

## Golden 431

### Chapter 431 National Treasure

Upon hearing Ouyang Lei's words, the old man shakily stood up and, supported by Ouyang Lei, headed towards the entrance of the small auditorium. The guests exchanged bewildered glances, puzzled. Given the old man's status and position, who could possibly warrant his personal greeting?

The mystery was soon solved, because an elderly man in a wheelchair was pushed in through the auditorium doors. Zhuang Rui, with his sharp eyes, immediately recognized that the man sitting there was none other than Old Master Song, and the person pushing the wheelchair was none other than Song Jun. Behind the wheelchair were four or five doctors wearing military uniforms underneath white coats.

"Brother Ouyang, congratulations on your 90th birthday! And congratulations on your 70 years of weathering storms together with your wife..."

Sitting in his wheelchair, Old Master Song clasped his hands in a gesture of respect to the birthday celebrant before Ouyang Gang even approached.

"Brother Song, you...you're all better now?"

Ouyang Gang walked closer and looked at his old comrade-in-arms with disbelief.

"At our age, what's the big deal? Brother, didn't you see? There's a whole bunch of people following behind us..."

Old Song spoke with a hint of helplessness. Since getting an injection and taking a nap yesterday, he felt great. While chatting with Song Jun, he overheard that today was Ouyang Gang's 90th birthday, and he decided to come and offer his congratulations. He was also tired of lying in bed for too long and wanted to get out and move around.

However, his actions caused quite a stir in the entire hospital. This was no small matter; it not only had to be reported to the Central Advisory Commission but also to the Central Security Bureau. It should be

noted that in his political career, Old Song held a position equivalent to that of a full-fledged state leader, and his influence in the military was no less than that of Ouyang Gang.

"Great! Great!! This is the most comfortable day I've felt in all these years..."

Ouyang Gang burst into genuine laughter. Seeing his old comrade of over half a century finally able to get out of bed, and noticing his complexion was recovering quite well, Ouyang Gang was overjoyed. No birthday celebration, no 70th wedding anniversary, could compare to seeing his old comrade recover.

Not to mention the two elderly people chatting hand in hand, the various lords sitting in the banquet hall were staring wide-eyed, almost unable to believe their eyes.

Although most of these local officials belonged to the Ouyang family faction, Ouyang Gang had a very good relationship with Old Master Song. The two families could complement each other in many fields, so most of them took the opportunity of coming to the capital to celebrate Old Master Song's birthday to visit him in the past few days.

At that time, Old Master Song was in a coma, only waking up for half an hour a day. Anyone could see that Old Master Song was not far from passing away. Who would have thought that in just one day, the old man would be able to be discharged from the hospital to attend Ouyang Gang's 90th birthday celebration?

Although technology is advancing rapidly and medicine is becoming more advanced, it seems that it is still not possible to make critically ill people recover so quickly. Some people who know the hospital director have already taken out their mobile phones and made quiet phone calls. Old Master Song's recovery is no small matter. It may even change some of the domestic landscape.

However, these people's inquiries were destined to be fruitless. After reporting on Old Song's recovery, the vice dean, who held the rank of senior colonel, was severely reprimanded. The gist of the reprimand was that as materialist communists, we cannot believe in ghosts and gods, and we must try to understand and find the reasons through science.

The dean is currently quite worried. If he could explain it scientifically, he wouldn't have had to submit that report about Old Master Song's dream.

At this moment, Song Jun had already pushed Old Master Song to the spot in the banquet hall where Ouyang Gang had just been sitting. Someone brought over a chair and placed it next to Ouyang Gang. With his grandson's help, Old Master Song sat down. Judging from this, after a while, Old Master Song might be able to walk again.

The banquet hall suddenly became lively. The original guests lined up to congratulate Old Master Song on his recovery, which delayed the start of the banquet. However, no one cared. Apart from the ignorant children, no one came here to eat and drink.

"Huh? Brother Ouyang, there's still such fresh fruit in this weather?"

After dealing with a group of people, Old Song noticed Zhuang Rui's birthday gift and his eyes lit up. People who have been bedridden for a long time love to see vibrant colors, which is one of the reasons why people like to bring flowers when visiting patients in the hospital. The plate of colorful fresh fruit in front of him actually made Old Song feel a little hungry.

"This was a gift from my grandson. What, can you still chew it with your teeth? Let me give you a grape."

There were too many people offering birthday wishes, and then Old Master Song arrived right afterward, so Ouyang Gang didn't examine the birthday gift closely. It wasn't until he turned around to pick up the bunch of grapes that he realized something was wrong. He exclaimed "Eh!" and reached for the longevity peach in the middle with his right hand.

Seeing that Ouyang Gang's expression was a bit off, Old Song asked, "Brother Ouyang, what's wrong?"

"This...this thing...is fake!"

Ouyang Gang was surprised and raised his voice a little, attracting everyone's attention to the fake thing he was talking about. They were all a little confused. This kind of food could only be said to be of bad quality, how could it be real or fake? There was no label on it.

"Fake?"

Old Master Song was also sitting next to the coffee table. He reached out and touched the jade carving. His eyes immediately showed a look of astonishment. At his age, he could almost remain calm even if a mountain collapsed in front of him, but this little thing made Old Master Song look surprised.

"This is a jade carving, Brother Ouyang. Your grandson has put in a lot of effort. There are peaches on it, and these colors represent good fortune, prosperity, and happiness. Hmm? It's still Xiao Gu's work. Not bad, not bad, rare, very rare!"

Grandpa Song held the ornament on his lap and examined it carefully for a while, even turning it over to look at the inscription on the bottom. He couldn't help but show an envious expression on his face. How come he had come across this object before? You know, Grandpa Song not only loves antiques and calligraphy and paintings, but he is also quite knowledgeable about metal and jade artifacts.

"This stuff is good?!"

Ouyang Gang was somewhat dismissive of his old comrade's words. He knew that his old comrade had always been obsessed with antiques and the like. Back before liberation, he had used the landlord's Tang and Song dynasty paintings to wipe his butt, and had suffered a lot of teasing from him over the decades.

"I can't reason with you, so let me put it this way: this thing is no less impressive than Empress Dowager Cixi's Jadeite Cabbage. Just based on the naturally formed jade material, and the ingenious design and craftsmanship, calling it a 'national treasure' wouldn't be an exaggeration..."

Old Song got a little excited and spoke a bit too quickly, his face flushing red. Startled, Song Jun, who was standing beside him, quickly said, "Grandpa, don't get excited! I'll find one for you later..."

While speaking, Song Jun glared at Zhuang Rui, who was standing not far away. It's not your fault that you have a lot of nice things, but it's wrong to show them off. If your father really wants them, where are you going to find them for him?

"What do you know? Get out of here. I dare say there won't be another one like this in the world. It's priceless, a priceless treasure..." Old Master Song scolded his grandson, his eyes never leaving the jade carving.

Upon hearing Old Master Song's words, some of the people sitting in the banquet hall who felt closer to the two old men came over to take a look at the ornament. If Old Master Song called it a national treasure, then even if it wasn't a national treasure, it would become one from now on.

Of course, these people were only curious about it; they weren't really interested in the thing itself. No matter how beautiful it was, it was just a piece of jade. What use was it if you couldn't eat or drink it? However, those who originally thought Zhuang Rui was stingy now had a different impression. It turned out that he wasn't stingy at all; he was incredibly generous.

“Brother, take it if you like it...” Ouyang Gang was quite pleased to see the valuable item Zhuang Rui had given him, but he wasn't really interested in it and was ready to give it away generously.

"Forget it, this item is worth hundreds of millions. If your grandson can give it as a gift, so can my own grandson. When I turn ninety next year, you can come and see it too..."

Old Song's words surprised those who had seen the thing before. Although they were all prominent figures in the outside world, governing a region, and any policy they implemented would affect the interests of all parties in the tens of millions, such a small thing could be worth hundreds of millions, which was much higher than the annual fiscal revenue of a poor county.

