

## Golden 27

### Chapter Twenty-Seven: Liu of Sanhe

Boss Song pondered for a moment before speaking, "If we're talking about the lineage of cricket gourds, it's not very long. The earliest cricket gourds appeared during the Kangxi era of the Qing Dynasty, when local officials presented them to the palace for princes and nobles to play with and admire; those were called 'official models.'"

The heyday of cricket gourds was during the Kangxi and Qianlong reigns. As more and more people appreciated them, the production of cricket gourds actually developed rapidly and later spread to the common people.

Among the pioneers of folk gourd making, Liu from Sanhe is undoubtedly the foremost. His representative works include the tall monk's head gourd, the short monk's head gourd, the smacking-lip gourd, and the tooth-shaped gourd, etc., which are highly praised by later generations. Their value has even surpassed that of official molds. During the Xianfeng era, many nobles and eunuchs in the palace collected gourds made by Liu from Sanhe. It can be seen that Liu's works were rare both then and now. Collectors of miscellaneous items dream of owning a gourd from Liu from Sanhe. Brother Zhuang, you are really lucky.

Zhuang Rui smiled but didn't reply. He knew that if he said anything at this moment, others would think he was being pretentious, so it was better to remain silent than to say anything.

"People's living standards have improved in recent years. Besides growing flowers and plants, many homes now enjoy the sounds of crickets chirping during the Spring Festival, which is quite a pleasure. Just in our market alone, there are at least a hundred or so people raising crickets. In Tianjin, the number of people raising crickets in winter is even higher than in summer. Whoever can raise crickets from summer and autumn until the Spring Festival is a 'big player,' and the price of cricket gourds has been steadily rising. However, top-quality crickets like those from Sanhe Liu are priceless and unavailable.

Mr. Wang, standing to the side, continued Mr. Song's words, making no attempt to hide the envy on his face. For collectors like them, the price of an item is only one aspect; more importantly, certain types of items are extremely rare, and often money alone cannot buy them.

What Wang and Song didn't mention is that with the increasing number of people playing with crickets, artificial breeding of crickets has flourished into an industry. Therefore, during the Spring Festival, raising crickets has become a common sight in many families in the Beijing-Tianjin area and surrounding areas, which also expresses the urban population's yearning for rural life. Naturally, the price of fine cricket gourds with age has risen accordingly. Even some people who don't collect things have a special fondness for some good cricket gourds.

"Hey, brothers, we've been talking for so long, how much is this thing actually worth?"

Liu Chuan listened intently for a long time, but still couldn't figure out the price of the gourd, so he finally asked.

Upon hearing this, Old Master Lü angrily retorted, "You only care about the price. You should know that this kind of thing hasn't appeared for years. I only saw one forty years ago. You can't buy it even if you have the money."

Seeing that Liu Chuan still looked confused, Boss Song explained, "According to market prices, Liu's gourds from Sanhe are worth between 50,000 and 100,000 yuan. However, now that more people are playing with crickets, the price is still rising. It's hard to say what will happen in a few years."

"Oh, it's only worth a few tens of thousands of yuan. Just give me a straight answer, that's all. You're such a long-winded old man. By the way, Uncle Lü, Grandpa Lü, why did you only offer 100 yuan to that kid Da Xiong yesterday? If you had offered more, you could have bought it first..."

Liu Chuan finally understood the price of the item. Hearing it was only a few tens of thousands of yuan, he wasn't too concerned. Not only him, but everyone in the shop, except Zhuang Rui, wouldn't care about such a small amount. However, market prices don't fully represent the true value of antiques. Liu Chuan didn't understand this. If someone really liked the item, it would be normal for them to offer tens of thousands of yuan for it. As the saying goes, "A thousand pieces of gold can't buy what I like," and that's the point.

Liu Chuan's words seemed to have hit a nerve with Old Master Lü, making the old man so angry that his eyebrows shot up. He pointed at Liu Chuan and cursed, "You brat, get the hell out of here! I offered 100 yuan, that's a bargain, you know? It's all about having a good eye, doing business, and enjoying the experience. You're hopeless, you'll only ever sell dogs and raise cats in the future."

The two bosses, Song and Wang, nodded in agreement. The joy of collecting lies in the process. The sense of satisfaction you feel after successfully finding a bargain is something that outsiders cannot understand.

"So what if I didn't get the bargain and my brother beat me to it? Why are you getting so angry..." Liu Chuan muttered sullenly.

"Brother Zhuang, now that you know the origins of this cricket gourd, are you still interested in making a purchase?"

Seeing that the situation was a bit awkward, Boss Song spoke up to Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui was also pondering this in his heart. He had spent a lot of money during this period, and only tens of thousands of yuan were left. If he came across any good things, he might not have enough money to buy them. In any case, he had already absorbed the spiritual energy in the gourd, so he might as well sell it.

Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui said, "I bought this cricket gourd with the intention of raising the crickets inside, but I didn't expect it to be such a treasure. If you like it, Brother Song, I'll give it to you, but I want to keep the crickets inside."

"Hey, Xiao Song, I've had my eye on this thing since yesterday. You're not going to try and take it from this old man, are you? You know I'm into all sorts of things, and I've been looking for this for a long time." Upon hearing that Zhuang Rui was willing to give up the cricket gourd, Old Master Lü couldn't sit still any longer.

"Hehe, old man, please let me have this time. You've already filled up all the good things in your house, why are you competing with us younger generation? Xiao Zhuang, I'll offer 60,000 for this gourd." Although Song Jun was very respectful to the old man, he didn't back down at all and even called out the price.

"I'll offer 70,000!"

Even Mr. Wang, who hadn't said much the whole time, started bidding. It wasn't that they were undermining each other; it's just that cricket gourds from Sanhe Liu are indeed rare, and this one, in terms of its appearance, patina, openwork core, and sound-producing reed, is a masterpiece from Sanhe Liu. If you don't buy it now, you might never see this kind of opportunity again in your lifetime.

Although Grandpa Lü was furious, there was nothing he could do. As the saying goes, the marketplace is like a battlefield. Collectors are even less likely to let go of items they like. Some collectors will even pester sellers for years to get what they want. No one will care about respecting the elderly or caring for the young in that situation.

"80,000, Xiao Zhuang. I'll also give you a cricket gourd from the Republic of China era. It's not expensive, but it's still worth three to five thousand. What do you think?"

Not to be outdone, Manager Lü immediately added 10,000. In fact, considering the market value of this gourd, 80,000 would be considered a high price if it were traded privately among players. Of course, if it were promoted and auctioned off, the price would be unpredictable.

Upon hearing Manager Lü's offer, the two bosses, Song and Wang, hesitated. They wanted to buy the gourd from Sanhe Liu because they genuinely liked it, and it was also a rare commodity with potential for profit. Perhaps some cricket enthusiasts in the north would take a liking to it, and they could make a fortune from it. However, at 80,000, the profit margin was already very small. If they raised the price further, they would have to bear certain risks. More importantly, they didn't specialize in miscellaneous items, and if they raised the price again, it would seem like malicious competition.

The two men exchanged a glance and slowly shook their heads. Although Old Master Lü had won the gourd without any competitors, he was still very bitter. He was the one who had come across the item first. If he hadn't been so determined yesterday to let the gourd's original owner out of the way, it would have been his long ago. The price had increased nearly a hundredfold in just one day. How could he be happy?

"I'll offer 150,000..."

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to agree to the deal, Qin Xuan's icy voice rang out.