked at the village entrance, and a squad of armed police officers were checking people coming and going with photos. By now, many of the people who had come to Liu Changfa's house and the wedding banquet had left, and there were only a few scattered

people at the village entrance. If Boss Yu went out at this time, he would definitely be caught red-handed.

...

As the saying goes, passing the imperial examination and the wedding night are among the most joyous occasions in life. Liu Changfa was already a bit drunk, and Wei Ge and Lao Si were also forced to drink too much to keep their heads down.

Zhuang Rui, however, sat at Professor Meng's table and didn't drink much. Because of Zhuang Rui, Liu Changfa personally came to invite Professor Meng and his group over as well.

The wedding banquet was coming to an end, but the bride's family still needed to be sent back. Liu Changfa swayed as he stood up and, together with Zhang Rong, saw the bride's family out the door. Zhuang Rui followed behind; he wanted to be the driver and take them back to the county town. However, he didn't plan to come back today; he would just find a guesthouse to stay in when they got there.

"Hey, Brother Yu, where have you been today? Why are you only arriving now? No way, you have to be punished with three cups of wine."

Liu Changfa was really a bit drunk. When he saw Boss Yu walking towards him, he quickly greeted him, grabbed Boss Yu's arm, and pulled him into the yard.

"Brother Long Hair, not today. I have something to do in the county town later."

"What's the rush? I'll have my classmate take you later. Honey, wait a bit before you leave. I'll have a few drinks with Brother Yu. You don't know, I was able to get into university entirely thanks to Teacher Yu and the others. Otherwise, I'd probably be working in the fields every day. Honey, don't you think so..."

Liu Changfa was like a chatterbox, making everyone around him both laugh and cry. Zhuang Rui and the others had no choice but to follow him into the courtyard. Giving someone a ride along the way was no big deal.

Old Master Yu was just worrying about how to get out of the village when he heard what Liu Changfa said. He immediately understood and did not refuse anymore. He helped Liu Changfa into the courtyard where the banquet was being held.

"Why are you dressed so warmly, Brother Yu? Take it off. We're all old women, we're not afraid."

Liu Changfa held onto Boss Yu with one hand and grabbed Boss Yu's collar with the other. However, he had drunk quite a bit today, and he lost his footing and staggered. He pulled hard on Boss Yu's collar and ripped open all the buttons on Boss Yu's chest.

Boss Yu never expected Liu Changfa to pull at his clothes. Before he could react, his chest was completely exposed.

Around the courtyard where the banquet was being held, many large light bulbs of over 100 watts were strung up, illuminating the courtyard brightly, and the row of detonators and explosives on Boss Yu's chest was immediately visible to everyone.

"Explosives!"

Rural people often use detonators and explosives when quarrying stones, so they are much more familiar with these things than city dwellers. Someone shouted out, and everyone in the yard focused their attention on Old Yu's chest.

"What kind of explosives are you using? Brother Yu, come and have a drink."

Liu Changfa swayed as he straightened up, but when his eyes fell on the row of explosives and detonators on Boss Yu's chest, he was jolted awake and regained his senses.

At this moment, Boss Yu was filled with hatred. He was about to drink a few cups of wine and sneak out of the village with the car, but this drunkard exposed his secret. Before Liu Changfa could make any move, Boss Yu kicked the groom in the stomach, and then pulled out a gun from his pocket with his right hand, pointing the dark muzzle at everyone.

Boss Yu could no longer remain calm. His taut nerves were triggered by Liu Changfa. After kicking Liu Changfa to the ground, Boss Yu grabbed Zhang Rong's hair and shouted at the people in the yard, "Everyone, squat down! Damn it, anyone who doesn't want to die, squat down..."

Most of the people in the courtyard were from the countryside and had never seen anything like it before. Some were stunned with fear, while others cried and ran outside the courtyard.

"Bang!"

A crisp gunshot rang out, and the person who had just run outside immediately fell to the ground, howling loudly. This shot also silenced the courtyard; apart from the person who had been shot in the thigh, no one dared to shout anymore.

Gunshots shattered the silence of the small mountain village. Those who had set up roadblocks at the village entrance and those searching the back mountain heard the gunshots and rushed over. In just five or six minutes, Liu Changfa's courtyard was completely surrounded.

"Yu Ku, put down your gun and come out. Surrendering is your only way out. Confess and you will be treated leniently; resist and you will be punished..."

"Bang, bang bang!!!"

Three gunshots rang out in the direction of the shout, immediately interrupting the sound.

"Don't come any closer, damn it. I've got explosives on me. I'd be lucky if I killed a bunch of them."

Old Yu shouted frantically, pulled out a detonator from his body, lit the fuse connecting the detonator, and threw it outside the gate.

Although there were no explosives and the detonator wasn't very lethal, the loud "boom" was still deafening, and the police officers surrounding the door quickly moved to both sides.

Chen Zhi, standing outside the door, frowned. The perpetrator had a gun, explosives, and hostages. What was even more troublesome was that Professor Meng was also inside. This made him abandon the idea of a direct assault. If Professor Meng were harmed, having his police uniform stripped off would be a minor matter.

"Is the sniper in position?"

However, the longer the time drags on, the more unstable the criminals' emotions will become, and Chen Zhi cannot predict what will happen then. A quick victory is the best approach.

"Report, the sniper is in position, but the target is hiding behind the crowd and cannot be locked on."

The voice coming from the walkie-talkie left Chen Zhi at a loss for what to do, and Boss Yu didn't give him much time to think.

When Boss Yu came over, he noticed Zhuang Rui's car. After hearing Liu Changfa's words, he knew the car belonged to Zhuang Rui, so he shouted to Zhuang Rui, who was squatting not far from the door, "Hey, you, you mean yours, that car outside is yours, right? Drive it to the door..."

"I?"

Zhuang Rui pointed to himself and asked, still somewhat confused. How could he encounter a gunfight while attending a wedding? He wondered if it was just his bad luck or his third brother's bad luck to run into something like this at his wedding.

"It's you! Don't even think about running away and not coming back in. If you don't drive the car over here, I'll kill her!"

The hostage in Yu Laoda's hands was Lao San's wife, and the gun was pointed at Zhang Rong's head. Liu Changfa, who had regained consciousness, was furious, but dared not move.

"Okay, I'll go get the car."

Zhuang Rui stood up and walked outside. As soon as he stepped out of the courtyard, he was pulled away by a man holding a gun in his right hand. Upon closer inspection, he realized it was the middle-aged man he had encountered the night before last.

"Are you a police officer? What should I do now?"

Zhuang Rui cut to the chase. Judging from the man's crazy behavior in the yard, he was definitely a desperate criminal. To be honest, if his buddies weren't still in the yard, Zhuang Rui would be as far away as possible right now.

"Listen to his instructions and drive the car over there." Chen Zhi didn't have any better ideas at the moment, but only by getting Boss Yu away from the compound could they have a chance to make their move.

"Why should I drive there? There are so many of you."

Zhuang Rui shouted unhappily, saying that he had already done a good job by offering his car, and now he was expected to be the driver? He wouldn't do that.

"He won't agree to let our people drive. We can't provoke him any further, otherwise he might hurt the hostages in desperation."

Chen Zhi certainly wanted to send an experienced person to drive, but Boss Yu would definitely not agree.

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment, then reluctantly agreed. He started the Grand Cherokee and brought it to a steady stop at the gate of the yard.

"Attention all snipers, you may open fire at any time, but you must ensure the safety of the hostages present."

Chen Zhi gave the order over the walkie-talkie: the time it took for the target to get into the vehicle was the best time to snipe.

"Get out of the car, open the door, and then get back into the driver's seat."

To avoid being targeted by snipers, Boss Yu had the people in the yard surround him and slowly moved towards the door.

Zhuang Rui was a little annoyed. This guy was really sticking to him. He could only turn off the car, get out, and open the back door.

Old Yu stopped at the gate of the courtyard, glanced into the car, pulled out two detonators with fuses attached, lit them, and threw them into two blind spots next to the gate.

"boom!"

As the explosion caused chaos, Boss Yu quickly jumped into the back seat of the car, pressed the muzzle of his gun against the back of Zhuang Rui's head, and said viciously, "Drive!"

"Bang!"

Suddenly, a sniper fired from an unknown location, shattering the rear window of the Grand Cherokee. Shards of glass flew inside the car, grazing Yu Laoda's cheek and Zhuang Rui's head. However, the shot grazed Yu Laoda's chin and missed.

Feeling the gun barrel pressed against his head seem to have shifted, Zhuang Rui ignored the pain in the back of his head, pushed open the half-closed car door, and rolled out headfirst.

Yu Laoda also came to his senses at this moment. Seeing that the hostage in his hands had escaped his control, he immediately pointed his gun at Zhuang Rui on the ground and pulled the trigger.

A flash of light from the gun muzzle illuminated Boss Yu's face, contorted with rage and utter despair. He knew he had no chance left; even if he died, he would take someone down with him.

Just as the gunshot rang out, a white figure pounced on Zhuang Rui with lightning speed.

"What is that?!"

Old Yu stared wide-eyed, but he no longer had the chance to see clearly; this question was destined to remain unanswered.

Almost at the same moment he fired, the sniper who had just missed fired again. The huge inertia generated by the bullets entering his body caused Boss Yu's body to slam heavily onto the back seat of the car, bounce up, and then hit the roof of the car. His body was riddled with bullets.

Then a deafening explosion rang out from inside the car. It was the "miraculous" sniper who had shot the explosives in Boss Yu's chest. After more than ten kilograms of black powder were detonated by the detonator, a shockwave first shattered all the windows of the car, and then formed a huge fireball that enveloped Zhuang Rui's Grand Cherokee.

All of this happened in an instant. Zhuang Rui, who was lying on the ground, only heard a gunshot behind him and felt a furry body pounce on him. Then came a huge explosion, but the impact was blocked by the object on his body.

"White Lion!"

Zhuang Rui turned his head with difficulty and, by the light from the car explosion, saw the white lion lying on top of him. Its body, facing the car, had its fur scorched and curled up. There was a bloody hole in the white lion's foreleg, from which blood was seeping out.

Chapter 252: Stone Cutting

Hearing Zhuang Rui's shout, the white lion barely opened its eyes, letting out a whimper before quickly closing them again, its breath growing weak.

Upon seeing that the white lion was still alive, a surge of joy welled up in Zhuang Rui's heart. He struggled to pull his body out from under the white lion and hugged it tightly, ignoring the continuous explosions around him. His spiritual energy rushed into the white lion's body like a madman.

From a puppy slightly smaller than the palm of his hand to now, Zhuang Rui and the white lion have grown to be like family. At this moment, Zhuang Rui no longer cares about concealing the spiritual energy in his eyes. As long as the white lion can live, Zhuang Rui is willing to sacrifice even the superpower of losing the spiritual energy in his eyes.

Chen Zhi looked at the man and dog on the verge of exploding and said to his men, "Pull them away..."

Immediately, four or five people stepped forward and carried Zhuang Rui and Bai Shi into the courtyard. They didn't know if Zhuang Rui was injured, so they carried them in together. Zhuang Rui only had eyes for Bai Shi and had no time to care about anything else.

Actually, the reason why White Lion's injuries were so severe was not due to the gunshot wound, but rather because the shock force of the explosion damaged White Lion's internal organs. However, under the nourishment of the spiritual energy that Zhuang Rui poured in, the injured parts of White Lion were gradually recovering.

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"Bring me a pair of needle-nose pliers..."

Zhuang Rui stroked the white lion's scorched fur with heartache, and shouted a word without even looking up.

"Hey bro, what do you need the pliers for?"

What happened in those few minutes was simply too unbelievable. It wasn't until Zhuang Rui's voice rang out that the guests in the courtyard seemed to wake from a dream. The third brother, Liu Changfa, hugged his wife and whispered words of comfort.

The two happiest people at this moment were none other than the drunken Wei Ge and Lao Si. The earth-shattering explosion couldn't wake them up; they were still rhythmically snoring under the table.

"Do you have it or not? Go get it now!"

Zhuang Rui yelled impatiently, startling the third brother. He didn't even bother to comfort his wife in his arms and rushed into the house to search.

Chen Zhi came into the courtyard, squatted down, and said somewhat apologetically to Zhuang Rui, "Mr. Zhuang, well, I'm really sorry..."

"It's our fault for not doing well; we haven't trained enough. The responsibility lies with us..."

The local police's criminal investigation team also came over. The person who fired the shot was his subordinate. The first shot missed the target, but the subsequent shot, after hitting the target, caused an explosion. For a sniper, this is an unforgivable mistake. Regardless of the outcome, that sniper will never be allowed to take on this mission again.

"Get out, all of you, get out of here..."

Zhuang Rui shouted hysterically as spiritual energy was continuously channeled into the white lion's body, but the white lion's eyes never opened again. Zhuang Rui was afraid, afraid of losing the white lion, which would be unbearable for him.

Since the spiritual energy in Zhuang Rui's eyes turned purple, he had never been so depleted as he was today. The long-lost stinging sensation returned, and he also felt somewhat dizzy. However, this was not caused by a lack of spiritual energy, but rather by a cut on the back of his head from the glass that had been bleeding.

"Call someone to bandage him up."