So some people started to wonder if they should conduct some archaeological excavations in their jurisdiction. These things, which had never been valued before, could also create economic value. If the archaeological departments knew about these people's ideas, they would definitely send Zhuang Rui a letter of thanks. Their quiet department had finally received attention from the leaders.

But now Song Jun was really conflicted. Where was he going to find this thing next year? When he looked at Zhuang Rui again, his eyes were practically spitting fire.

After this little incident, the birthday banquet continued. The old man and the old woman symbolically drank the toasts offered by everyone and then left the banquet to return to their courtyard. Ouyang Gang wanted to symbolically drink more, but the doctor beside him wouldn't allow it.

Grandpa Song naturally followed along; the two old comrades-in-arms were going to have a good chat today.

"Zhuang Rui, don't run away, you little brat..."

After the banquet ended, Zhuang Rui was thinking about Peng Fei. He said goodbye to his uncle and others and was about to drive away from Yuquan Mountain when he was blocked by Song soldiers.

Chapter 432 Enrollment

"Brother Song, congratulations! Grandpa Song is better now, so you can relax a bit more.

Zhuang Rui said this, but in his heart he was sighing. When would this life of doing good deeds anonymously ever end? But Zhuang Rui also knew that it was best not to leave any name behind. Otherwise, even if his grandfather could protect him, he wouldn't be able to have an easy life in the future. The country would definitely spend a hundred times more effort taking care of him than taking care of giant pandas.

"Stop giving me that nonsense, I'm here to settle scores with you..."

As soon as Song Jun saw Zhuang Rui, he immediately became hostile. "You've had your fun, kid. Now I'm going to search the world for treasures for the old man. Items like those are unique and irreplaceable. Where are you going to find them yourself?"

Zhuang Rui had no idea of the resentment in Song Jun's heart, so he asked curiously, "Brother Song, I didn't offend you. When I visited the old man yesterday, if it weren't for my... good luck, would Grandpa Song have recovered so quickly?"

Zhuang Rui almost blurted out about treating the old man's illness, but luckily he reacted quickly and stopped himself in time.

"That was given to him in a dream by my grandfather's old comrade-in-arms. What's it to you? I told you, you can just enjoy your treasure in your own time. Why do you have to show it off? Well, my old man just said that I should go find one too. Where am I supposed to find one?"

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui realized that his older brother was indeed resentful and had come to settle scores with him. However, Song Jun was being unreasonable; what business was it of his to give

his grandfather a gift? Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui laughed and said, "The old man has a bad memory; he might forget about it by tomorrow. Why are you taking it so seriously..."

"You're the one with a bad memory. He's not senile. Yesterday, he even brought up the time I stole his Red Star Medal when I was a kid and used it to exchange for something. Stop talking nonsense. You're the one who got into this mess. You'd better find me a good piece of jade. Name your price, as long as the old man is happy..."

Song Jun had a very deep bond with his grandfather. He knew the old man had just said it casually, but he took it to heart. Next year, for his grandfather's birthday, he was determined to get him something nice, not for appearances, but to show his filial piety.

He and Zhuang Rui were already quite familiar with each other, which is why he clung to him without any reservations. The main reason was that Song Jun knew that the kid in front of him was incredibly lucky and might stumble upon some good stuff. He said this to give Zhuang Rui a heads-up in advance, so that he would think of him if he encountered anything good.

"Isn't this the behavior of a bandit?" Zhuang Rui smiled bitterly. These things are rare and hard to come by, and there was nothing he could do about it.

"Pah! Your old man was only... Anyway, I don't care, you figure it out..."

Song Jun stopped mid-sentence, realizing that this wasn't something a junior like him should say. He was afraid Zhuang Rui would find fault with him, so he quickly added, "Tomorrow, Fatty Ma is coming to Beijing. Let's have a meal together, and then fly directly to Yangon in a couple of days. Get ready."

With Grandpa Song's health improved, Song Jun was finally free. He's now obsessed with gambling on stones, not because it's a quick way to make money, but because the thrill of seeing his stones appreciate significantly in value is what he craves. Uh, drugs too? In Song Jun's circle, only a fool would get involved with that stuff.

"What preparations should we make? Brother Song, please tell me..."

Zhuang Rui had long decided to go to Myanmar to gamble on jade, but he was completely clueless about the Yangon Jade Auction. These past few days he had been thinking about what identity he should use to go. A few days ago he asked Old Master Gu, who said there were three main ways to participate in the Myanmar Jade Auction.

The first group consists of raw jade dealers. These individuals, if they wish to participate in the Myanmar jade auction, can contact the organizers in advance to obtain an invitation. The second group comprises well-known jewelry companies, which receive invitations from Myanmar annually. These individuals are the primary consumers at the jade auction.

Another type is the so-called semi-official organization, which is hosted by the domestic jade association. Any member can sign up to participate, but of course, the cost is borne by the individual, as there is no reimbursement for this. Otherwise, how could it be called semi-official?

Zhuang Rui considered going with the Jade Association, since many of them had been there before. Although it was more about sightseeing than gambling on stones, they would still have experience, which was better than going alone and guessing.

Song Jun hesitated for a moment before saying, "Actually, I've never been to the Myanmar jade auction either..."

"Alright, forget I asked. Ask Brother Ma tomorrow..." Zhuang Rui almost vomited blood from Song Jun's words. You haven't been there, so why are you acting all high and mighty? You're so serious.

"Hey kid, I've never been to Myanmar, but I know more about it than you do. You can use RMB there, but US dollars are more effective and the exchange rate is higher. You'd better exchange some first. Also... that's all..."

"US dollars? Aren't there restrictions on the amount of foreign currency you can take abroad?" Zhuang Rui asked, somewhat puzzled. Last time he went to Hong Kong, he had to get bank drafts in advance, otherwise he wouldn't have been able to take them out.

"So you're a finance major? Don't you have an overseas account? If you don't, I'll give you one later, you can transfer the money there. Alright, we'll talk about it when Fatty Ma comes tomorrow..." In the freezing weather, Song Jun was too lazy to argue, and waved his hand to let him pass.

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"Boss, you're back?"

After Zhuang Rui returned home, he went straight to the front yard, pushed open the door of the gatehouse monitoring room, and saw Hao Long explaining the monitoring equipment to Peng Fei. When they saw Zhuang Rui come in, the two of them stood up.

"I already told you not to call me boss, Peng Fei. You're a few months younger than me, so call me Brother Zhuang from now on."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand, gesturing for the two to sit down, and then said, "Is the accommodation all arranged? What about Ya Ya? I'll help her with her school enrollment later. I'm going on a long trip in a few days, so I won't have time..."

"It's all arranged, thank you boss... Brother Zhuang..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, a look of gratitude flashed in Peng Fei's eyes. He didn't really care about the quality of food and lodging; what mattered most was providing his younger sister with a good learning and living environment. Moreover, Zhuang Rui had instructed Zhang Ma to take all of Xiao Nannan's toys to Ya Ya's room, which delighted the girl, who was currently in her room changing clothes for her Barbie doll.

When Peng Fei worked as a security guard, he earned only a few hundred yuan a month and was often bossed around by the owner of the nightclub. They weren't treated like human beings at all, and the owner would curse and swear at them. But Zhuang Rui was a completely different person. He respected him and treated him as an equal.

This made Peng Fei secretly grateful. He was not good with words and didn't like to say nice things, but at this moment, he resolved to work hard to repay Zhuang Rui for what he and his sister had done for him.

Zhuang Rui was in Beijing and naturally didn't know anyone except his family. Although enrolling his child in school was a very small matter, he was too embarrassed to ask Ouyang Jun for help.

But after thinking for a long time, Zhuang Rui really didn't know where to start. After searching through his phone book for a while, Zhuang Rui saw a name and his eyes lit up. It would be more appropriate to ask Director Zheng... no, it should be Deputy Secretary Zheng to handle this matter. A few days ago, when Zhuang Rui met him, he received a new business card. The title of office director on the card had been changed to deputy secretary of the district party committee.

Yes, it's Deputy Secretary Zheng. Although the name is a bit hard to pronounce, Deputy Secretary Zheng is feeling very good right now. He has reached the threshold of deputy director-general, a threshold that many people never cross in their entire lives, and he accomplished it at the age of forty. At this rate, it seems that he will be promoted to the provincial or ministerial level in the future.

Of course, choosing the right side is the most crucial thing. A few days ago, Deputy Secretary Zheng accompanied the district party secretary to the residence of the old man in Yuquan Mountain. All he saw were people he could look up to. Although he didn't get to meet the old man and receive his teachings, Deputy Secretary Zheng made up his mind that he must get along more with the Ouyang brothers in the future. That would be a shortcut to success.

So when he received Zhuang Rui's call, Deputy Secretary Zheng was so happy he almost laughed out loud. After visiting Yuquan Mountain, he also learned Zhuang Rui's identity—he was the old man's only grandson.

What? Not as close as his own grandson? That's not how it works. The old man has four grandsons, but his only grandson by marriage is Zhuang Rui, who is also the youngest. Needless to say, he's definitely the most favored.

After learning Zhuang Rui's identity, Deputy Secretary Zheng has been regretting for the past few days that he didn't put in more effort to help Zhuang Rui lower the price when he bought the house. Anyway, whether it was sold at a high price or a low price, he wouldn't have made a profit, but the favor would have been wasted, and he hadn't given enough.

For Deputy Secretary Zheng, handling a student's enrollment was a piece of cake, especially since the student had a Beijing hukou (household registration). He immediately made a phone call. As a newly appointed deputy secretary, he held the title of district standing committee member. With just one phone call, the matter was settled.

Thinking that it would be insincere to tell Zhuang Rui about this over the phone, Deputy Secretary Zheng simply went directly to Zhuang Rui's courtyard house. He also wanted to see who Zhuang Rui was handling this matter for. As the saying goes, to do great things, you must start with small things.

"So fast? Secretary Zheng, I really have to thank you for this. I'm going to Myanmar in a few days, could you take Ya Ya with you then?"

Zhuang Rui hadn't expected that the matter would be resolved in just over an hour after the phone call. Looking at Secretary Zheng, who was sweating profusely in the cold weather, he was at a loss for words. Power, it really is a damn good thing!

"Okay, Mr. Zhuang, don't worry, I'll definitely get this done for you..."

After Deputy Secretary Zheng understood the relationship between Zhuang Rui and Ya Ya, he was pleasantly surprised. Zhuang Rui was so protective and caring about a mere security guard he had hired. If he could get along well with him in the future, it would be hard for him not to rise to prominence.

Chapter 433-434 Journey to Myanmar

"Mr. Zhuang, please go back. There's no need to see me off. My car is at the intersection..."

After agreeing with Zhuang Rui that he would take Ya Ya to complete the school registration procedures the next day, Deputy Secretary Zheng took his leave, satisfied. He had made a good impression today; the trip in this cold weather was worthwhile.

If someone who knows him well saw this, they would definitely think they were seeing things. How could a deputy director-level official be so respectful to someone outside the system? This is the only way to be an official: if you want to be a leader, you must first learn to act like a grandson.

"Big brother, can I really go to school now?" After Deputy Secretary Zheng left, Ya Ya asked Zhuang Rui with anticipation on her little face.

"Of course, that uncle will take you tomorrow. Yaya, you must study hard from now on..."

Zhuang Rui smiled and rubbed Ya Ya's head. Deputy Secretary Zheng was very capable; the school he chose was not far from the courtyard. From now on, Aunt Li could just pick her up and drop her off in the morning and evening. Once Ya Ya got to know her classmates, she could go to school with them.

"Yaya will study hard, thank you big brother..."

The little girl nodded seriously. Children are very sensitive, and she could feel Zhuang Rui's love and care for her. Therefore, she was also willing to be close to Zhuang Rui. Now, in Ya Ya's heart, besides her brother, Zhuang Rui was the closest and best person to her.

"Alright, go play with the white lion..."

Strangely enough, as soon as Ya Ya came to this yard, she took a special liking to the white lion. The white lion, which was usually aloof from strangers, actually allowed Ya Ya to touch its head. However, this scared Peng Fei quite a bit, and a fight between man and dog almost broke out. If Hao Long hadn't stopped her, it was hard to say who would have won between Peng Fei and the white lion.

"Brother Hao, Peng Fei, I'll be gone for about seven or eight days. I'll leave this yard to you then. Oh, and I'll leave the car with you too. If my mom needs anything, please help her get there..."

Zhuang Rui knew that his mother frequently traveled between Yuquan Mountain and this courtyard. These past few days, his brother-in-law had been picking her up and dropping her off. However, Zhao Guodong was about to return to Pengcheng, so this matter could only be left to Hao Long and his brother. They had even flown helicopters, so driving a car would be no problem for them.

After Ya Ya left, Peng Fei asked Zhuang Rui, "Brother Zhuang, are you going to Myanmar?"

"Yes, I'm going to a jade auction. I'm leaving the day after tomorrow and should be back in about a week. What's wrong?" Zhuang Rui noticed that Peng Fei's expression was somewhat serious and felt a little strange.

Peng Fei gave a wry smile and said, "Brother Zhuang, Myanmar is not a good place. It's very complicated there..."

"Oh? Tell me about it..."

Zhuang Rui became interested upon hearing this. He had almost forgotten that Hao Long and Peng Fei had both lived in border areas like Myanmar, albeit in shady ways, but they were still more familiar with the situation than he was.

"Brother Zhuang, Myanmar is a federal country with an extremely complex social structure..."

"A federal nation? How is it different from us?" Zhuang Rui interrupted Peng Fei. Having heard about the United States and the Commonwealth of Nations all the time, Zhuang Rui really didn't know what a federal nation meant.

"Of course they are different. The federal government takes the form of a treaty, under which several small states unite to establish a larger nation and agree to be members of that nation. In other words, a federal republic is a new society formed by the union of several societies, and this new society can expand by the addition of other new members."

This is why the various small states in Myanmar are highly autonomous, each possessing its own army and autonomy. If they have any dissatisfaction with the federal government, they are prone to fighting.

Although Myanmar has a population of just over 50 million, it is home to 135 ethnic groups, primarily the Burmese, Karen, Shan, Kachin, Chin, Kayah, Mon, and Rakhine. The government in Myanmar is controlled by these major ethnic groups.

Because of the conflicts and contradictions between various ethnic groups, Myanmar implements a military regime. Their highest leader is a general. However, the administrative orders of the Myanmar government are not very effective for the smaller states below.

"Brother Zhuang, the jade auction you mentioned is the same as gambling on rough stones, right? I've heard a bit about it. There were times when people from China went to Myanmar to gamble on rough stones, but they were kidnapped by local forces who demanded ransom from China. If they were lucky, they paid the ransom and came back; if they were unlucky, they never even found their bodies..."

Peng Fei had previously rescued a person who had been kidnapped while on a mission in Myanmar to gamble on jade, so he was very knowledgeable about these kinds of things.

Is Myanmar really that chaotic?

Zhuang Rui was speechless at what Peng Fei said. In Zhuang Rui's memory, Myanmar used to be a tributary state of China, which had to pay tribute every year. Later, it became a British colony. In addition, Myanmar was rich in jade. As for other things, Zhuang Rui really didn't know anything.

"How can things not get chaotic, Brother Zhuang? Myanmar is where the Golden Triangle is located, and Myanmar has the largest area of poppy cultivation and the highest production in the Golden Triangle region."