Chen Zhi also saw the wound on the back of Zhuang Rui's head and gave an instruction to the people around him. Although the matter was not resolved perfectly, fortunately no civilians were injured or

killed, which was a blessing in disguise. As for the Tibetan mastiff that had loyally saved its master, it was ignored by everyone.

"Here you go, little brother. It's my fault for wronging you."

The third brother found the pliers and handed them to Zhuang Rui. This happened at his wedding and almost cost Zhuang Rui his life. The third brother blamed himself for everything.

"Third brother, this is none of your business. Go and comfort your wife."

Zhuang Rui gave a reluctant reply, but did not look up, for fear of interrupting the flow of spiritual energy into his eyes.

A special police officer came over with bandages and was about to bandage Zhuang Rui's injured head when Zhuang Rui snatched the bandages away.

While examining the white lion's wound, Zhuang Rui discovered the bullet lodged in the lion's forelimb, but the bone was not broken. Zhuang Rui was also careful not to use spiritual energy to heal the wound, because that would make it impossible to remove the bullet.

The 9mm bullet was indeed quite powerful, almost blowing a bloody hole in the white lion's shoulder. Zhuang Rui inserted the pliers into the white lion's wound and removed the bullet stuck in the bone. The white lion's body trembled violently, opened its eyes to see Zhuang Rui, and then closed them wearily again.

Zhuang Rui threw the pliers and bullets on the ground and hurriedly wrapped the gauze around the white lion's wound. He then used his spiritual energy to heal the wound. Only after seeing the wound slowly close up did Zhuang Rui feel relieved. The white lion's life could be considered saved.

Exhausted, Zhuang Rui plopped down on the ground. His eyes were stinging from overusing his spiritual energy, and tears streamed down his face uncontrollably. He could only close his eyes and wait for his spiritual energy to recover on its own.

Suddenly, Zhuang Rui felt the white lion in his arms stir. He quickly opened his eyes and found the white lion looking at him. Its large eyes revealed gratitude, affection, and reluctance. He gently stroked the white lion's head, and a feeling of warmth welled up in Zhuang Rui's heart. He hugged the white lion tightly.

"What? One of them escaped? Issue an arrest warrant immediately and issue it nationwide. Request the cooperation of police in all provinces in the manhunt."

Upon hearing that Yu Laoba had not been found in the village, Chen Zhi's expression immediately turned grim. After interrogating Yu Laosan and Yu Laoqi, he knew that apart from Yu Laoda, who had been killed on the spot, only Yu Laoba, who had escaped, possessed all the information about this tomb raiding gang.

Because it was Yu Laoba who went down into the tomb to retrieve the burial goods over the years, he knew the quantity and whereabouts of these items best. If Yu Laoba got away, the case would be considered a case of starting strong but ending weakly.

...

After entering Liujiazhuang, Yu Laoba immediately stole a child's clothes, changed into them, and then, under the cover of night, boarded a carriage that was leaving Liujiazhuang.

Just as the explosion rang out, three or four miles away from Liujiazhuang, Yu Laoba, sitting at the back of a carriage, revealed a sinister look on his face. He knew that his elder brother had fallen here, and he had nowhere to go in the country.

Yu Laoba did not smuggle himself from Guangdong to Hong Kong. Instead, he went to the China-Myanmar border, crossed the border illegally, and then managed to get to Thailand. After contacting his supplier in Hong Kong, he reopened a route for smuggling cultural relics in China. Of course, that's another story.

...

The white lion was seriously injured this time. Even with Zhuang Rui's spiritual energy to soothe and heal it, it was still two days before it could walk again. However, to others, it already seemed like a miracle.

The excavation of Emperor Wenzong's tomb went very smoothly. According to Professor Meng's preliminary exploration, it was determined that Emperor Wenzong's tomb is the best-preserved imperial tomb of the Tang Dynasty since the joint tomb of Empress Wu Zetian and Emperor Gaozong.

In just two days, more than a thousand burial objects have been retrieved from the tomb, including more than twenty national first-class cultural relics. This is only what was obtained from the first two burial pits. The harvest in the main tomb chamber of Emperor Wenzong is expected to be even greater.

However, these clean-up tasks were not of much concern to Zhuang Rui, and he wasn't focused on them at the moment. Besides, no matter how many treasures were inside, they weren't his. Moreover, after this incident, Zhuang Rui had some thoughts about whether or not to pursue a master's degree in archaeology.

However, when he was on the phone with Uncle De, he was scolded by Uncle De. According to Uncle De, tomb raiders always avoid archaeological teams. Such a thing is almost a once-in-a-century occurrence. Besides, he sent Zhuang Rui to school to systematically learn about the customs and social structures of past dynasties, not to learn how to excavate in the field.

Thinking about it, that made sense, so Zhuang Rui gave up his idea.

However, given Bai Shi's current condition, he definitely won't be able to attend the International Tibetan Mastiff Exchange Conference in Shanxi. He called Liu Chuan and told him about it, which scared Liu Chuan so much that he almost immediately sent Zhou Rui over. Zhuang Rui then told him not to tell his family, as this matter was already worrying enough, and he didn't want any more people to worry about him.

On the third day of his stay in Liujiashuang, Zhuang Rui prepared to return to Pengcheng. Yesterday, he asked Wei Ge to go to Xi'an to buy him a car, a Jeep Grand Cherokee. Zhuang Rui was quite familiar with this model and was already quite comfortable driving it.

As for the totaled car, the insurance company will handle it. Moreover, after pressure from the local public security department, the compensation has been received. Some friends said, "This is not a traffic

accident, so the insurance company will not care. What a joke! The whole car was burned to a skeleton. Isn't this an accident?"

After saying goodbye to Professor Meng and Lao San, Zhuang Rui drove back. However, since the new car hadn't been broken in, he didn't drive very fast and it took him two days to get home. In total, he had been away for ten days, but for Zhuang Rui, it felt like ten years, because he had once again experienced a life-or-death ordeal.

Upon returning to his new home, Zhuang Rui discovered that the once empty villa had been completely renovated, and the white lion, who had seemed somewhat sickly, had become more energetic.

Having likely faced death again, Zhuang Rui wasn't in a good mood after returning home. He didn't inform his family that he was back and slept all day. If Zhuang Min hadn't come to tidy up the room, they probably wouldn't have known that Zhuang Rui was back.

Knowing that Zhuang Rui had returned home, Zhao Guodong picked up Zhuang's mother and rushed to the villa that evening. He also bought a lot of groceries to celebrate the first meal in the new house. The once quiet villa became lively, filled with Nannan's laughter.

"Uncle, is White Lion sick? He won't play with me today."

Nannan blinked her big eyes and looked at Zhuang Rui, asking, "Usually when I hug the white lion, it always holds its head high and acts all haughty. But today, the white lion actually obediently lay down, which makes the little one very uncomfortable."

"What? You went to tease the white lion again?"

Zhuang Rui was startled upon hearing this and quickly picked up the little one and put her on his lap. He said seriously, "The white lion is sick. Don't bother it, little girl. We'll play with it when it gets better, okay?"

"Okay, I'll go feed the White Lion White Rabbit Milk Candy. Mom said that eating White Rabbit will make you feel better when you're sick."

The little guy, who usually wouldn't share the candy in his pocket, suddenly changed his ways today when he heard that the white lion was sick.

Looking at his adorable niece and his smiling mother serving him food, Zhuang Rui felt much of the gloom in his heart dissipate, and a gentle warmth rose within him. Family is always the best haven for healing wounds.

It was clear that Zhuang Rui had something on his mind. After having dinner early, Zhuang's mother decided to stay overnight. Such a big house would feel a bit lonely with only one person.

After clearing away the dishes, Zhuang's mother, daughter, and granddaughter watched TV in the living room, while Zhuang Rui took the white lion for a leisurely stroll around the pond. Zhuang Rui discovered that the spiritual energy's therapeutic effect on the internal organs didn't seem to be very good; the white lion would become breathless if it ran even a little faster.

Walking over to a wicker chair, Zhuang Rui saw Zhao Guodong sitting there smoking. He joked, "Brother-in-law, what's wrong? Got kicked out for smoking?"

Zhao Guodong tossed Zhuang Rui a cigarette and said, "Xiao Rui, you don't seem very happy today. By the way, the small stone cutting machine you ordered has arrived. Since you weren't home, I left it at the repair shop's warehouse for now."

Zhao Guodong is a car mechanic. The first thing he noticed when he arrived was that Zhuang Rui's car, which didn't have license plates yet, wasn't the same one as before. Something must have happened on this trip. However, Zhuang Rui has always been very opinionated and wouldn't say anything, so no one could get anything out of him.

Zhuang Rui smiled bitterly to himself upon hearing this. This trip to Shaanxi had not only yielded no results, but had also nearly cost him his life. How could he be happy? However, when he heard his brother-in-law say that the stone cutting machine had arrived, Zhuang Rui's eyes lit up.

Before going to Shaanxi, Zhuang Rui asked Zhao Guodong to order a set of stone-cutting tools. He did not hide the fact that he had made over 100 million RMB gambling on stones in Guangdong from his family. Even the piece of red jadeite rough he brought back was studied by Zhao Guodong for a long

time. He almost made the same mistake as Zhuang Rui did back then, picking up a hammer and trying to crack it open.

"How much did the stuff cost?" Zhuang Rui asked casually.

"The stone cutting machine cost 42,000 yuan. It was made in Xiamen. I also bought three different models of grinding machines, which cost a total of 45,000 yuan. You gave me 50,000 yuan, and I still have a little left. Here, the invoice and the money are all here."

As the saying goes, even close brothers should keep clear accounts. Zhao Guodong came today to return the remaining payment for the stone cutting machine to Zhuang Rui. He is a man of principle and doesn't think that just because Zhuang Rui has become a billionaire, he can swallow this money and refuse to pay it back.

"Brother-in-law, take this and buy some toys for Nannan. I, as her uncle, have never bought her anything."

Zhuang Rui took the invoice and tossed the five thousand yuan to Zhao Guodong. He admired this quality in his brother-in-law the most: regardless of wealth or poverty, he always adhered to his principles. In today's society, there are very few people who can do this.

The next morning, Zhao Guodong didn't go back to the repair shop. Instead, he called his apprentice and asked him to send the stone-cutting tools to the resort. He wanted to stay and see how an ordinary-looking stone could be cut into a piece of jade worth hundreds of millions.

Zhuang Rui's attitude towards this was indifferent. He had already gambled away hundreds of millions of yuan worth of jadeite, so winning on this rough stone was nothing. He thought, "I'm just lucky. Let people think what they want. The more you try to hide these things, the more people will speculate. On the contrary, if you're open and honest, people will think you're just lucky."

There was some trouble when they entered the gate. The dutiful security guards did not allow the delivery pickup truck to enter. It was only after Zhuang Rui went out to negotiate that the pickup truck driven by Zhao Guodong's apprentice was able to park next to the villa's garage.

"How about it, Xiao Rui? This stone cutter was brought over from Nanjing by someone. You can't buy it in Pengcheng at all."

After the three men worked together to unload the stone cutter from the pickup truck, Zhao Guodong handed the instruction manual to Zhuang Rui.

"Brother-in-law, this is good, but..."

Looking at the stone-cutting machine in front of him, Zhuang Rui smiled wryly.

The stone cutting machine that Zhao Guodong bought was actually for cutting slabs. It was quite advanced, fully automatic, with a single-arm cantilever structure. In particular, the spindle box component used a pair of helical gears for two-stage speed change, and it also had the ability to achieve fully automatic cutting by computer remote control according to the preset cutting depth.

However, the gears of this type of stone cutter are inside the single arm, and the stone is pushed in by the conveyor belt for cutting. For those who gamble on stones, there is no way to observe the cut. Although this type of stone cutter is convenient to operate and saves time and effort, no one in the stone gambling circle uses it.

Zhuang Rui was quite satisfied with the three grinding machines, each about the thickness of an arm. The largest one could be fitted with both alloy saw teeth and diamond gears, making it almost equivalent to a small stone cutter.

Zhao Guodong noticed that Zhuang Rui's expression wasn't good when he looked at the stone cutter, and asked, "Xiao Rui, is this thing not working well?"

"It's okay, it works, but it's a bit of a hassle."

Since he had already bought it, Zhuang Rui was too lazy to bother with returning it. This kind of stone-cutting machine was completely unusable for experts in gambling on rough stones, but it didn't affect Zhuang Rui much. He could see the jade inside the rough stone, and as long as he adjusted the cutting depth beforehand, it was much less strenuous than a manual stone-cutting machine.

However, this meant that the piece of red jadeite could not be cut in front of Zhao Guodong and the others, otherwise Zhao Guodong would definitely question the accuracy of its cut surface after it was cut open.

“Brother-in-law, the stone cutting machine we used before wasn’t this model. I’ll think about it some more. Let’s cut these rough stones open first.”

Zhuang Rui made an excuse not to touch the red jadeite rough stone on the ground, but instead took out the black jadeite rough stone from the Ma Meng factory that he had bought from Yang Hao's stall.

Of these pieces, only two contain green. One is the glassy imperial green jadeite, and the other contains a hibiscus-type jadeite slightly larger than a thumbnail. The base color is good, almost reaching a bright green, and it can be polished into a small cabochon. Its value is around 70,000 to 80,000 yuan. As for the other pieces, Zhuang Rui bought them to match, fearing that Yang Hao would suspect something.