The area is mainly inhabited by ethnic minorities in Myanmar who have relied on poppy cultivation for generations. In order to fight against the government and protect their opium industry, the local residents have armed themselves. For example, the former Khun Sa group had a powerful armed force of nearly 3,000 people who were well-trained and could hold their own against the government.

There were poppies all over the mountains there, it was really beautiful...

As Peng Fei was speaking, he suddenly changed the subject, as if he had thought of something, and a thoughtful expression appeared on his face.

Seeing Zhuang Rui's expression turn somewhat grim, Hao Long quickly said, "Boss, those places are indeed quite dangerous, but what Peng Fei mentioned are all in remote areas, places where the government's influence doesn't reach. If you're just going to gamble on stones, then nothing will happen. Yangon's security is quite good..."

After hearing Peng Fei's words, Zhuang Rui's heart started to pound. As the saying goes, a wise man does not stand under a crumbling wall. If what Peng Fei said is true, then he would have to think carefully about this trip to Myanmar. Zhuang Rui was not willing to go to the drug dealers' den. These days, even tomb raiders dare to strap explosives to their bodies, not to mention drug dealers, who would probably even bring out guns and cannons.

"I'm going with a group of people from China, so there shouldn't be any problems, right?" Zhuang Rui thought for a moment. He was only going to Yangon, which is the capital of Myanmar. The things Peng Fei mentioned shouldn't happen.

"Brother Zhuang, why don't I go with you? I'm familiar with that place and I can speak Burmese, so it'll be easier to handle if anything happens..."

To be honest, Peng Fei really didn't want to go back to that place. The memories it brought him were nothing but fighting and bloodshed, death and survival. But having just found a good boss, Peng Fei was genuinely afraid that something might happen to Zhuang Rui there, which is why he took the initiative to bring it up.

"Yes, boss, let Peng Fei go with you. Don't worry about me at home..." Hao Long said from the side.

"Okay, Peng Fei, you'll be my assistant for now. Give me your ID card, I'll go and take care of the formalities..." Although Peng Fei was going to work as a bodyguard, Zhuang Rui didn't really like the word "bodyguard," so he gave Peng Fei a different identity.

"ID card?"

Peng Fei's expression turned somewhat strange after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. In the past, when he traveled to Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos, he never went through any formalities. He didn't even have a piece of paper to prove his identity, which was to avoid causing diplomatic disputes between countries.

However, Peng Fei still handed over his ID card to Zhuang Rui. For him, being able to enter Myanmar as a businessman was quite novel; it was something he had never even dreamed of before.

The next day, Zhuang Rui took Peng Fei to the Jade Association, a place he had never been before. He handed his ID card and Peng Fei's ID card to the staff there, took photos, and then asked them to process passports. Of course, all expenses were to be borne by themselves, as the Jade Association only served as a platform.

Zhuang Rui discovered that his nominal directorship was quite effective. After he gave his name, the permanent director, who was over fifty years old, kept Zhuang Rui company for a long time before letting him leave.

"Hey, Brother Ma, it's only been a few months, and you've gotten even more prosperous..."

After leaving the Jade Association office, Zhuang Rui took Peng Fei to a hotel where he had arranged to meet Song Jun. Today, Fatty Ma was coming to Beijing, and Boss Song was hosting a welcome dinner for him. It has to be said that these two brothers, who initially looked down on each other, are now getting along quite well.

"You little brat, are you indirectly insulting me? So what if you're fat? I, Brother Ma, don't care what people say. Hey bro, who's this...?"

When Fatty Ma saw Zhuang Rui enter, he struggled to lift his massive body from the chair. He was a shrewd and perceptive man, and even though he realized Peng Fei was Zhuang Rui's follower, he still asked him a question.

"This is my assistant, Peng Fei. He speaks Burmese very well and is coming with me this time. Peng Fei, please have a seat. Brother Ma is an old friend, so don't be shy here..."

"Yes, everyone, please sit down. Brother Song is really something. He said he would host a welcome party for me, but I haven't seen him at all."

After gesturing for Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei to sit down, Fatty Ma waved for the two men behind him to sit down as well.

He didn't bring a woman this time, which relieved Zhuang Rui. To be honest, every time Zhuang Rui saw Fatty Ma with a young woman, he couldn't help but think that Fatty Ma definitely wouldn't use the male-on-top position when they did \*that\*.

"Fatty Ma, why are you acting like an old woman, always gossiping behind people's backs?"

As soon as Fatty Ma finished speaking, Song Jun pushed open the door of the private room and walked in. As if they had agreed beforehand, Song Jun also had two followers behind him. Judging from their age and build, they were probably the bodyguards he was taking to Myanmar.

Song Jun was a man of great pomp and circumstance and disliked having outsiders present when discussing matters. After sitting down, he said to Zhuang Rui, "Brother, these are the people you brought, right? Let them go to the private room next door; I've already booked it..."

"Oh, this is my assistant..."

"Brother Zhuang, you two talk. Just let me know if anything happens..."

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to ask Peng Fei to stay, Peng Fei stood up and walked out of the private room with several other people.

"You little rascal, I called you a few months ago and you kept making excuses, but now you've even found an assistant. Are you trying to hog all the benefits yourself...?"

After Peng Fei and the others left, Song Jun gave Zhuang Rui a dissatisfied look. In his eyes, Peng Fei was just a recent college graduate and probably a translator hired by Zhuang Rui.

"Hey, Brother Song, you've misjudged him. That young man is no ordinary person..." Fatty Ma chuckled. He had just noticed that Peng Fei had an indescribable sense of vicissitude, and was probably not as simple as he appeared on the surface.

Zhuang Rui smiled, not explaining Peng Fei's identity, and said, "Brother Song, I'm afraid I won't be able to partner with you in jade gambling this time..."

"Oh? Why? Brother Zhuang, I only went to Myanmar because of you. What's the point of us going if you don't help?"

Fatty Ma was convinced that Zhuang Rui was the right person for gambling on stones. In his opinion, Zhuang Rui had an inexplicable intuition about gambling on stones, just like he rarely misjudged people.

“I’m definitely going to buy it, but Brother Ma, you don’t know, I have a jewelry store in Beijing that’s short of jadeite raw materials. Even if I gamble on a rough stone, I definitely won’t sell it. You two are both going there to make money, so let’s go together and each buy our own...”

Zhuang Rui explained the reason, and Song Jun and Fatty Ma looked at each other, somewhat dumbfounded. With their level of jade appraisal, they were far from qualified to try their luck at the Myanmar jade auction. Even many veteran jade gamblers had failed there.

"This...this..."

Fatty Ma's clever tongue moved for a long time, but he couldn't come up with a coherent answer. This matter was not easy to handle. His and Song Jun's purpose was twofold: first, to stockpile some jadeite raw materials, and second, to cut and sell stones on the spot, partly for excitement and partly to make money. This was completely contrary to Zhuang Rui's purpose for this trip.

"How about this, if there's any food I can't finish, the three of us brothers will team up. You can sell your share if you want, but I'll definitely bring mine back..."

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and realized that he had about 180 million yuan in funds at his disposal. Of this, 80 million yuan was the result of a bet between Hong Kong and the shipping magnate's family. Originally, it was 110 million yuan, but his grandfather squeezed 30 million yuan out of him. Zhuang Rui just considered it money spent to make the old man happy and didn't care. After all, he had already given away the jade carving ornament worth over 100 million yuan, so why would he care about 30 million yuan?

In addition, there was another 90 million, which was the dividend from the Xinjiang jade mine. It was originally said to be around 150 million, but as the mining of the jade mine progressed, a batch of equipment needed to be purchased, and there were many other expenses. After communicating with the Jade King and Zhuang Rui, the two of them each invested another 60 million. Therefore, Zhuang Rui only received 90 million in dividends this time.