"Xiao Rui, did the jade really come from here?"

Not only was Zhao Guodong full of doubt, but his apprentice also picked up a fist-sized piece of hemp material, examining it over and over, his face clearly showing disbelief.

No wonder Zhao Guodong and the others didn't believe it. When Zhuang Rui first saw this kind of rough stone from the Ma Meng factory, he almost threw it away. He grabbed the piece of rough stone containing imperial green and said with a smile, "Hehe, brother-in-law, this stuff is cheap, only a few hundred yuan each. You should all pick one and cut it, have a go at it."

Zhuang Rui dared not let them cut that piece of imperial green jadeite rough. You see, the piece inside, the size of an egg, could be made into at least five cabochons, worth around ten million. The process of cutting the stone could not tolerate the slightest mistake.

"No, Xiao Rui, you should do it yourself. I heard that stuff is really expensive. What if we cut it badly?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Zhao Guodong quickly put down the stone in his hand, as did his apprentice, who did so with great care, making Zhuang Rui chuckle.

"Brother-in-law, that's enough. Don't scare yourself unnecessarily. There aren't that many valuable raw materials. I already said that these few pieces are cheap. I just bought them for everyone to cut and play with."

"Really?" Zhao Guodong was still somewhat incredulous.

"Really, go ahead and cut it..." Zhuang Rui handed over the grinder. This little thing is fine with a grinder.

"How...how do I cut this? Si'er, you go first."

Zhao Guodong took the polishing machine, somewhat at a loss, and then casually handed it to his apprentice.

"Okay, I'll cut first."

Zhao Guodong's apprentice, Si'er, was not intimidated. He first plugged the grinder into the power outlet in the garage. However, he didn't know what to do with the rough stone. After thinking for a while, he simply squatted down, stepped on the rough stone, turned on the grinder, and prepared to cut it on the stone.

"Hey, no, no, that'll hurt your foot."

Zhuang Rui quickly stepped forward to stop Si'er's actions. If he cut like that, he could easily cut his own foot if he even slightly shook his hand. This grinder can even cut through metal. How could he possibly be safe if he hit his foot?

"Si'er, you can cut it now."

Zhuang Rui took the rough stone from under Si'er's leather shoes, opened the reinforcing device next to the stone cutting machine belt, placed the stone in the middle, and turned the switch to clamp the rough stone tightly in the middle before calling Si'er over to cut the stone.

"Hurry up, kid, I'm waiting to cut it."

Si'er looked a little nervous, and his hands were trembling slightly. After starting the grinder, it took a long time to land on the stone. Zhao Guodong, who was standing next to him, became a little impatient and urged him to hurry up.

"Master, I don't know where to put this. What if I cut the jade inside in half?" Si'er felt like a dog biting a hedgehog, not knowing where to start.

Zhuang Rui encouraged him from the side, "Cut it however you like, it's okay. Just pay attention while you're cutting, and if you see any green, stop immediately."

After a quick glance, Zhuang Rui realized that the kid was lucky; the stone he picked at random was actually the hibiscus jadeite. However, the jadeite was too small, and Zhuang Rui didn't think much of it. Nevertheless, he still reminded Si'er.

Encouraged by Zhuang Rui, Si'er brought the grinder that had been idling for half a day closer to the stone. With a "click-clack" sound, a layer of grayish-green powder floated down to the ground.

Although the rough stones from Ma Meng Factory appear to be entirely black, the outer layer of these black jadeite rough stones is composed of chlorite clay minerals. Therefore, when they are crushed into powder, their color turns grayish-green.

The raw material wasn't large, and a small piece was cut off by Si'er a few minutes later. Nothing was found, but a dark green color appeared on the cut surface. Zhuang Rui saw this and knew that it was a sign that the green color was about to appear.

Si'er relaxed at this point. Cutting stone was just a matter of course. After reinforcing the stone that had become a little smaller, he took the grinder and cut towards the middle. Zhao Guodong stared wide-eyed at the place where stone chips were flying.

"Stop, stop! Hey kid, stop right now! Can't you see the color?"

Just as Si'er was thoroughly enjoying himself, he was suddenly startled by his master's shout. He quickly picked up the grinder, and the spinning gears almost hit his face.

Zhuang Rui pulled over the soft hose for washing cars, rinsed the rough stone, and cleaned away the stone chips and dust, revealing a vibrant green color to the group.

Zhao Guodong's reminder was timely. The polishing machine did not damage the jade. Although the exposed part was only about the size of a little fingernail, the green color was very pure, and it was even three times deeper than the green of the trees in the garden.

Although the quality of the jadeite is only considered mid-range, Chinese people love green jadeite. Even a small piece of jadeite like this, if polished by a skilled craftsman and set into a ring, can sell for seventy or eighty thousand yuan.

"Master, is there really... really jade?"

Si'er's face lit up with surprise. Although the thing wasn't his, he was already very satisfied to be able to extract the jade from the stone egg with his own hands.

"Nonsense, of course there's jade. Be careful, polish away all those stones around you and take out the jade."

Zhao Guodong completely forgot about his earlier behavior and began to act as a teacher.

"Why....."

Si'er agreed and began polishing the rough stone next to the jadeite. Because she was afraid of damaging the jadeite inside, she moved much slower than before. It took almost an hour to take the jadeite out.

"It's so beautiful!"

Si'er held the thumb-sized piece of jade, with some wispy green mist on its surface, in her palm and examined it carefully in the sunlight, unable to help but sigh with admiration.

"Brother Zhuang, here you go..."

After playing with it in her hands for a while, Si'er reluctantly handed the jade to Zhuang Rui. Although it was a good piece of jade, it wasn't for her.

"Hehe, you can keep it, Si'er. Go to a reputable jewelry store later and have their craftsmen make some jewelry for you. Then give them this jade to them to process and set. You can keep it for yourself to play with..."

Zhuang Rui didn't accept it. Although the jade was worth tens of thousands of yuan, it was no longer of any interest to him. His brother-in-law's apprentice was a pretty good person. He had resigned from his original job with Zhao Guodong. He was the one who went to Nanjing with him last time. He was practically his employee. Zhuang Rui just considered it a perk for him.

"Hey, thanks, Brother Zhuang."

Si'er happily agreed. Jade is something that not only women like, but men can't resist its allure either.

"Xiao Rui, how much is this jade worth?"

Zhao Guodong, who was standing to the side, asked, "I know what Zhuang Rui means, but if you give something away, you should make sure your subordinates remember your kindness. If you just give it away without a clear explanation, others may not value it. Besides, Zhao Guodong himself was also quite curious about the value of this thing."

"Hehe, it's worth about fifty or sixty thousand. If the setting is good, the price of the whole ring will probably be even higher."

Zhuang Rui casually replied that polishing the ring face is very simple and does not require any special skills, but the quality of the setting is quite important. For example, pavé setting is a common technique

for setting diamonds. There are also other techniques such as bezel setting and bezel setting, which have many intricacies and require a high level of craftsmanship.

"Fifty or sixty thousand? Brother Zhuang, I can't accept this. It's too valuable."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Si'er hurriedly stuffed the jade in his hand into Zhuang Rui's hands. To be honest, the most expensive jade jewelry he usually saw was only a few hundred or a thousand yuan. He originally thought this thing was only worth a few hundred yuan, but he didn't expect it to be so expensive.

Zhuang Rui pushed Si'er's hand back and said, "You're lucky to have untied it yourself, so keep it for yourself. Otherwise, give it to my brother-in-law. I don't want it anyway."

"Master, look at this..."

Si'er looked at Zhao Guodong with some difficulty. Like master, like apprentice. He was not the kind of person who would take advantage of others. Moreover, after leaving his original unit and working for Zhao Guodong, his monthly salary was four or five thousand, which was several times that of his original unit. In addition, he also had some shares in the repair shop. He calculated that he could get more than 100,000 yuan in dividends at the end of the year. Si'er was already very satisfied.

"Put it away. Just do a good job from now on. Oh, and I'll give Jianmin another reward later. Don't be jealous, kid."

Zhao Guodong understood Zhuang Rui's meaning, waved his hand to let Si'er leave the jade. Nowadays, there are more and more private cars, and the competition in the car repair industry has become more intense. It's not good to not have a few trusted people on your side. The two apprentices that Zhao Guodong brought from his workplace are quite skilled. Not long ago, someone even tried to poach them with a high salary.

Jianmin, whom Zhao Guodong mentioned, is another apprentice he has taken on. Since Si'er has taken the jade, he will definitely give that apprentice something else in return. He has to treat everyone fairly.

"Hehe, how could that be..." Si'er happily examined the jade in her hand for a long time before carefully putting it back into her pocket.

"Look at your master..."

With his apprentice having already unearthed the jade, Zhao Guodong was naturally full of confidence. Following Zhuang Rui's instructions, he secured the rough stone and then got to work with the polishing machine, working away with great effort.

Chapter 254 Intoxicating Colors

"Xiao Rui, why is there nothing in this area?"

After working for more than half an hour, the fist-sized rough stone had almost completely turned into powder, and there was still no jadeite that Zhao Guodong had hoped for. He couldn't help but frown and asked Zhuang Rui for help.

Zhuang Rui laughed at his brother-in-law's words and said, "Brother-in-law, if every piece of rough stone contains jade, would it still be called gambling on stones? Look, there are two more pieces of rough stone over there. Let me cut them open for you."

Zhao Guodong was somewhat unconvinced. If his apprentice could cut out jadeite, surely he, as the master, couldn't be worse than his apprentice? Without refusing, he stepped forward and cut open the remaining two rough stones one by one, only to find that his luck really wasn't very good. Apart from some pebbles on the ground, he didn't see anything else.

"Xiao Rui, are you going to solve that thing you're holding...?"

Although he had been busy for half a day and hadn't gotten anything, Zhao Guodong had managed to satisfy his craving and his eyes were now fixed on the piece of raw jade in Zhuang Rui's hand.

"Brother-in-law, let me have a go too, I'll unravel this piece myself."

Zhuang Rui put on a pitiful look. He dared not let Zhao Guodong cut this rough stone. It contained imperial green jadeite of the glass type. If even a little bit of the jade inside was damaged, its value could drop by millions.

"I was thinking of cutting out a piece of jade to make a piece of jewelry for your sister."

Zhao Guodong was very dissatisfied with his luck and kicked the scattered stones on the ground.

Zhuang Rui's heart stirred upon hearing this. He had been thinking about how to maximize the profits from the jadeite, but since he started gambling on jadeite, he had earned over 100 million RMB and had unearthed quite a few top-quality jadeite pieces. Why hadn't he thought of keeping some to give to his family?

With that thought in mind, Zhuang Rui made up his mind. He wouldn't sell the imperial green jade after it was cut open. Instead, he would make pendants for his mother and older sister. Zhuang Rui knew that the pendants wouldn't be as expensive as the cabochons, but he wasn't short of money. As long as his family liked it, that was more important than anything else.

"Let's see how your luck is. That kid Da Chuan has told me several times that your hand is practically a golden hand, you're guaranteed to hit the target every time." Zhao Guodong looked on expectantly as he watched Zhuang Rui walk towards the stone cutting machine with the rough stone.

"Hey, everyone come and eat, don't you even know what time it is..."

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to cut the stone, Zhuang Min's voice suddenly came over. Zhuang Rui checked his phone and, sure enough, he had only cut a few rough stones, and it was almost noon.

"Let's go, brother-in-law, we'll talk about it after we eat."

After Zhuang Rui put the raw materials into the garage, he used the remote control to lower the garage door before turning around and walking into the house.

After serving Bai Shi half a plate of meat porridge, Zhuang Rui sat down at the table. Lunch was very plentiful; Zhuang Min had gone out to buy groceries that morning, along with more than a dozen large, bright red hairy crabs.

"Brother Zhuang, your villa is really impressive..." Si'er was stunned when he entered the villa for the first time.

"You should eat well, kid. When you get married, go to the countryside, buy a piece of land, and build your own house. I guarantee it'll be even more impressive than this villa." Zhao Guodong smiled and put a hairy crab on his apprentice's plate. They had been together for four or five years and were as close as brothers.

"This place is nice, but it's too inconvenient to buy groceries. It takes half an hour to drive there and back."

Zhuang Min bought the groceries on her way back from dropping her daughter off at kindergarten in the morning. She felt that everything about the resort was great, except that she had to go a long way to buy things like oil, salt, soy sauce, and vinegar.

Hearing this, Zhuang Rui's heart stirred, and he said to Zhuang Min, "Sister, why don't you buy a car? Otherwise, it's too inconvenient to come here. Brother-in-law needs to go to the repair shop often, and he can't always pick you up and drop you off." Zhuang Rui knew that his older sister had gotten her driver's license a few months ago and occasionally drove her brother-in-law's car.

"That would cost over ten thousand yuan, so let's forget about it. Guodong's repair shop has just expanded its business, let's wait until next year."

Zhuang Min was also somewhat tempted upon hearing this, but after considering the price of a car, her enthusiasm waned.

"Why wait until next year? This afternoon, you can pick up your daughter and go to the car market with Mom to look at cars. If you like one, just buy it. It will be more convenient for you to bring Mom here when you have a car."

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he stood up and rummaged around for a while before finally finding the bank card with the more than 400,000 yuan compensation from the insurance company. The compensation was much less than the price he paid for the car, supposedly due to depreciation and wear and tear. Zhuang Rui was too lazy to argue about it at the time, so he took the card and left.

"Mom, what do you think..." Zhuang Min didn't know whether to accept the money or not. Although her younger brother was rich, she was already married and it was inappropriate for her to take the money.

"Take it. It's really inconvenient without cars coming and going. Let's go take a look this afternoon..."

Mrs. Zhuang was a very generous person. When the two siblings were young, she never made them suffer. She never mentioned saving money for future use. She spent almost all of her salary. When she heard that Zhuang Rui had earned more than 100 million yuan recently, Mrs. Zhuang just nodded and did not show any surprise.

After hearing Zhuang's mother's words, Zhuang Min finally took the bank card. However, the meal became rather unappetizing, her mind preoccupied with what car to buy that afternoon.

After lunch, Zhuang Rui first used his spiritual energy to help the white lion recover before going to the garage to prepare to cut open the rough stone containing imperial green jade.

"Xiao Rui, give me your car. Guo Dong needs to go back to the repair shop this afternoon." Zhuang Rui had just opened the garage door when Zhuang Min and her daughter came over.

"This car... isn't the original one. The original car was borrowed by a classmate in Shaanxi, and it got into an accident. He gave me a replacement." Zhuang Rui really didn't know how to explain, and even he himself didn't believe what he said.

"Xiao Rui, be careful when you drive. Whether you hit someone or get hit, both of you will be injured."

Fortunately, neither Zhuang Min nor her daughter were the type to pry into things. After giving Zhuang Rui a brief instruction, Zhuang's mother didn't press the matter further.

"Xiao Rui, is this what they call rough jade? It looks no different from any other stone you see on the roadside. Why is it called such a strange name?"

Zhuang Min's attention was immediately drawn to the somewhat strange-looking stone-cutting machine and the raw stones that had already been fixed in place.

"Sis, this is a jadeite rough stone. 'Stone gambling' is just a general term for a behavior. Well, the act of cutting open this stone can be called stone gambling. If there is jadeite inside, we win the gamble; if not, we lose the gamble."

Zhuang Rui was both amused and exasperated by his older sister's words, and could only give her a further lesson on jade gambling.

Zhuang Min knew that these people had been cutting stones here all morning. Looking at the stone chips all over the ground, she asked, "Oh, did you win or lose the bet just now?"

"Hehe, I won, Master lost..."

Si'er proudly pulled the jade from her pocket and handed it to Zhuang Min.

"Wow, it really came from this stone. Guodong, you're really useless. You're not even as good as Si'er..." This piece of jade has not been polished and still has a lot of fibrous crystal residue on it, making it easy to identify.

Zhuang Rui's lips twitched upwards unnaturally at his older sister's words, while Si'er shrank back, afraid that his master would notice him.

In fact, that's just Zhuang Min's personality; she speaks frankly and without thinking.

However, these words were a bit too forceful and could easily arouse suspicion. When Zhuang Rui glanced at his brother-in-law, sure enough, his face had turned somewhat ashen. Zhuang Rui was considering whether, in order to protect his brother-in-law's dignity, he should hand over his piece of raw jade to Zhao Guodong to cut.

Before Zhuang Rui could make up his mind, Zhao Guodong said, "Xiao Rui, I'll cut this last piece of rough jade. I don't believe it..."

Even an honest man has his limits. Seeing Zhao Guodong pick up the polishing machine, Zhuang Rui quickly went over and said, "Brother-in-law, this rough stone cost more than 30,000 yuan. There's a good chance it will contain jade. Be careful. Just polish it slowly from the side. Don't cut it directly."

As long as you can stop applying force in time when the green color appears, you shouldn't damage the jade inside. Zhuang Rui deliberately inflated the price of this rough stone so that Zhao Guodong would be more careful.

Sure enough, Zhao Guodong hesitated for a moment after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. However, it seemed that he was deeply provoked by Zhuang Rui this time. He sighed and decided to do it himself. A useless man is no different from an incompetent man. This is intolerable.

Zhuang Rui realized she had said the wrong thing, stuck out her tongue, and didn't dare to say anything more.

Cutting stones is actually a very simple task, especially cutting small pieces of rough stone. Unless you are nearsighted by 500 or 600 degrees and not wearing glasses, you can usually stop when you see green. Of course, colorblind people are an exception.

Zhao Guodong had just finished processing two rough stones and was now quite skilled. Amidst the "click-clack" sound of the grinding wheel rubbing against the stone, a gray-green mist layer appeared on the surface of the rough stone and began to penetrate inwards.

"Brother-in-law, it might be turning green soon, so please be a little slower."

Zhao Guodong naturally didn't know what these grayish-green, misty crystals were, but in Zhuang Rui's eyes, who was somewhat of an expert, it was a sign of a successful gamble. If this were at the Pingzhou jade gambling fair, based on this performance, it would be easy to resell it for tens of thousands of yuan. Of course, that was the price before knowing the quality of the jade inside.

The allure of jade gambling lies in this: until the very end, no one knows what will happen. Experience is used to overturn things, authority is used to challenge things, and no one dares to be 100% certain about the performance of a rough stone, even a semi-gambled one.

Zhao Guodong became somewhat nervous after Zhuang Rui's words and became even more cautious. When a green light appeared in front of him, he immediately raised his arm forcefully. The rapidly spinning gear grazed his forehead, and a few strands of hair fell to the ground.

"There's jadeite! I've found jadeite too, haha. Xiao Rui, come and take a look, is it jadeite?"

Zhao Guodong ignored his dangerous actions and shouted happily like a child, reaching out to pull Zhuang Rui with the hand that was still holding the grinder.

"Brother-in-law, be careful, you almost hurt yourself just now."

Zhuang Rui took the polishing machine from Zhao Guodong, turned off the power, rinsed the rough material with a hose, and then went closer to examine it.

Looking at this tiny bit of green, no bigger than a soybean, Zhuang Rui truly admired his brother-in-law's eye for quality. He estimated that even if he were to cut this rough stone, the polished surface would probably be larger than this.

"Brother-in-law, yes, it's jade. I'll do the rest of the work."

Zhuang Rui gave Zhao Guodong a thumbs up, and Zhao Guodong stood there grinning foolishly, his expression no less than saying to Zhuang Min, "See? Your husband has also unearthed jade."

"Silly boy, come here and let me see if you're hurt."

Zhuang Min was also startled by Zhao Guodong. She quickly went over to check Zhao Guodong's scalp and thankfully only a few strands of hair had fallen out.

Zhuang Rui's movements were much more skillful. He re-secured the rough stone, cut off the excess stone on the remaining sides, and then used the back of a grinding wheel to polish it little by little. The jadeite, which was about the size of an egg, gradually appeared in front of everyone.

"Wow, it's so beautiful! What kind of jade is this? I've never seen anything like it before!"

Looking at the jade in Zhuang Rui's palm, Zhuang Min couldn't help but exclaim. Not only her, but also Zhao Guodong and Si'er, as well as Zhuang's mother, who was usually indifferent to material possessions, all focused their eyes on Zhuang Rui's palm.

Although Zhuang Rui was afraid of damaging the jade, some fine mist crystals remained on the outer skin of the jadeite. However, this could not conceal the splendor of the imperial green. The almost transparent jade showed a rich green color. Under the sunlight, it was flawless and exuded a deep, quiet, and intoxicating color.

The first to regain her senses was Mrs. Zhuang, who asked, "Xiao Rui, is this imperial green jadeite?"

Although he found it a little strange that his mother, who never wore jewelry, recognized this piece of jade, Zhuang Rui still replied, "Yes, and it's imperial green of the glass type. Just this big piece is worth over ten million."

The reason why Imperial Green Glass is so precious is not because of its beautiful color or how clear its texture is, but because of its rarity.

Glassy jadeite is rare, but it can still be seen often. The same goes for fully green jadeite. Some high-green jadeite can also be called imperial green, but the combination of the two is very rare. Perhaps among the tens of thousands of rough stones at the Pingzhou jade gambling fair, there is only one piece of glassy imperial green jadeite the size of an egg. The saying "rarity makes things valuable" is the most appropriate way to describe it.

"Ten million...? That's...that's so expensive!"

From the side came Si'er's stammering voice, her mouth agape as if she could swallow the rough jade. Although the jade in Zhuang Rui's hand was very beautiful, Si'er just couldn't equate it with ten million.

Chapter 255 Stone Studio (Part 1)

"To make a finished product, the skill of the sculptor is also crucial to determine its price. My brother-in-law was just lucky; if I were to cut it, I might end up with nothing.

Zhuang Rui smiled and complimented his brother-in-law, then handed the jade he was holding to his mother so they could take a look.

Si'er and the others didn't know much about jade gambling. When they saw that two out of the five stones yielded jade, they thought it was a normal thing and didn't ask any more questions. However, if it were Song Jun or Fatty Ma here, Zhuang Rui would never have cut the stones on the spot, even if you beat him to death.

Everyone carefully passed the glass-type imperial green jadeite around, and when they held it in their hands, they all looked as if they were afraid it would melt in their mouths or break in their hands.

"Mom, I'll find a jewelry store and have them make some pieces for you, my sister, and our daughter. Everyone will get one. Brother-in-law, don't look at me, the men don't get any..."

Zhao Guodong was beaming with joy as he unearthed a piece of top-quality jade when he was startled by Zhuang Rui's words. He thought he had misheard and immediately looked at Zhuang Rui.

"Xiao Rui, this...this is way too expensive, isn't it? Wearing this out, wouldn't you be constantly on edge?"

Zhuang Min was also taken aback when she heard this. However, although she said that, her eyes, which were fixed on the jade, betrayed her. No woman could remain unmoved by such a beautiful jade.

Mother Zhuang shook her head and said, "Xiao Rui, just use this jade to make some things for Xiao Min and Nannan. I'm too old to wear these things anymore."

"That won't do. Each of you needs one. Mom, you don't need to worry about it."

Although Zhuang Rui remembered that his mother never wore such things, it didn't mean that his mother didn't like them. From the way his mother looked at the jade just now, Zhuang Rui could tell that his mother, who was always indifferent to these material possessions, was also tempted.

"Okay, let's make a Buddha pendant. It can be worn inside clothes so it won't be too conspicuous."

What Zhuang's mother said next almost made Zhuang Rui stumble. Just a moment ago she said she didn't want it, but now she's even considering what to do. It seems that jade has an extraordinary attraction for women, regardless of age, appealing to everyone.

After putting the jade in his pocket and tidying up the rubble in the garage, Zhuang Rui drove his mother and older sister to pick up Nannan. Zhao Guodong and his apprentice also returned to the repair shop. Business at the repair shop had been good lately, and they had already lost most of the day.

After picking up Nannan, Zhuang Rui drove directly to the area near Jinshan District where the car market was most concentrated.

"Huh? We have a 4S store here now?"

Zhuang Rui saw a car dealership with a 4S sign on it by the roadside. The exterior walls on three sides were made of floor-to-ceiling glass, and the decoration was simple, bright, and very impressive. So he parked his car there.

"Hello sir, welcome to the Volkswagen 4S store. How can I help you?" As soon as you entered, a lady in a cheongsam greeted you.

Hearing her words, Zhuang Rui was taken aback. The 4S stores he had seen in Nanjing had all kinds of car models, and were like general car stores. He didn't expect that in just a few months, regular 4S stores had already opened. It seemed that the car consumer market had become very popular.

"Let's just take a look around. If you have any good car models to recommend, please let us know."

This 4S store is set up like a leisure center. There is a glass coffee table and a few chairs between three or five display cars. There are some brochures on the coffee table. There are quite a few people coming to see the cars today, and like Zhuang Rui and his group, most of them are in groups of three or four. Several children are running around in the store.

"Mom, you should rest. We'll go take a look."

Zhuang Rui knew his mother usually took a nap in the afternoon, so he found an empty seat for her to sit down, and someone immediately brought her several cups of tea.

"Sir, we just received the latest Volkswagen Passat. It's a very good mid-range car in China, perfect for families. It's especially suitable for a family of three like yours. And the white one would be perfect for your wife to drive."

The saleswoman saw Zhuang Rui drive in a Grand Cherokee when she was standing at the door, and knew that the lady next to him must be the one who wanted to buy the car.

Her words left Zhuang Rui somewhat dumbfounded. What was all this about? He gave a wry smile and said, "This is my sister, and that's my niece. They're not a family of three. By the way, when you buy a car here, all the paperwork is handled by your agency, right?"

The saleswoman stuck out her tongue. Seeing that Zhuang Rui wasn't really angry, she cautiously replied, "Sir, please rest assured that we handle all the registration and licensing matters for cars purchased from us. Apart from the necessary expenses of the vehicle management office, we don't charge any additional fees."

Zhuang Rui nodded, looked at Zhuang Min, and said, "Sis, what do you think? This white Passat is perfect for a woman to drive, and it's not flashy at all."

Zhuang Min opened the car door and got in. She seemed quite satisfied, but after looking at the car's specifications and price, she immediately shook her head. It cost over 260,000 yuan, much higher than her budget.

"Xiao Rui, let's go check out the Jetta. I've heard it's a pretty good car."