The remaining ten million was transferred by Zhuang Rui from Pengcheng. The 4S Audi dealership has now started to make a profit. After selling more than fifty cars transferred from the manufacturer and paying off the previous payments, there is still nearly fifteen million yuan in the account. Zhuang Rui withdrew ten million from it because he was afraid that he would not have enough money when he

arrived in Myanmar and would not be able to afford the good materials he saw. So he thought he should bring as much money as possible with him.

Yesterday, Zhuang Rui asked Ouyang Jun to have someone exchange all the money into US dollars. Now, the checkbook in his bag can issue more than 20 million US dollars, and it is also valid in Myanmar.

It sounds complicated, but it's actually quite simple. Zhuang Rui just needs to find a reputable foreign company, deposit his money into that company's account, and then the foreign company will convert it into US dollars at the market exchange rate and issue Zhuang Rui a limited-amount Swiss bank checkbook.

Of course, not just anyone can do this. Without Ouyang Jun's influence, no one else would go to such lengths.

Zhuang Rui originally intended to open an account directly at a Swiss bank, but after inquiring, he discovered it wasn't as simple as he thought. UBS and Credit Suisse in Switzerland didn't offer personal banking services in China, and even within Switzerland, without a residence permit and address, it was impossible to open an account. As for the \$1 million required to open the account, that wasn't a significant amount for Zhuang Rui.

Of course, it's not that this is completely impossible. There are brokers in this industry, and even international brokers. They have people who specialize in handling these matters and can get things done for a small amount of money. It's just that this time the time is too tight, and there's no time to spare.

"Brother, how much money did you bring with you this time?"

Fatty Ma can only hope that Zhuang Rui is short of money, as that would increase their chances of getting involved.

"More than 20 million..."

"Oh, that's quite a lot, quite a lot..."

Fatty Ma was overjoyed. Twenty million was a lot of money for ordinary people, but it was far from enough to make waves at the Myanmar jade auction. It probably wouldn't even make a ripple.

“Uh, Brother Ma, it’s US dollars...” Zhuang Rui added weakly.

"Cough...cough cough...you...you brat, stop panting when you speak!"

Fatty Ma was drinking tea when Zhuang Rui's words nearly made him choke. More than 20 million US dollars, that's almost 200 million RMB! Even Fatty Ma himself didn't have such a large budget for this trip. The Song army was the same; they only prepared about 10 million US dollars, which is just over 100 million RMB.

"Hey, brothers, the Myanmar jade auction is huge. My little bit of money isn't enough to handle it. I'll have to rely on you two later. Let's take it one step at a time. Why think so much?"

Zhuang Rui's words made the two men's expressions improve. Zhuang Rui was right. The scale of the Myanmar jade auction was many times larger than that of the Pingzhou jade auction. If the Pingzhou jade auction had tens of thousands of pieces of jade, then the raw jade at the Myanmar jade auction would probably be in the hundreds of thousands or millions.

Jewelry merchants from all over the world will be gathering in Yangon. The three of us combined only have about fifty million US dollars, which is really not enough.

Thinking of this, the two of them chuckled to themselves. They felt that their mindset was a bit off, as if they had placed all their bets on Zhuang Rui. However, this was not their fault. Zhuang Rui had created too many miracles in the jade gambling circle. His several jade-cutting feats were now considered legends and circulated in the jade gambling circle, attracting those who dreamed of getting rich overnight to join the jade gambling army.

...

"Isn't this weather a bit too hot?"

As soon as Zhuang Rui got off the plane in Yangon, he felt depressed. Although he was prepared and was only wearing a travel shirt and jeans, he started sweating after walking only a few steps. Looking at the sun high in the sky, the temperature was at least 30 degrees Celsius.

Not to mention Zhuang Rui, even Song Jun and Fatty Ma, who were on the same plane as him, as well as the people from the Jade Association, were having a hard time. Just a few hours ago it was snowing heavily, and a few hours later it was sunny and bright. The difference was a bit too much. Fatty Ma was even more resentful than Zhuang Rui, which was understandable given his heavy weight.

"Brother Zhuang, a shower at the hotel will make you feel much better..."

Peng Fei finished the formalities and walked over with Zhuang Rui and his own suitcase. He looked relaxed and seemed very comfortable with the climate.

"Peng Fei, where's your knife? Did you bring it on the plane?"

Zhuang Rui was a little curious. He knew that the members of the Wolf Fang unit had a habit of always carrying a knife, but there was a security check when boarding the plane, and he didn't know whether Peng Fei had brought it or not.

"certainly....."

Peng Fei subtly flipped his wrist, satisfying Zhuang Rui's curiosity, but he refused to elaborate on how he put it on.

Zhuang Rui, Song Jun, Fatty Ma, and the bodyguards walked outside together. They hadn't felt anything while inside the airport, but as soon as they left, they were surrounded by a group of taxi drivers. Looking at those short people dressed in bright colors, Zhuang Rui realized that he was in a foreign country.

"Sir, would you like a ride?"

"Sir, my car is brand new, I just bought it..."

The taxi drivers were speaking Mandarin and were very familiar with picking up passengers. Some of them even tried to snatch the suitcase from Peng Fei's hand. Peng Fei, however, was completely unaware that he was being robbed. He exchanged a few words with the driver in Burmese and then pulled Zhuang Rui into the car.

This so-called newly purchased taxi was incredibly dilapidated. To make matters worse, it didn't even have air conditioning. Zhuang Rui was sweating profusely as he sat there. According to Peng Fei, using air conditioning in Myanmar was a very luxurious thing.

Song Jun had already arranged for a hotel in Yangon. This was during the Myanmar jade auction season; if they had booked a hotel later, well, they would have had to sleep on the street. Anyway, the weather wasn't cold, so they wouldn't have gotten sick.

From Yangon Airport into the city, it's about ten kilometers. Zhuang Rui saw Peng Fei take out ten US dollars and hand them to the driver. Just as the driver was about to give him change, Peng Fei waved his hand, said a few words in Burmese, and then the driver took out a card and handed it to Peng Fei before driving away.

"Boss, the fare is six dollars, and the four dollars is a tip. We can use his car for the next few days..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui's puzzled look, Peng Fei explained it to him. After listening, Zhuang Rui was speechless. He thought, "If you're going to look for a place, at least find one with air conditioning."

Chapter 435-436 The Great Golden Pagoda

As if sensing Zhuang Rui's thoughts, Peng Fei smiled and said, "Brother Zhuang, most of the taxis in Yangon are Japanese cars from the 1980s. Even if they have air conditioning, it's long broken. This hotel is quite upscale, so it should have cars. However, with so many people staying here, it might be difficult to get a car when needed..."

The hotel Song Jun booked, called Sedona, is a five-star hotel. Many jade rough buyers from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and many other countries stay here. It is also Myanmar's state guesthouse.

Every year during the jade auction season, it's very difficult to find a room here. However, the prices are not cheap either, around \$300 a night, which is much higher than a five-star hotel in China.

The hotel houses thousands of wool merchants from various countries, and the hotel's own fleet of vehicles is simply not enough to accommodate them. Although the hotel's vehicle rental fees are relatively high, who would care about a few dollars when they come here?

"It's even hotter than Hainan! Hey bro, come on, what are you doing standing here..."

As Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei were talking, Song Jun and the others got out of the taxis. Fatty Ma was wiping his face vigorously with a towel. His white T-shirt was soaked with sweat and clung to his body, showing off his fat.

Upon entering the hotel lobby, a huge oil painting immediately caught Zhuang Rui's eye. It was a sky-blue oil painting depicting a girl in traditional Burmese clothing holding a white jar.

Behind the girl are Burmese jade merchants, haggling with out-of-town buyers of raw jade, selecting raw jade by lamplight, and celebrating with toasts after a deal is made. Their identities can be clearly distinguished from their clothing, and their facial expressions are depicted vividly.