"Let's go with the Passat. The Jetta is too small and not very comfortable to sit in."

Zhuang Rui could tell that his older sister was quite satisfied with the car, so he finalized the deal.

"Oh, oh, Mommy has a car to drive now..." The little girl excitedly climbed into the car through the door Zhuang Min opened, refusing to get out no matter what.

"Alright, bring the car purchase contract. Sis, you sign the contract with them, and I'll go make the payment. I have some other things to do later."

Zhuang Rui's nonchalant attitude made the car saleswoman secretly click her tongue in amazement. She quickly called over a few colleagues to help. There are usually many people looking at cars, but not many people decide to buy on their first visit. Young and wealthy people like Zhuang Rui are even rarer.

"By the way, I bought a car in another city, but it hasn't been registered yet. Can you register it for me here?"

Upon reaching the payment counter, Zhuang Rui asked, "This would have been the most convenient thing to do if Liu Chuan had handled it, but he's currently in Shaanxi and probably won't be back for more than a week. Anyway, my older sister's car also needs to be registered, so Zhuang Rui thought he'd get it done at the same time."

"Yes, as long as you have the car purchase invoice and related documents, we can handle it for you for a very small handling fee. You can also choose to have your future maintenance done here."

After receiving a satisfactory reply, Zhuang Rui swiped his card to pay the full amount. As for the insurance and other matters, he left them to his older sister to handle. He returned to his car, took out the purchase documents, and handed them to the dealership so they could help him register the vehicle.

After dealing with these matters, Zhuang Rui knew he would have to wait more than an hour to pick up the car. He told his older sister to drive carefully on her way back and then left.

Driving to the city center, Zhuang Rui saw a sign by the roadside, his eyes lit up, and he parked his car there.

The shop's signboard, "Shitou Zhai," hangs above the entrance. The red background and white characters are written in the style of clerical script, which is bold, steady, solid, and compact, giving people a strong classical charm and making them want to explore further.

This is a shop specializing in jade, which has been in Pengcheng for many years. Zhuang Rui had visited before, but at that time he was short of money and could only admire the exquisite jewelry that cost thousands or tens of thousands of yuan.

Upon entering the store, you are greeted by a display stand about one meter high, on which is placed a sailboat carved entirely from jade, symbolizing smooth sailing.

There weren't many customers in the store. Zhuang Rui looked around at a few counters. Most of the jadeite jewelry here was made of mid-range material, mainly earrings, cabochons, and pendants, with a few bracelets as well. However, the prices were not cheap. After browsing around, Zhuang Rui realized that those jewelers dared to add so much price to the raw jadeite material for a reason.

"Sir, hello. What kind of jade are you looking to buy? I can introduce it to you. Our Stone Studio products are designed around the themes of 'mystery, dreams, and joy,' allowing you to have a spiritual, romantic, and natural experience with genuine stones!"

Wu Jia had been observing this customer for a while. Judging from his behavior after entering the room, he didn't seem like a customer at all. When he was examining the jade, his eyes revealed more of a critical and disdainful look.

Zhuang Rui snapped out of his daze upon hearing this and saw a girl with a round face, a sweet smile, and wearing a shop uniform looking at him. He said somewhat shyly, "Oh, I'm not here to buy jade. But do you offer jade processing services? I have some raw materials and would like to have a few pieces of jewelry made."

In the early years, there used to be people setting up stalls on the roadside to buy and process gold and silver jewelry, but these have not been seen in recent years. Zhuang Rui came here to try his luck. Old

shops like this, which have been open for more than ten years, usually have their own jade carving masters.

"Custom manufacturing?"

Wu Jia was taken aback. She had been managing the store since graduating from university, for three or four years now, and this was the first time she had heard someone make such a request.

"I'm sorry, we only sell finished products here, we don't do any processing for our customers."

Wu Jia was telling the truth. Although her grandfather sometimes helped others carve objects, those people were either friends or regular customers. She didn't know whether she should take on the business, so she subconsciously refused.

"Oh, I'm sorry to have bothered you..." Zhuang Rui was somewhat disappointed and turned to leave.

"Excuse me, what kind of jewelry do you want made? Can I see your materials?" It was the first time Wu Jia had encountered a customer like this, and she couldn't help but feel a little curious.

Chapter 256 Stone Studio (Part Two)

Is there any difference?

Zhuang Rui stopped and turned to look at the girl with a hint of doubt. If she had already said that she would not process customer materials, then why did she need to look at his raw materials?

"Ah, it's like this. If your materials are of good quality, perhaps I can ask my grandfather for you. Most of the high-end jade ornaments in this shop were hand-carved by my grandfather."

Wu Jia felt a little embarrassed by Zhuang Rui's question and secretly blamed herself for meddling. She could only bring up her grandfather to make a point.

However, Wu Jia had already made up her mind that no matter how good or bad Zhuang Rui's materials were, she would say that the materials were just average, because her grandfather had gotten older in recent years, especially in the last two years, and his hands trembled badly. Apart from polishing some bracelets, he rarely carved other more delicate objects.

"Oh? This shop is owned by your family?"

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui turned around and walked over. This Stone Studio was very famous in Pengcheng, but he never expected that it was actually run by this girl's family.

I remember when Zhuang Rui was in junior high school, there was a classmate whose family was very rich. He once boasted in class that his father had bought a Guanyin statue from Shitouzhai and sent it to the temple to have it consecrated by a master. This shows how famous Shitouzhai was in Pengcheng.

Back then, Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan could only come in and browse when they had nothing to do, carrying a few yuan in their pockets. As for the things here, they couldn't afford them. This memory from back then was the main reason why Zhuang Rui chose to come to Shitouzhai to inquire.

"This business was founded by my grandfather; I'm just working here..."

Wu Jia didn't know why she answered the man's question. Maybe Zhuang Rui gave people a friendly feeling, like chatting with a friend, so she just blurted it out.

"Yeah, your shop has been open for many years. I used to come here to play when I was a kid, but I couldn't afford to buy anything here." Zhuang Rui recalled the days when he and Liu Chuan, two little kids, wandered around the shop and couldn't help but feel a little sentimental.

"Hey, didn't you want it processed? Take out the jade material, let me take a look first..."

Wu Jia was somewhat confused by Zhuang Rui's words. "We're not that close, why are you telling me this?" she thought. So her tone became a little unfriendly, and she changed the formal "you" to "you" when addressing Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui didn't notice the change in the girl's tone. He had just carefully examined the carvings of several pendants; they were exquisitely crafted, depicting the facial expressions of people or animals with lifelike realism. The carving was even better than the pendant Qin Xuanbing had given him, which he was wearing around his neck.

By observing these objects, Zhuang Rui had gained some understanding of the girl's grandfather's craftsmanship. He then reached into his pocket, took out the egg-sized piece of imperial green jadeite, and carefully handed it to Wu Jia.

Seeing Zhuang Rui's cautious look, Wu Jia muttered under her breath, "What kind of material is it? Why are you being so mysterious?"

Upon receiving it, Wu Jia first felt her right hand suddenly drop downwards. Looking closely, her first thought was: this thing is colored acrylic glass.

Don't be surprised that the girl would have this thought, because nowadays many unscrupulous merchants use colored acrylic glass and resin and other synthetic materials to imitate jade jewelry, and these people have already formed a production and sales chain. Someone even came to Wu Jia's door to promote it.

However, Wu Jia quickly dismissed this idea, because after getting her hands on the piece of jade, she felt that the wispy crystals at the edges were a bit tricky, and they didn't seem to be glued on, indicating that this was not a fake jade.

Wu Jia, who had been somewhat nonchalant, suddenly became nervous. She had been holding the jade in her palm to examine it, but now she quickly took an empty jewelry box from the counter, placed the jade in the recessed area of the box, put it on the counter, turned on the strong light needed for customers to select jade, and took out a magnifying glass to carefully observe the jade.

The more Wu Jia looked at it, the more shocked she became. She had followed her grandfather around since she was a child, watching him carve jade. Whether it was hard jadeite or soft jade, she could almost always tell the difference between real and fake. She had also seen many kinds of top-quality jade. But this piece of jadeite in front of her shocked her and made her deeply fascinated.

The jade was almost transparent, with a deep, ocean-like green color, like a lover's eyes, intoxicating. Wu Jia claimed to have appraised many top-quality jade stones, but compared to this jadeite in front of her, they were all trash. One was an emperor, and the other was a commoner; there was simply no comparison between them.

"This...this...this is imperial green jadeite of the glass type???"

Wu Jia has forgotten her original intention. Even if she remembered, she wouldn't dare say that the material of this piece of jade is average. If the glass-type imperial green material is considered average, then all the goods in her shop should be thrown on the street.

"Is the material of this jade alright?" Zhuang Rui asked, noticing the change in the girl's attitude and intending to make a joke.

"Okay, no, it's very... very good, sir. Please wait a moment, I'll call my grandfather right away. Oh... I'm sorry, this piece of jade is too precious, you should keep it for yourself."

Wu Jia didn't catch Zhuang Rui's humor. Instead, she became flustered and her words became incoherent. Not to mention that she had never seen one before, even her grandfather had only seen a piece of imperial green jadeite when he was young. But at that time, he was not experienced enough, and the piece was not given to him to carve. Wu Jia knew that her grandfather had always regretted it.

That's why she was so anxious to notify her grandfather. However, after running a few steps toward the phone in the store, she realized that she had the jade in her hand, so she handed it back to Zhuang Rui somewhat embarrassed.

In fact, Zhuang Rui's understanding of jadeite was still somewhat superficial. Although he could estimate the price of this piece of imperial green jadeite, he did not know its status in the jadeite circle.

The so-called "Glassy Imperial Green" represents uniqueness, and the name itself conveys a domineering aura of self-importance and dominance.

Not all green jadeite can be called Imperial Green. Jadeite with a similar green color to this piece is generally called Yang Green or Full Green because its texture and clarity do not meet the requirements

of Glassy Jadeite. Only full green jadeite of Glassy Jadeite without any flaws can be called Imperial Green, which represents nobility and is the king among all jadeite.

Let alone ordinary people, even many jewelers rarely see pure imperial green jadeite in their entire lives. Objects carved from this material are rare, sometimes only once every few years or even decades. Once they enter the market, they are immediately bought and treasured.

"Sir, please have a seat and some water. May I ask your surname and how I should address you?"

"My surname is Zhuang, you can call me Zhuang Rui..."

After the girl hung up the phone, Zhuang Rui saw her run back excitedly. In the well-air-conditioned store, sweat was even dripping from the tip of her nose, obviously due to her excitement. However, her string of "please"s made Zhuang Rui a little dizzy.

"Yes, Mr. Zhuang, please wait a moment. My grandfather will be here shortly."

As the actual operator of this jade shop, Wu Jia was already secretly thinking about whether she could buy a small piece of material from Zhuang Rui. It didn't have to be much, just a tiny piece the size of a fingernail, enough to polish into a cabochon, which would then become the shop's prized possession.

"Just call me Zhuang Rui, I'm not used to being called'sir'..."

Zhuang Rui corrected Wu Jia's way of addressing him. It wasn't that he was trying to get close to the girl, but she kept calling him "sir" which made him very uncomfortable. Because he was preparing for graduate school entrance exams, he had been reading a lot of classical Chinese texts lately, and in those texts, "sir" meant "teacher." Zhuang Rui had no intention of becoming a teacher.

"Alright, my name is Wu Jia, let's get to know each other now."

As Wu Jia spoke, she extended her hand to Zhuang Rui. She was thinking about how to get closer to Zhuang Rui. This glass-type imperial green jadeite was a rare find. If she could buy even a little bit of it, it would definitely make Stone Studio famous.

Zhuang Rui shook hands with Wu Jia, looked around, and asked, "By the way, Wu Jia, I remember there was a middle-aged man here when I came here before. Did your elders pass the baton to you?"

It's not that Zhuang Rui is gossipy, but the jewelry and antique trades are the easiest to be targeted and held accountable. Some people buy items, and after someone examines them, they feel they've been cheated and will come to return them. Usually, such shops have a mature and steady person in charge, but Wu Jia doesn't seem like someone who can keep things under control.

Wu Jia was stunned for a moment after hearing Zhuang Rui's words, and a sad expression appeared on her face. After a while, she said softly, "My parents were in a car accident when they went on vacation last year. This shop is my grandfather's life's work. I couldn't watch it collapse, so I came here."

Although Wu Jia had been exposed to jade since childhood, she had no intention of inheriting the family business. However, after her parents died in a car accident, her grandfather was so devastated that he had no time to manage the shop, so she resigned from her original job and returned to Stone Studio.

Wu Jia's grandfather, having also experienced the pain of outliving his son, and being old, his health suddenly deteriorated. Now, many of the items in the shop are carved by his apprentices, and the old man rarely comes to the shop anymore.

Zhuang Rui looked at Wu Jia, whose eyes were filled with tears, and didn't know what to do. He hadn't expected that his casual question would bring up someone else's sad story. When it comes to the death of a loved one, words of comfort are too pale, so Zhuang Rui was quite at a loss.

"Xiaojia, where is that imperial green jadeite you mentioned? Let Grandpa see it..."

Just as Zhuang Rui was feeling a bit awkward, an old voice came from the shop entrance. Turning around, he saw an elderly man with a full head of white hair and a somewhat melancholy look between his brows walking into the shop with a cane.

"Grandpa, slow down, the jade is right here."

Upon seeing her grandfather enter, Wu Jia quickly wiped her eyes and went to support him. She dared not show her longing for her parents in front of him, as that would make him sad for days.

After sitting down on a chair in front of the counter, the old man put on a pair of reading glasses and took the jade from Wu Jia, examining it carefully under the bright light that had been turned on.

Just as the old man picked up the jade, his focused expression made him seem decades younger. However, Zhuang Rui, who was close by, saw that the old man's right hand holding the jade was trembling slightly.

"Its color is like the green bamboo in the mountains, and its brightness is like the stream in the valley. It is without a single flaw. It is a fine jade... a fine jade, a rare and excellent piece of jade."

After observing for a while, the old man reluctantly put down the jade in his hand and said "good" three times. He had been playing with jade all his life, and this was only the second time he had seen imperial green jade of the glass type. He couldn't help but feel a little excited.

"Young man, is this jadeite yours? You're really lucky. An old man like me has never owned even a tiny piece of imperial green jadeite in my entire life."

After putting down the jade, the old man looked Zhuang Rui over. His eyesight and experience were far superior to his granddaughter's. When he was examining the jade, he rubbed it a few times with his hand. From the polished surface and the feel of it, the old man knew that the jade had just been cut from the stone not long ago.

Judging from Zhuang Rui's clothes and appearance, he didn't seem like a rich man, so the old man said that Zhuang Rui was lucky.

Zhuang Rui is very generous when it comes to buying cars, houses, and investing, but his habits from childhood have made him not very interested in so-called brand-name clothes and clothes specially designed for successful people.

Back in Zhonghai, Qin Xuanbing had bought him several high-end clothes, but Zhuang Rui felt awkward wearing them. So now he only wears clothes that cost a few dozen yuan each from ordinary shops, and his shoes are sneakers he brought back from Shaanxi, covered in dust.

Zhuang Rui smiled and did not deny the old man's words. He said, "Hehe, you're quite lucky. Old man, how many pendants do you think this piece of jade can be carved out of?"

"A pendant? Young man, you want to make it into a pendant? That's a bit of a waste."

Upon hearing this, the old man's expression changed. "Glassy imperial green jadeite is best suited for making bracelets, followed by cabochons. Even small items like earrings are more valuable than pendants. It's not that imperial green jadeite is bad for pendants, but pendants are worn inside clothing and are often used as amulets, so their value is relatively lower than those exposed ornaments."

"Grandpa, this is a pendant. I didn't intend to sell it; it was made for my family to wear."

Zhuang Rui's tone was firm. Although the item was quite valuable, Zhuang Rui was not short of money at the moment, and it would be a pity to sell such a rare and sought-after item.

"Young man, come inside and let's talk. Sigh, if it were two years earlier, I would have carved this for you, but now..."

When the old man heard that Zhuang Rui insisted on making pendants, he looked a little sad. He stood up and beckoned Zhuang Rui to go to a private room in the shop to talk.

Chapter 257 Origins

The jewelry taken from the display case is generally worth tens or a few hundred yuan. More valuable items need to be examined in a separate room.

Most upscale jewelry and jade shops have private rooms or VIP rooms. Precious jewelry is similar to antiques in that the items are not handled by the customer. The items are placed on a table for the customer to pick up and examine. This way, even if the item is accidentally dropped and broken, the responsibility can be clearly identified.

Stone Studio also has a separate room, which is not large, with only a coffee table and a row of sofas. However, in one corner of the room, there is a safe that is more than half a person tall, presumably used to store valuable ornaments. After Zhuang Rui entered the room, he glanced up and saw that there were two cameras installed on the ceiling.

"Young man, have a seat. Xiao Jia, go and pour me a cup of tea."

After entering the room, the old man greeted Zhuang Rui and sat down on the sofa.

After sitting down, Zhuang Rui didn't stand on ceremony and went straight to the point: "Sir, I'm from Pengcheng. I used to come to your shop to play when I was a child. Your craftsmanship is well-known in Pengcheng, so I still hope to entrust this piece of jade to you for carving. As for the processing fee, that's not a problem. You can name your price..."

"Cough...cough cough..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the old man's face flushed red. He was about to speak when a wad of phlegm blocked his throat, and he began to cough violently.

"Grandpa, please don't get agitated, Mr. Zhuang. What did you say to my grandpa?"

Wu Jia, who was carrying two cups of tea, entered the house just then. Seeing her grandfather's condition, she quickly put the tea on the coffee table and patted the old man's back repeatedly.

"It's not...it's not the young man's fault, Xiao Jia, please sit down too." The old man coughed for a while, took a sip of water, and slowly calmed down.

"Young man, this piece of jade is incredibly valuable. Judging by its size, if it were made into smaller cabochons, you could probably cut fourteen or fifteen pieces. The rest could also make a pair of earrings. All in all, it should sell for around seventeen or eighteen million.

If you were to carve it into a pendant, you could only produce four or five at most, and selling them for around ten million would be quite good. Why do you insist on making pendants? If you want to give them to family members, you can buy other items instead."

The old man, seeing Zhuang Rui's attire, didn't think he was a wealthy person, and thus had some doubts.

"Hehe, old man, you can never earn enough money, but once you miss this, it's hard to find it again. This is only the second time I've seen imperial green jadeite, so I'll make a few pendants to leave for my family. No matter how important money is, it's not as important as family."

Zhuang Rui had already made up his mind, so naturally he wouldn't be swayed by a few words from the old man.

"I was being presumptuous, you're right. No matter how important money is, it's not as important as family..." Zhuang Rui's words stirred up painful memories, and for a moment, tears streamed down the old man's face, and he couldn't control himself.

"Grandpa, it's all in the past, don't think about it anymore. If you don't take care of your health, what will happen to Xiaojia all by herself?"

Wu Jia offered a few words of advice, but ended up feeling upset herself, which made Zhuang Rui uneasy. He knew that the two people in front of him had lost their son and father, yet he still said those things, wasn't he just making them feel bad?

It took about seven or eight minutes for the grandfather and grandson to calm down. The old man wiped away his tears and said to Zhuang Rui somewhat apologetically, "Young man, I'm sorry, I was thinking about something sad..."

"It's alright, old man. The deceased is gone, but we who are alive must still live well," Zhuang Rui said, offering words of comfort.

"Hehe, I'm practically halfway to the grave, and you still have to comfort me. I'm old, really old."

Young man, if you want to polish this jade into a cabochon, this old man can still manage. My hand isn't as steady as it used to be, but polishing cabochons doesn't require advanced skills, so it should be fine.

"However, if you want it carved into a pendant, I dare not take the job. If it were two years ago, I would have paid you to carve it even if you didn't give it to me. But these past two years, my hands have been shaking so badly that I'm afraid I might accidentally damage this jade."

As the old man spoke, a hint of regret appeared on his face. He had carved countless pieces of jade in his life, including top-grade jade such as blue-eyed mutton fat jade, but he had never carved a piece of imperial green jadeite. Now, although he had this opportunity, the old man was no longer as skilled as he used to be.

Having spent his entire life collecting jade, the allure of this exquisite piece was no less than that of a drug addict encountering marijuana. However, due to his own circumstances, he was unable to carve it himself, which caused him great distress.

"I do have a few apprentices, but... sigh, never mind..."

This piece of jade is extremely valuable. If there is even the slightest mistake during the carving process, it will be irreparable. The old man is really worried about the few apprentices he has trained for only a few years. His early apprentices have all started their own businesses and are no longer in Pengcheng.

"It's alright, sir. I'll think of another way. Please take care of yourself. I'll take my leave now..."

Zhuang Rui stood up, feeling somewhat disappointed. Shi Tou Zhai was a well-established business in Pengcheng, and if they couldn't handle this job here, then there was no point in going anywhere else.

Seeing Zhuang Rui get up to leave, the old man quickly said, "Young man, wait a moment. Just because I can't do it doesn't mean I can't find someone to do it."

"Oh? Please speak, sir..." Zhuang Rui sat down again.

"These pendants are usually made of the twelve zodiac animals or Guanyin Buddha statues. They require the most exquisite carving craftsmanship. If this were an icy jadeite, I would dare to have my apprentice carve it. However, the imperial green glass jadeite is too precious. If I make a mistake, I, the old man, cannot afford to pay for it."

"Here's what I'll do. I'll introduce an old friend to carve it for you. His skills are unparalleled in our industry. With my connections and the quality of your material, I'm sure he won't refuse. But you'll have to make a trip to the capital and come to him in person." After the old man finished speaking, he looked at Zhuang Rui, waiting for him to make a decision.

"Old man, which master are you talking about?" Zhuang Rui asked, seeing the old man's high regard for the person.

"I know, Grandpa, you're talking about Grandpa Gu, right? Hmph, Grandpa Gu may be powerful, but he might not be stronger than you."

Before the old man could reply, Wu Jia called out, though she was somewhat dissatisfied with her grandfather's words. In her heart, her grandfather's cooking was the best.

After Wu Jia finished speaking, she noticed that Zhuang Rui's expression was a bit strange. Thinking that he didn't believe her, she said angrily, "Don't disbelieve me, what I said is true. My grandfather and Grandpa Gu used to be known as 'Southern Wu and Northern Gu'. They were both very famous in the jade carving industry. If it weren't for my grandfather's poor health, the things he carved would not be any worse than Grandpa Gu's."

"No, no, I didn't mean that. Of course I trust the old man's craftsmanship, otherwise I wouldn't have come to his door. But... is the Grandpa Gu you mentioned Gu Tianfeng, the vice chairman of the National Jade Association?"

Zhuang Rui didn't mean to disbelieve, but he felt that the world was a bit too... small. He and his senior uncle had only not seen each other for a little over ten days, and now he was being asked to come over.

In fact, Zhuang Rui had considered asking his senior master Gu to carve the jade at first, but firstly, his senior master Gu was far away in the capital, which was not very convenient, and secondly, his senior

master Gu had always taken good care of him, so Zhuang Rui felt a little embarrassed to keep bothering him.

Another reason is that he has produced far too many good materials. If his master uncle Gu saw this piece of jade, who knows what he would say. For these reasons, Zhuang Rui thought of finding a craftsman in Pengcheng to carve it. However, he did not expect that after going around in circles, he would still have to go to that master uncle.

However, after hearing Wu Jia's words, Zhuang Rui also felt great respect for the old man in front of him. To be able to be on par with Master Gu, his reputation in the jade industry must be extraordinary. Pengcheng actually has such a master hidden away.

"Ah...you know Grandpa Gu? Then why don't you ask him to carve this jade?"

Wu Jia looked at Zhuang Rui and asked curiously, "Although this old master is famous in the jade industry, he is not a household name. People who are not familiar with this industry generally do not know the old master's real name."

"Yes, I didn't expect you to be an insider. I misjudged you."

Wu Jia's grandfather originally thought that Zhuang Rui had obtained the jade through other channels, but now it seems that the young man had most likely cut it out himself.

"Hehe, I wouldn't call myself an insider, I've just become quite interested in jade gambling in recent years and have had pretty good luck. As for Master Gu, he has some connection with my family..."

Zhuang Rui hesitated for a moment before briefly explaining his relationship with Master Gu. He knew that even if he didn't say anything, the old man in front of him would surely find out about the decades-long friendship between him and Master Gu.

"I didn't expect you two to have this connection. Then there's no problem. Old Gu will definitely help you with the carving. With his help, your top-quality jadeite won't be wasted. When you see Old Gu, please give him my regards."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the old man was also quite surprised. It was indeed a coincidence. Although he lived in Pengcheng and had heard of Zhuang Rui's grandfather's reputation, he had never had any contact with him. He never expected that his old friend would have such a connection with the young man in front of him.

"Thank you, sir. I will definitely convey your message when I get to the capital." Having said his piece, Zhuang Rui prepared to take his leave.

Seeing Zhuang Rui about to leave, the old man hesitated for a moment before saying, "Oh, right, young man, I have a favor to ask of you, I hope you can consider it..."

Chapter 258 Carving Techniques from the North and South

"Old man, please don't hesitate to ask for anything. I'll do my best to help if it's within my power..."

Facing this master carver, who was as renowned as his senior master but was now in his twilight years, Zhuang Rui held him in high esteem. If it weren't for the fact that rings and other jewelry were too ostentatious and his mother might not like them, Zhuang Rui would have already entrusted the jade to the old man for carving.

Zhuang Rui didn't know if his spiritual energy would help the old man with his trembling hands, but this was not like winning a few top-quality jadeite pieces in a gambling game. If it got out, he probably wouldn't have a good life.

Although Zhuang Rui now has some wealth, he knows that there are too many people in this world who could devour him whole, leaving nothing behind, so he suppressed that thought.

However, Zhuang Rui was already considering whether he should learn some acupuncture or something, even if it was just for show, so that he could conceal the presence of spiritual energy in case of any emergency in the future.

"Young man, with Brother Gu's skills, after removing the top and bottom of this piece of jade, you should be able to cut enough material for four pendants. There will still be a tiny bit left at both ends. Old man... I was wondering if you could sell me the remaining piece of jade? Of course, I won't let you lose out on the price..."