Merchants from all over the world were taking photos under the oil painting. On a whim, Zhuang Rui took out a digital camera from his bag and handed it to Peng Fei, asking him to take a picture of him as well.

"Hey, isn't this Boss Zhuang? Boss Zhuang, let's take a picture together..."

Zhuang Rui had just stood there when he heard a greeting. He turned around and saw that it was indeed an acquaintance. It was Mr. Han, the head of Han's Jewelry, whom he had met at the Pingzhou Jadeite Auction. He had even sold Mr. Han a piece of rough jadeite back then.

Fatty Han didn't stand on ceremony. He came over and put his arm around Zhuang Rui's shoulder, clamoring for his men to take a group photo.

"Boss Zhuang, I'm staying in room 128. If you're free tonight, I'd like to treat you to a drink. Oh, Boss Song and Boss Ma are here too, what a coincidence..."

Seeing Fatty Han approach Song Jun and his companion, Zhuang Rui wiped away a cold sweat. This Boss Han was being far too enthusiastic. He wasn't a woman; once he grabbed someone's hand, he wouldn't let go.

No sooner had Boss Han left than a large group of people swarmed around him, greeting Zhuang Rui, asking for photos, shaking hands, and even getting autographs. Zhuang Rui was dumbfounded. He wasn't a celebrity, so what were these people doing?

However, there were quite a few familiar faces among this group of people, presumably people he had met in Pingzhou. Zhuang Rui couldn't keep a straight face and forced a smile as he dealt with them. After everyone had shaken hands and taken photos, Zhuang Rui was covered in sweat and quickly called Peng Fei to get into the elevator.

"Ouch, Zhuang... Ouch..."

As soon as Zhuang Rui entered the elevator, someone reached out and patted him on the shoulder. However, Peng Fei, who was right behind Zhuang Rui, grabbed the hand and, with a little force, the other person cried out in pain.

"Peng Fei is my friend..."

Zhuang Rui couldn't help but laugh when he saw this person. He and this guy really had a connection. He met this kid the first time he was involved in jade gambling, and he also met him when he was accumulating his initial capital. He never expected to see him again in a foreign country.

Seeing Yang Hao rubbing his hands, Zhuang Rui asked with a smile, "I don't know what was wrong with those people outside just now, they all kept pulling me, it was really strange. Don't mind it, my friend didn't mean it..."

"You don't know? Your name is super famous in the jade gambling circle now, called... something like 'Lucky Boy,' and other people just want to get a bit of your good fortune..."

Yang Hao smiled upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words. Zhuang Rui wasn't particularly well-known in Nanjing's jade gambling scene; winning a few million was normal in the industry. However, he had become a sensation in Pingzhou, successfully extracting top-quality jade from two pieces of scrap, leaving many astonished.

Not to mention that record-breaking bid, which brought Zhuang Rui a fortune of over 100 million yuan. Zhuang Rui's story of getting rich through gambling on stones is now widely circulated in the domestic and international stone gambling circles.

People who enjoy gambling are often quite superstitious, especially those from Hong Kong. Before coming to Myanmar, they probably bathe, burn incense, and pray to Guan Yu (a deity associated with good fortune). They also firmly believe that by associating with lucky people, they will also absorb good luck.

"Damn, buddy, I'm a virgin..."

Zhuang Rui was somewhat speechless. "We're men now," he thought, "but we can't go around telling the whole world that." Looking at Yang Hao, Zhuang Rui asked, "Why are you the only one who came to Myanmar?"

"No, my elders are here too. I've been here all day. I just went downstairs for lunch. Hey Zhuang, your friend's grip is really strong..."

Yang Hao felt as if his right hand was being clamped by iron clamps. He had no doubt that the thin young man next to Zhuang Rui could break his arm.

"Hehe, it's because you don't exercise. Look at your physique, you're almost as big as Brother Ma. Okay, I'm here. I'm going to take a shower first. We'll talk on the phone later..."

When Zhuang Rui saw the elevator stop at his floor, he quickly gestured to Yang Hao to make a phone call, and then went out with Peng Fei.

"Brother Zhuang, I acted impulsively just now..."

After stepping out of the elevator, Peng Fei said to Zhuang Rui embarrassedly that he had only learned the skills of killing to survive, and was really not good at protecting people. In addition, his vision was not very clear when he entered the elevator, and when he saw someone suddenly reach out to Zhuang Rui, he subconsciously subdued Yang Hao.

"It's alright, haha, we're all old friends, it's fine. Take a shower and rest for a bit, the jade auction doesn't start until tomorrow, let's conserve our energy today..."

Zhuang Rui smiled to indicate that he didn't mind, and casually took the room number to open the door. Song Jun had booked all one-bedroom suites with two living rooms, and each room had a shower. Zhuang Rui and his companion each had their own room, while Song Jun and Fatty Ma each had two bodyguards, so the two of them had to make do and squeeze into one room to sleep.

After taking a shower, Zhuang Rui changed into clean clothes, went to the living room, turned on the TV, and was surprised to find that there were satellite channels, including local stations from Kunming and other places. He watched with great interest. He had heard from Peng Fei that Myanmar was very chaotic, so he had no interest in going out to travel. In fact, compared with China, Myanmar's history was that of an uncivilized and barbaric country, not worth visiting.

Zhuang Rui was destined to be busy. He had just watched TV for a while when his phone rang. When he answered, it was his future mother-in-law and father-in-law who had arrived. Zhuang Rui dared not be negligent and quickly called out to Peng Fei, leading him to the restaurant.

"You silly child, why didn't you call as soon as you arrived? I was just telling your Uncle Qin that your plane should have landed by now..."

Qin Haoran arrived two days early. Qin's Jewelry attached great importance to this jade auction, as it was related to the company's raw material reserves for next year, making it a top priority. In addition to the couple, four well-known jade gambling masters also came.

Due to the Myanmar military's restrictions on the export of jadeite rough, it will be quite difficult to smuggle rough jadeite directly from Myanmar jadeite mines for at least the next two years. The soldiers here in Myanmar don't care about human rights; if they catch someone smuggling, they'll just shoot them, leaving you with no recourse.

Therefore, many large jewelry companies hope to make a profit at this jade auction in order to ensure the supply of jade raw materials.

"Hehe, I was just saying I'd call my aunt and uncle after I finished showering..."

Zhuang Rui acted like a good boy at this moment. After all, he had done *\*that\** to someone else's woman, so he naturally had to be respectful to his elders.

"Yes, let your mother go to Hong Kong for a visit when she has time. Oh, and your sister and her family too, they should all come and have some fun. Once Xiaobing finishes this work, we won't let her manage the company's designs anymore, then you two can have more time together..."

Although Fang Yi looked like she was in her early thirties, she was clearly going through menopause. She sat there, rambling on and on to Zhuang Rui. Qin Haoran, meanwhile, pulled out an English newspaper and pretended to read it. It was rare for his wife to bother him; he figured his future son-in-law would suffer for him.

"Auntie, I need to take this call. Who's so inconsiderate as to call now?"

Zhuang Rui was getting drowsy listening to the phone, but he still had to nod occasionally to show his attention. Just as he was feeling miserable, his phone rang. He cursed the other person for being so tactless, but in his heart he wished he could pull the other person out of the phone and kiss them.

"Hey Yang Hao, I'm at the restaurant downstairs. What's up?"

Zhuang Rui was talking casually on the phone, but in his mind he kept thinking, "Dude, just say you have something to do so I can find an excuse to slip away."

"Let's go out for a walk. I've heard that the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon is world-famous. It would be a shame to come all this way and not go see it. Do you have time?"

Zhuang Rui's phone had excellent speakerphone quality, and Fang Yi and Qin Haoran, who were sitting opposite him, could hear the voice coming from the phone.

"Well... maybe not today. I have something very important to do. How about we go tomorrow?" Fang Yi was very satisfied with Zhuang Rui's reply. Chatting with her was much more important than going shopping.