The old man made this request with some helplessness in his heart. This Stone Shop was entirely supported by his reputation, but in recent years, the competition in the Pengcheng jade market has been quite fierce. In addition, due to his poor health, he rarely takes on business from his old customers. As a result, the popularity of Stone Shop has declined significantly.

The old man wanted to use the scraps from Zhuang Rui's jadeite to polish a cabochon as the store's prized possession, which would also help alleviate some of the pressure on his granddaughter. With his discerning eye, he could tell at a glance what kind of thing could be made from the jadeite and how much material would be left over.

Zhuang Rui did not agree directly, but instead asked the old man, "Grandpa, what other items can be made from the materials left behind?"

The old man picked up the jade from the table, held it up to his ears, and said, "I can make two small rings, about the size of a fingernail, or two pairs of small earrings. Any more than that, I'm afraid I can't."

"earrings?"

Zhuang Rui's heart skipped a beat. He knew his mother had pierced ears, but he had never seen her wear earrings. Besides the pendant, making a pair of earrings for his mother would be a great idea. With his mother's style, she would definitely look beautiful in such earrings.

"Old sir, to be honest, I originally had no intention of selling this jadeite at all. But since you've brought it up, how about this: if we can save enough material for two cabochons, I'll use one to make a pair of earrings, and you can have the other one. Is that alright?"

After thinking for a moment, Zhuang Rui expressed his thoughts. Although he respected the old man, he would not use his own things to do favors.

"Okay, okay, bring back the rest of the materials. I'll make the earrings for you. I'm going to call Lao Gu. If he can't save these materials, I'll go to Beijing and give him a piece of my mind."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the old man stood up shakily with excitement. This was a win-win situation! He had not only fulfilled his dream of carving an imperial green jadeite, but he could also keep a ring face to save face. The old man was already very content.

"Grandpa, I'd better go and talk to him myself about this..."

Seeing that the old man was about to make a phone call, Zhuang Rui quickly stopped him. If the old man was calling his senior brother Gu, he would definitely be scolded. He had a good item but didn't show it to his own family first.

"Yes, yes, you go and tell him yourself. As for how you know this old man, well... just say you're classmates with my granddaughter, um, that's it. You young people can get to know each other better, haha..."

The old man, having lived to such an advanced age, understood Zhuang Rui's meaning after a moment's thought, and secretly praised the young man for his politeness and understanding.

"Closeness?"

Zhuang Rui glanced at the girl next to him. Although she was pretty and had a sweet smile, Zhuang Rui had no intention of getting involved with her. Qin Xuanbing's two phone calls a day, along with the occasional greetings from Officer Miao, were already giving Zhuang Rui a headache.

"I'll call Master Gu when I get back. By the way, sir, I'd also like to ask you where there are many jade carving masters. I have some other materials that I'd like to have carved."

Zhuang Rui was thinking about his piece of red jadeite rough. Sooner or later, after it was cut open, he would still have to ask someone to carve it. There was quite a lot of jadeite inside; he could take out seventeen or eighteen pieces for bracelets. He couldn't very well trouble Master Gu again, could he?

"Hehe, among all the jade carving craftsmen in the world, Yangzhou is the best. I am a jade carver from Yangzhou. If you have a lot of jade, you can go to Yangzhou and invite a few masters over." The old man spoke of his lineage with a proud expression.

Zhuang Rui had heard of Yangzhou carvers, but he didn't have any friends there. He was going to go there completely clueless, so he continued, "Grandpa, could you introduce me to one or two masters when the time comes? Price is not a problem, as long as they are willing to come."

"Master? Heh, these days, anyone who can be called a master is only a few years younger than me. They wouldn't come out for money. But don't worry, once you've cut out the material, I'll call an apprentice over to help you carve it. His skills are almost as good as mine back then, and he's one of the best carvers in Yangzhou now."

The old man reassured Zhuang Rui that his apprentices in other places were now all capable of working independently in various jewelry companies. As long as Zhuang Rui could afford the price, he would surely give his master some face if he asked. Moreover, they were all in their thirties or forties, which was the golden age for them to hone their skills.

"Was Master Gu also a Yangzhou carver?" Zhuang Rui asked curiously. Nanwu and Beigu, it seems their lineages are different. As a junior, he was always very interested in gossiping about his elders.

"No, Brother Gu is from the Beijing University of Technology faction..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui's confusion, the old man continued, "From ancient times to the present, jade carving has been divided into northern and southern styles. The northern style is centered in Beijing and is also known as the Beijing style; the southern style is centered in Suzhou and is also known as the Suzhou style or the Yangzhou style. And Brother Gu is a Beijing style craftsman."

"Is there any difference between the two?" Zhuang Rui really knew nothing about carving.

"Hehe, the difference is huge. Southern craftsmanship is delicate, with a focus on the lifelike and exquisite details, especially in jade ornaments."

Northern craftsmanship often employs concise carving techniques, typically leaving a large area on the jade to create a "sparse yet impenetrable" effect. With just a few strokes, the shapes of figures, flowers, birds, and animals can be vividly depicted.

Secondly, there are differences in design. Let me give you an example.

The old man stood up, walked to the safe, took out an item, and placed it in front of Zhuang Rui.

"This is a famous Qing Dynasty carving, 'Squirrel Eating Grapes.' In the north, a large leaf is usually used as the base to highlight the shape of the grapes on the surface. But look at this piece, the grapes are carved out in detail, and the jade underneath the grapes has been hollowed out."

The old man turned the exquisite jade carving over and pointed out the hollow part inside for Zhuang Rui to examine closely.

"Southern craftsmen have always been 'unsparing of good materials,' willing to sacrifice unnecessary parts for a masterpiece; while northern craftsmen are more 'conservative of materials,' trying to preserve the integrity of the jade as much as possible. This 'Squirrel Eating Grapes' piece weighs 458 grams. If it were carved by a Beijing craftsman, at least 600 grams could be preserved."

From an artistic point of view, Southern craftsmanship pursues the ultimate and perfection. However, with the gradual decrease in the availability of Hetian jade and jadeite materials, most collectors or consumers use weight as one of the standards for evaluating jade carvings. Therefore, Southern craftsmanship has now also drawn on many techniques from Beijing-style carving.

However, in the current jade market, southern craftsmanship accounts for 80% of the market share, while northern craftsmanship accounts for less than 20%, and this share is shrinking further.

"Really? The difference is that big? Then why is Master Gu so famous?"

Zhuang Rui was startled by the old man's words; the Beijing-style carving was really disappointing.

The old man smiled and said, "The main reason is that during the Qing Dynasty, the emperors all recognized the carving skills of Yangzhou. So now, the price of Yangzhou carvings is higher than that of northern carvings. Also, there are more jade carving talents in the south than in the north, so there are successors. Furthermore, jade carving has become an industry, which is developing very well and has a wide influence. However, the number of practitioners in the north is decreasing day by day, and it is difficult to achieve a large scale."

There are quite a few people in Yangzhou with my skill level, but among the current masters of Beijing-style carving, Brother Gu is truly a towering figure. If it weren't for him, haha, no one would even mention Beijing-style carving anymore.

It's clear that the old man is very proud of his Yangzhou origins, but he also highly praises the craftsmanship of Mr. Gu.

After hearing the old man's explanation, Zhuang Rui finally understood the inside story of the carving industry. It turned out that the old master was unique in Beijing-style carving, which explained his high status in the industry.

In fact, Zhuang Rui had underestimated his senior apprentice. Gu Tianfeng was not only extremely talented in carving, but also an expert in identifying and appreciating jade, which is why he had remained successful for decades. His status in the jade industry was similar to that of the master in the antique world, surnamed Aisin Gioro.

Although the purpose of the trip was not achieved, Zhuang Rui still benefited a lot. After saying goodbye to the old man, he drove home. Zhuang Rui picked up the phone but hesitated. He had only been home for two days and Bai Shi was still sick. Should he go to Beijing right away?

"Let's make a phone call to get some information first..."

It's a bit unethical to not burn incense normally and then suddenly seek help from Buddha in an emergency. After thinking for a while, Zhuang Rui still dialed Old Master Gu's number.

Chapter 259 Heading to Beijing

"Uncle, Mom isn't talking to me anymore.

As Zhuang Rui entered the villa with his phone in hand, his niece rushed into his arms to complain. Zhuang Rui looked over and saw that his older sister was arguing with the instruction manual for her Passat. When she saw Zhuang Rui come in, she just looked up and greeted him.

"Okay, don't pay any attention to her. Be a good girl, go play with your grandma."

Zhuang Rui was about to comfort his niece when the phone rang, so he quickly grabbed his phone and went outside.

"Kid, you made a fortune in Pingzhou and ran off without even saying goodbye to your Uncle Gu. I've done all that work for you for nothing..."

The old man's cheerful voice came through the phone, though it was mostly playful and he wasn't really angry.

"Hehe, Uncle-Master, didn't you leave early? Besides, that piece of rough jade was bought by Brother Song and the others together, it wasn't mine alone."

After interacting with the old man a few times, Zhuang Rui knew that this senior apprentice was not particular about formalities, so he spoke quite casually.

"Yes, your senior master is not against you gambling on stones, but you should act within your means in the future. There are many people who have lost their families and lives due to gambling on stones. You are still young, and you should know how to take it slow and steady."

Grandpa Gu really cared for Zhuang Rui and treated him like a nephew. He would never say such things to anyone else; speaking too intimately with someone you don't know well can be annoying.

"Thank you for your teachings, Uncle-Master. I will remember them. By the way, Uncle-Master, have you been in the capital lately? I was just thinking of visiting you." Zhuang Rui took out a tissue and wiped the sweat from his forehead. It sounded a bit insincere coming from him.

"You came to see me? You must have something else on your mind, kid. Don't try to fool me, just say what you want to say..."

Old Master Gu, being the person he was, couldn't help but understand the meaning behind Zhuang Rui's words, and immediately started laughing and scolding him on the phone.

"Then I'll be frank, Uncle-Master. I bought a batch of black jadeite from the Ma Meng factory in Pingzhou. I was cutting it up for fun today and found a nice piece. I wanted to carve it into a pendant for my mom, so I'm troubling you with this. I don't trust anyone else.

When Zhuang Rui spoke, he was a little cunning. He didn't dare to say that he only bought five pieces of black jadeite, but deliberately said that he bought a whole batch. He was sure that Old Master Gu wouldn't investigate such trivial matters.

Old Master Gu laughed on the other end of the phone and said, "Don't flatter me, kid. Let me tell you, I haven't carved jade for anyone in over a year. Tell me, what kind of material is it? I wouldn't sell ordinary material."

"Hehe, if it were just ordinary stuff, I wouldn't dare come to you, Uncle-Master, guess what..." Zhuang Rui heard that the old man was in a good mood, so he actually kept him in suspense.

"You brat, you're even testing your senior master now. This is a piece of black sand jade from Ma Meng Factory. It has black veins, black background, and white mist. The colored parts are quite good in terms of texture and water content. However, the green is very concentrated. I often hear that emeralds are found there."

As the old man spoke, he seemed to have made a connection to something, and his voice suddenly rose eight octaves: "Zhuang Rui, you didn't happen to find imperial green jade, did you? Tell me quickly, what's the quality?"

On the other end of the phone, Zhuang Rui was utterly impressed. The old man hadn't seen anything, yet he had guessed it just from the three words "Ma Meng Factory." Without further ado, he said, "Uncle-Master, I'm completely convinced! You guessed right, it's Imperial Green, and a glassy variety at that..."

"But Uncle-Master, how did you guess it was imperial green material?" Before the other end of the phone could answer, Zhuang Rui asked again.

"Nonsense. There have been four instances of glass-type imperial green jadeite in recent years, all from the Ma Meng factory. You're not very skilled, but you have a high standard. If you call it good jadeite, then it must be imperial green jadeite, besides mine."

"Uncle-Master, what do you think? This material is worth your investment, isn't it?" Zhuang Rui said with a grin.

"Worth it, of course it's worth it. If you dare to carve for anyone else, don't call me 'Uncle-Master' anymore. Alright, enough rambling. Take your things and buy tickets. We're heading to the capital right away. I need to check out the materials first..."

The old man's reaction surprised Zhuang Rui somewhat. He had only intended to test the waters, but the old man had directly invited him over—something he hadn't even decided on yet.

However, the old man's words also made him somewhat relieved. Fortunately, Wu Jia's grandfather was unwell; otherwise, if he had been given the material to carve, and the old man found out later, there would have been no way to explain it.

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui was feeling conflicted. He had only been home for two days, and now he had to go out again. It seemed that he was busier than when he was working, even though he was unemployed.

"Mom? Is something wrong?"

Zhuang Rui turned around to go back to his room when he saw his mother standing at the door watching him.

"You have something to do, don't you? What, are you going out again?"

Mrs. Zhuang was increasingly unable to understand her son. Ever since the robbery in Zhonghai, he had become much more composed and confident, and he seemed to have good luck, having built up such a large business at such a young age.

Zhuang Rui nodded helplessly and said, "Yes, I found a master jade carver who agreed to help carve that piece of jade, but I have to go to Beijing and leave today..."

Upon hearing this, Mrs. Zhuang frowned and said, "This isn't urgent. I'm not in a rush to get it. Why rush it? Aren't you going to Beijing to study in a while? We can just get it done then."