"The jade auction starts tomorrow, there's no time to go shopping. If you're not going, I'll ask someone else to go..." Yang Hao had just gone back and begged his elders for a long time to get leave, but among the people he knew, only Zhuang Rui was about his age. He couldn't very well drag an old man along, could he?

"Zhuang Rui, go ahead. Myanmar has some really nice historical sites. Since you're here, make the most of it..."

Qin Haoran's voice sounded like heavenly music to Zhuang Rui's ears, but he still pretended to be reluctant and agreed to Yang Hao's request on the phone before bidding farewell to Fang Yi, being extremely polite.

"Peng Fei, is it alright for you to go out for a stroll in Yangon?"

After leaving the restaurant, Zhuang Rui remembered the safety issue, but even if a gunfight broke out outside, he was unwilling to go back and listen to his mother-in-law's nagging.

Peng Fei, feeling a little embarrassed, said, "Brother Zhuang, it's alright. It's my fault for being too nervous earlier. This is the capital of Myanmar, under government control, unlike the chaotic remote areas..."

"Brother Zhuang, over here! I heard there's an antique market next to that Golden Pagoda. Shall we go check it out later?"

Zhuang Rui had just reached the hotel entrance when he saw Yang Hao. This guy was really impatient; he had already hailed a taxi and was waiting there.

The shower was a waste of time. Stepping into the sweltering taxi, sweat immediately began to drip down his forehead. Zhuang Rui rolled down the window and stuck half his head out of the car, which made him feel a little more comfortable. The short taxi driver, on the other hand, seemed to have gotten used to the temperature, as there wasn't a trace of sweat on his face.

Fortunately, the hotel wasn't far from the Shwedagon Pagoda, only a five or six-minute drive away. After turning past the next building, the view opened up, and a towering golden spire appeared before Zhuang Rui.

"This...this is the Shwedagon Pagoda?!"

Looking at the slender spire that shimmered with dazzling golden light in the sunlight, Zhuang Rui was deeply impressed.

The Shwedagon Pagoda in the distance, like a golden, mysterious object rising from the horizon, is a breathtaking wonder gleaming in the sun. Its shape is neither an Islamic dome nor a Hindu minaret, but rather like an upright gourd.

"Yes, this is our Shwedagon Pagoda. The World Heritage Organization has said that our Shwedagon Pagoda, along with Borobudur in Indonesia and Angkor Wat in Cambodia, is considered a gem of Eastern art, one of the most famous pagodas in the world, and a symbol of Myanmar..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the dark-skinned, thin driver unexpectedly began explaining to Zhuang Rui in Chinese. Although his Chinese was somewhat broken, he still managed to convey the meaning, and he wore a proud expression as he spoke.

Zhuang Rui originally wanted to use the Great Wall of China to refute the driver, but at this moment the car had arrived at the outer perimeter of the Shwedagon Pagoda. Upon seeing the entire Shwedagon Pagoda, Zhuang Rui was stunned and could no longer utter the words that were on the tip of his tongue.

A magnificent golden pagoda, over a hundred meters tall, stood before Zhuang Rui. It felt as if he were standing beneath a thirty-story building, making him feel incredibly small. Around the massive pagoda were dozens of smaller golden pagodas, surrounding it. Everywhere he looked was a golden hue, a powerful visual impact that overwhelmed Zhuang Rui and his companions, creating an atmosphere of grandeur and opulence.

After getting out of the car, Zhuang Rui saw that after Yang Hao paid the fare, the driver did not leave immediately. Instead, he opened the car door, got out, and respectfully put his hands together in front of the Shwedagon Pagoda, chanting Buddhist scriptures. After about a minute, he drove away again.

After the taxi left, Yang Hao said with a smile, "That driver was interesting, acting like a monk..."

"I bet that driver really was a monk. You don't know anything about Burmese history, do you..."

Before coming to Myanmar, Zhuang Rui did some research on the country. He knew that Myanmar, like Thailand, was a famous Buddhist country. Buddhism had been introduced to Myanmar for more than 2,500 years, and more than 85% of the population practiced Buddhism.

The abundance of pagodas, temples, and monks are the three major characteristics of Burmese Buddhist culture. Burmese men are expected to shave their heads and become monks at least once in their lives, which is considered a way to cultivate virtue and accumulate merit. This is why Zhuang Rui mentioned earlier that the driver might have been a monk.

Burmese Buddhists believe that building pagodas brings blessings in this life and the next. It is estimated that there are over 100,000 pagodas of varying sizes throughout the country. Therefore, Myanmar is also known as the "Land of Pagodas."

The Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, which was built more than 2,500 years ago, is a representative work of Burmese pagodas, a masterpiece of world Buddhist architectural art, and the oldest and most valuable pagoda in the world.

The Shwedagon Pagoda stands 100 meters tall and is surrounded by 64 smaller pagodas. The entire pagoda is covered in gold leaf, with the main pagoda alone containing nearly 30,000 pieces of gold leaf, weighing more than 7 tons. The top of the pagoda is cast in gold and inlaid with 5,448 diamonds and 2,317 rubies. The entire Shwedagon Pagoda is radiant, magnificent, and spectacular.

"This is the most valuable antique in the world..."

Zhuang Rui was amazed. The value of those diamonds and gems was beyond monetary measure, not to mention the more than 7 tons of gold. This gold tower was equivalent to one-thousandth of the United States' gold reserves in the World Bank.

As the saying goes, "Seeing is believing," and when Zhuang Rui saw the description of the Shwedagon Pagoda in the local gazetteer of Myanmar, he was still somewhat dismissive. If we're talking about man-made structures, the Forbidden City in China represents the highest level of ancient architecture. So when he arrived in Myanmar, he had no interest in sightseeing.

However, after seeing the Shwedagon Pagoda, Zhuang Rui realized that he had been a bit arrogant before. This Shwedagon Pagoda is indeed something that the people of Myanmar should be proud of.

The Shwedagon Pagoda is built against the mountain. Zhuang Rui spent three dollars at the entrance to buy a colorful brochure about the pagoda. It was written in Chinese, English, and Burmese, and it detailed the history of the pagoda as well as many myths and legends.

The legend begins with two merchant brothers who encountered the Buddha—they received eight strands of his hair, intending to send them to Burma as offerings. Upon arriving in Burma, the brothers, with the help of the local king, found a sacred mountain that housed many treasures of the Buddha.

When the eight Buddha hairs were taken out of the two men's golden box and offered as an offering, some incredible things happened: the light emanating from the hairs penetrated heaven and hell, enabling the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the mute to speak clearly; moreover, thunder roared from the sky, the earth shook, and even Mount Sumeru was affected; gems rained down from the sky, reaching up to knee-deep; and the trees on the Himalayas blossomed and bore fruit even when it was not their flowering season.

These are all legends, of course, but inside the Shwedagon Pagoda, there are indeed relics of four Buddhas, including the staff of Krakucchanda Buddha, the water purifier of Samyaksambuddha Buddha, the robe of Kassapa Buddha, and eight hairs of Buddha Shakyamuni. These relics are worshipped and offered incense by countless devout Buddhists every day.

Upon entering the mountain gate, one can see the massive pagoda base, which has a circumference of 433 meters. Surrounding it are 64 small pagodas and 4 medium pagodas, each with a different style, built of wood and stone. Each of the four entrances to the pagoda is guarded by stone lions, and behind the entrances, a series of steps leads directly to a platform on the mountain.

More than 50,000 gold and silver bells hang around the tower. When the wind blows, the bells ring out in a clear and melodious sound that can be heard in all directions.

The Shwedagon Pagoda has gates in all four directions, and each gate is guarded by a pair of tall stone lions, similar to those found in front of Chinese temples. Inside the gates, there are long stone staircases leading to the top of the pagoda. The staircases are lined with stalls selling Buddha and human statues carved from wood, bamboo, bone, ivory, and other materials, as well as incense, candles, and flowers for offering to Buddha, and various Burmese snacks.