"I'd like to do that too, but..."

Zhuang Rui gave a wry smile and briefly recounted how he met Old Master Gu.

Upon hearing that this person had some connection with her family, Madam Zhuang said, "Go then, but come back early after you've finished your business. The capital is a mixed bag; don't cause trouble."

Although she knew her son wasn't the type to cause trouble, Mrs. Zhuang still gave him a word of advice.

"Okay, Mom, don't worry."

Zhuang Rui agreed, went back to his room to pack a few simple clothes, and then came out.

Zhuang Rui pulled his older sister, who was reading the instruction manual, up from the sofa and asked her to take him to the train station. He didn't want to drive to Beijing again; after several long-distance trips, he was starting to feel nauseous from the smell of gasoline.

"Sis, you have to feed the white lion every day, don't forget."

If there's one thing Zhuang Rui is most worried about right now, it's the white lion. But he really can't take it with him to Beijing. However, this trip shouldn't be too long, and the white lion has almost recovered and no longer needs to be infused with spiritual energy every day.

"Okay, don't worry. Remember, make me a pair of earrings. I don't want them to hang around my neck."

Zhuang Min knew the purpose of her younger brother's trip to Beijing, but she wasn't interested in the pendants Zhuang Rui mentioned. Instead, she insisted that Zhuang Rui make her a pair of earrings.

...

Pengcheng is a hub connecting the north and south transportation routes, with a constant stream of trains passing by. Basically, there is a train heading towards Beijing every half hour or so. Zhuang Rui asked and found out that there was a tourist express train from China Shipping to Beijing in twenty minutes, which would take just over five hours to reach Beijing.

This was Zhuang Rui's first time visiting Beijing, and he couldn't help but feel a bit excited. After all, Dashilan and Liulichang in Beijing are nationally renowned antique markets, and coupled with Beijing's long history and cultural heritage, their depth and richness are incomparable to places like Pengcheng and Zhonghai.

Beijing is also the place where the most antique lovers in China are concentrated. There are countless auction companies, and there are several antique auctions almost every month. The old courtyard houses are also good places to find old houses. However, the water is quite deep, and it is common to make a mistake and pay tuition if you are not careful.

After enduring four or five hours on the train, it was already past eight o'clock in the evening when the train pulled into Beijing Station with a loud whistle.

Zhuang Rui had just stepped out of the air-conditioned car when the sweltering heat almost suffocated him. Beijing was even hotter than Pengcheng, and it was a dry, scorching heat, devoid of any moisture.

"Little brother, little brother, I'm here..."

Just as I was about to take out my phone to call my second brother, I heard his shout. Looking in the direction of the sound, I saw Yue Jing, who was a bit short and chubby, jumping up and down and waving at me.

"Second brother, thank you so much for picking me up so late..."

Zhuang Rui walked over and hugged Yue Jing. He had called his second brother when he boarded the train to tell him the train number and arrival time. Zhuang Rui was unfamiliar with Beijing, so he couldn't very well ask Old Master Gu to pick him up.

"You little rascal, you didn't even tell me you were coming. If you had known, I would have driven my dad's car to pick you up. It can go right up to the platform."

The second brother punched Zhuang Rui hard on the shoulder and took Zhuang Rui's backpack. He had been waiting here since seven o'clock, and was not only covered in sweat but hadn't even had dinner yet.

"It was a last-minute decision to come. By the way, Second Brother, what kind of car does Uncle Yue drive? Can he drive up to the platform?"

As Zhuang Rui followed the second brother out of the station, he asked curiously. In Zhuang Rui's memory, it seemed that only police cars could drive to the platform when they were catching bad guys or welcoming some important person in TV dramas.

"The car itself isn't valuable, it's the license plate that's valuable. Why don't you stay at my place tonight? My old man might be home tonight." As they talked, they arrived at the train station parking lot, and the second brother opened the door of a car.

"Wow, second brother, you're driving a BMW now? Aren't you afraid the people will say you're a corrupt government official?"

Zhuang Rui knew that the second brother's family had connections, but he imagined that these sons of officials in the capital would definitely be careful about their image. He didn't expect Yue Jing to be so ostentatious.

"It's not my car, it's my sister's. I'll take you out to eat later. Driving such a cheap car is beneath you."

Zhuang Rui sat in the car and looked around. Sure enough, the faint scent of perfume and the feminine teddy bear pendants indicated that the car's owner was a woman.

Chapter 260 Clubhouse

"Second brother, let's just find somewhere to eat something simple. I have other things to do tonight; I need to visit an elder..."

Zhuang Rui checked the time on his phone; it was just past 8:15. If he visited before 9:00, the old man should still be awake. Any later, and it would be impolite.

"No, let's do it tomorrow. I went through a lot of trouble to borrow this car today, and besides, I don't get to go to that place often. You absolutely have to come with me today..."

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As the second brother spoke, he drove the car onto an overpass. Zhuang Rui glanced at the road sign next to the overpass, which showed that it led to Daxing. He couldn't help but smile wryly. But he was already in the car; he couldn't very well jump off.

Zhuang Rui took out his phone and called Lao Gu, saying he would definitely be at Lao Gu's house by tomorrow morning. After Lao Gu complained for a while, Zhuang Rui looked at the second son and asked, "Where exactly are you going? This city is so big, can't you find a place to eat?"

"What kind of food do those places have? They're all the same old century-old establishments. Modern people have different tastes; they can only eat in a nice environment. You're quite wealthy now; you should learn to enjoy life."

"Environment my ass! Have you forgotten how we could get a decent meal at any roadside stall when we were in school? Second brother, you're a lowly bureaucrat making a meager thousand yuan a month, and now you're talking about taste?"

Zhuang Rui couldn't help but laugh when he saw his second brother's serious expression. Back in college, there were night markets set up every night outside the school gate. Even though there was a garbage dump not far away, the guys still ate quite well.

"Times change."

Yue Jing chuckled, glanced at Zhuang Rui's attire—a short-sleeved t-shirt, faded jeans, and the same white sneakers he'd worn back from Shaanxi—and frowned. "Let's find a place to get you dressed properly," he said. "You look like a complete backpacker."

"No, I'm used to dressing like this. If you think it's beneath me, I won't go. I need to go back to Pengcheng after I finish my business." Zhuang Rui immediately rejected his second brother's suggestion; it was better not to go.

"Fine, whatever you want. But don't blame your brother if no one wants you tonight."

Yue Jing's laughter was quite lewd, which puzzled Zhuang Rui. It wasn't like they were going on a blind date; why was it so mysterious?

Changing the subject, Yue Jing asked about Lao San's wedding. Since he had just taken leave to go to Guangdong, he hadn't attended Lao San's wedding. Zhuang Rui picked out a few things to mention, but omitted the part about his own dangerous encounter.

"Second brother, where are you driving to?"

Traffic in Beijing is terrible, and it took more than an hour to finally leave the city. However, looking at the farmland on both sides of the road, Zhuang Rui had some questions. How could there be a restaurant in such a place?

"We're almost there, we'll be there soon..."

As the second brother spoke, he turned the car into a side road. The road was not wide, but it was also an asphalt road, no worse than the national highway they had just passed. The lights on both sides of the road were somewhat dim. After driving forward for more than two hundred meters, a large gate blocked the car's way. There was no gatehouse next to the gate, only a lonely automatic card reader.

Around the gate were iron fences more than two meters high. With the help of the car headlights, Zhuang Rui could see that there was a camera on each side of the gate pointing towards the entrance. In the darkness, Zhuang Rui could not see the situation inside and had no idea what kind of place it was.

Yue Jing took out a card from the car, swiped it at the gate, and the gate opened silently to both sides. After the car entered, it immediately closed again. The car continued to drive forward for more than a hundred meters, where there was a guard post. Three men in black suits stood there, their straight backs showing that they were well-trained.

"Sir, please show your VIP card."

A man in a black suit walked up to the car and gestured for Yue Jing to roll down the window.

"Sir, you hold a Level 2 VIP card. Please proceed to VIP Building No. 2..."

Yue Jing handed over the card he had received earlier. The man took it, swiped it with a card reader, checked the information on it, and then handed it back.

"Second Brother, are you sure we came here to eat? Or did we stumble upon some secret national base?"

Zhuang Rui had never seen such a scene before. It was just a meal; why did they have to check him back and forth? Besides, these VIP cards were divided into different levels. Judging from what the man in the black suit said, different levels of cards could only enter corresponding places.

"Hey kid, you'll see when you go in. It's not just about having money to eat here. Take this card of mine, for example. If I were to sell it, I could get tens of millions. Do you believe me?"

As the second brother spoke, he parked the car in front of a rather large three-story building. However, what Zhuang Rui found strange was that the lighting was dim from the entrance to the inside, and the second brother was able to park the car by the car's headlights.

As he parked, Zhuang Rui looked around and noticed something different. Of the cars he could see, none were inferior to the BMW his second brother drove. There were even two very stylish cars that he couldn't name.

"Let's go..."

Pushing open the car door, the second brother led the way with practiced ease, following the firefly-like light out of the parking lot and directly to the front of the three-story building. Zhuang Rui refused to believe that the second brother didn't come here often.

Two men in black suits stood in front of the door, and there was a machine similar to airport security at the entrance. Zhuang Rui became more and more curious about this place. Why make such a big fuss over a meal?

When the large door, which looked like it was made of mahogany, was opened, light immediately poured out. Although the light wasn't strong, it was enough for Zhuang Rui to see the situation inside.

"This...this, second brother, are you sure there's food here?"

The first thing you see is a large hall of about three or four hundred square meters. Around the hall, there are more than a dozen sofas that look like karaoke rooms. In front of each row of sofas is a large glass coffee table, which is almost always full of people. Around the coffee table, there are quite a few girls dressed in revealing clothes walking around.

In the middle of the hall was a stage about 70 or 80 square meters in size, where a girl dressed in white was playing the piano, and soft music echoed throughout the hall.

After looking around, Zhuang Rui didn't see any food such as rice or steamed buns at any of the teahouses.

"Hey kid, aren't you even a little bit shocked?"

Brother Yue Jing was very dissatisfied with Zhuang Rui's performance. Although his own stomach was growling with hunger, eating was not the most important thing when he came here.

Zhuang Rui replied irritably, "Shocked my ass. I'm telling you, Second Brother, we've been wandering around for almost two hours and haven't even had a meal. If I don't tell Wei Ge and the others, they'll say you're stingy."

"I...I have no language with you..." Yue Jing rolled his eyes in exasperation at Zhuang Rui.

"Gentlemen, please follow me..."

A soft female voice rang in Zhuang Rui's ears. Looking in the direction of the voice, a pretty girl wearing a low-cut cheongsam stood in front of the two of them. The large expanse of white skin on her chest made Zhuang Rui's eyes light up. Moreover, the girl's appearance seemed somewhat familiar to Zhuang Rui.

"Come on, what are you standing there like an idiot at the door for..."

The second brother pulled Zhuang Rui along, and the two followed the girl towards a teahouse. The girl's long, fair legs, visible through the high slit of her cheongsam, were a silent temptation.

"I remember now, she's the one who acts in TV dramas, her name is..."

Zhuang Rui walked to the sofa, but before he could sit down, he suddenly remembered the background of the waiter in front of him. Just as he was about to shout, Yue Jing covered his mouth. However, Zhuang Rui's words still attracted a lot of attention, or perhaps it would be more appropriate to call it contempt.

"Hey, little brother, you're my older brother, okay? Let's keep our voices down and give your older brother some face."

The second brother wondered if he had made a mistake by bringing Zhuang Rui here. He had originally wanted to give Zhuang Rui a surprise, but he didn't expect to be frightened by him. If he lost face here, the whole of Beijing would know about it the next day.

"Please have a seat, both of you. Please let me know if you need anything."

The girl seemed not to hear Zhuang Rui's words. She turned around, smiled sweetly, and left. However, this only strengthened Zhuang Rui's conviction.

"Second brother, isn't that girl the actress who starred in the TV series?"

Zhuang Rui also felt that standing here was attracting attention, so after sitting down, he pulled the second brother aside and asked.

Zhuang Rui's reaction just now wasn't because the girl was particularly beautiful; it's just that ordinary people are so far removed from these celebrities in real life. The sudden appearance of one, especially as a waitress, shocked and somewhat disbelieved Zhuang Rui.

"Hehe, she's just a third-rate celebrity, why are you making such a fuss? How about it, isn't the place your brother brought you nice?"

Seeing Zhuang Rui's expression, the second brother felt very satisfied. It wasn't easy for him to get this card from his older sister after begging and pleading.

Zhuang Rui recalled a term and asked, "Is this what you call a club?"

"Tch, who goes to clubs these days? Old man, you're so out of touch. This is called a private club, a private club. You can't just get in if you have money. Don't think you're a billionaire now. Let me tell you, there are at least dozens of billionaires lining up outside waiting to squeeze in here."

Yue Jing scoffed at Zhuang Rui's words. He used to come here often before he started working, but after he started working, his card was taken back by his family. If he wanted to come, he could only use his older sister's card.

"Second brother, why don't you order some food first? You can't just stare at women until you're full..."

After a brief moment of shock, Zhuang Rui's stomach started growling again. Although there were some fruits and other things on the coffee table in front of him, they weren't enough to keep him full.