Zhuang Rui, Yang Hao, and the other two are now standing at the entrance of the south gate of the Golden Pagoda. On both sides of the gate, there are a pair of lion-faced human statues guarding it. Zhuang Rui doesn't know if this building, which is said to be 2,500 years old, has any mysterious connection with the Egyptian pyramids.

Following the staff's instructions, Zhuang Rui and the others removed their shoes before entering the Shwedagon Pagoda. This was to show respect to the Buddha; even foreign heads of state and presidents would remove their shoes upon arrival.

Above the series of steps are images of Buddha, while the base of the pagoda is made of bricks and covered with gold bricks. These are real gold bricks made of pure gold, donated by Buddhists from all walks of life in Myanmar. Inside the pagoda, niches on the walls enshrine jade Buddha statues of various shapes.

Walking through the foreign golden pagoda, barefoot monks occasionally passed by. Although the pagoda was extremely luxurious, Zhuang Rui felt an unprecedented peace and tranquility when he stood inside. All the worldly troubles in his heart seemed to have disappeared.

Today is the last day of 2004. Many devout Buddhists have come here to prepare for the start of the new year. As a result, the pagoda is full of people, but no one is making a fuss. Everyone is orderly following the flow of people to worship each Buddha statue enshrined in the pagoda.

After walking around the Shwedagon Pagoda and visiting several Buddhist relics, Zhuang Rui, Yang Hao, and their companions exited from the southeast corner. The sun was still shining brightly, but Zhuang Rui and Yang Hao didn't feel as hot this time, perhaps due to the tranquility of their hearts.

At the southeast corner of the Shwedagon Pagoda stands an ancient Bodhi tree, which is said to have been transplanted from the sacred tree nursery of the Vajrasana of Shakyamuni Buddha in India. To the left of the Bodhi tree is a Chinese temple called "Fu Hui Palace", built during the reign of Emperor Guangxu of the Qing Dynasty with donations from overseas Chinese.

This place was much more lively, with many vendors selling souvenirs and antiques on the ground. The grand temples with their distinctive Chinese characteristics, combined with the vendors' calls in Chinese, made Zhuang Rui feel as if he had come to an antique market in China.

"Peng Fei, see what fun things you can do, buy some for Nannan and Yaya to take back home..."

Yesterday, after Ouyang Wan brought Nannan back to the courtyard house, the little girl immediately became familiar with Yaya. Her other older brothers and sisters are all much older than her and they can't play together. Now that Yaya has come to the house, little Nannan has immediately become Yaya's little shadow, and the two little girls have an extremely good relationship.

Before coming, Zhuang Rui had taken out \$30,000 and placed it with Peng Fei, so Peng Fei paid for all the expenses along the way.

The stalls here mostly display carvings of figures or Buddha statues, made of ivory and wood. Although the carving is not bad, Zhuang Rui doesn't think much of it. He never believed that foreign monks could chant sutras, so why would he come here to ask for Buddha statues?

"Come and take a look, gentlemen. These are all genuine ivory, bamboo, and old wood root carvings, no fakes whatsoever..."

When the group arrived at a stall, the stall owner's fluent Mandarin attracted Zhuang Rui and the others. It's true that many Burmese people can speak Chinese, but you can clearly hear the awkwardness in their language. This man, who looked to be in his thirties, spoke fluent Mandarin, which showed that he was definitely Chinese.

His stall had a relatively richer variety of items. In addition to Buddha statues carved from wood, ivory, and bone, there were also handmade bamboo vases and other decorative items that could not hold

water. They were quite exquisitely made. There were also rattan products and brightly colored sarongs covered with sequins, which were very characteristic of Myanmar.

Zhuang Rui was drawn to the sarongs and squatted down to examine them. He casually asked the stall owner, "Brother, judging from your accent, you're Chinese, right?"

The stall owner replied, "Yes, my grandfather's generation came to Myanmar more than half a century ago, but he went back to his homeland to reunite with his relatives two years ago..."

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but feel a sense of awe and asked, "Was your grandfather one of those who stayed in Burma during the Chinese Expeditionary Force?"

There are quite a few Chinese people living in Myanmar, and most of them are military personnel.

During the War of Resistance against Japan, China sent two expeditionary forces, totaling 260,000 troops, to Burma to fight. Due to the Allied forces' mismanagement and poor cooperation, the first expedition ended in failure. The number of people who died or went missing in the rout, including those captured, bombed, starved, or succumbed to infectious diseases, reached as many as 70,000.

Many surviving Chinese soldiers stayed in Myanmar until the 1990s when that long-buried history was rediscovered. At that time, a campaign was launched to welcome the remains of the fallen heroes back to the mainland, and many veterans also returned to the mainland to trace their roots.

The second group of people who stayed in Myanmar were the Kuomintang troops led by Li Mi, who were defeated in Yunnan and other places during the Liberation War and entered Myanmar, where they occupied the Golden Triangle region.

#### Chapter 437 Ivory Carving

Back then, after the Kuomintang Eighth Army was defeated in Yunnan, Li Mi fled to Taiwan alone. For half a year, the 93rd Division was homeless and wandered around. On New Year's Eve of 1950, they finally managed to escape and entered Burmese territory. During their escape, the 93rd Division and the remnants of another regiment and another division brought 7,000 soldiers and their families who were unwilling to surrender to foreign lands.

However, the Burmese government did not want to accept them, so war broke out. Although the Nationalist army suffered repeated defeats in the civil war, they were more than capable of dealing with the Burmese government army, quickly defeating them and finally gaining a foothold in the Golden Triangle.

Li Mi, who was in Taiwan, immediately clamored to launch a counterattack against the mainland as soon as he saw his old subordinates gain a foothold in Myanmar. He did launch a counterattack, but the result was heavy casualties, and he retreated back to Myanmar.

Meanwhile, the Burmese army had reached an agreement with India, deciding that India would send troops to assist the Burmese army in driving out the remnants of the Kuomintang army. It was a fierce battle, and the Kuomintang army won the final victory, but it was also a Pyrrhic victory. The Kuomintang remnants, with less than 10,000 troops, managed to defeat the Indian-Burmese joint forces and completely establish a foothold on the Sino-Burmese border.

In the 1960s, the 93rd Division began fighting against the Burmese Communist Party again. Due to the loss of supplies from Taiwan, it suffered heavy casualties and its manpower dwindled with each battle. Dozens of armed groups of varying sizes formed in the Yunnan-Thailand-Burma border region.

Later, due to years of war and lack of supplies, the Nationalist army, the Burmese Communist Party, and the Communist soldiers of the Burmese branch began to collectively cultivate opium in the Golden Triangle region, forming the world's largest armed drug production and processing base: the Golden Triangle!

The Chinese who remained in Myanmar were nothing more than these two groups, which is why Zhuang Rui asked this question. Regardless of the reason for staying, they were all descendants of Yan and Huang, and they were all fighting for survival. Now that the three links with Taiwan are about to be established, Zhuang Rui naturally doesn't care about their identities.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the stall owner became somewhat embarrassed and said, "My grandfather stayed in Burma during the Expeditionary Force period. At that time, they fought guerrilla warfare against the Japanese in the jungle, but later they joined the defeated Kuomintang troops and fought against the Burmese Communists..."

The soldiers who remained in Burma from the Expeditionary Force were almost all veterans of countless battles. After fighting the Japanese, they had settled down peacefully, but later, defeated Kuomintang troops fled to Burma. Out of a sense of kinship, many veterans took up arms again. Of course, these men are now all over sixty years old, and the large-scale wars are over.

"What's your name, sir? How's business here? What's the price of this ivory figure carving?"

Zhuang Rui squatted down. Just because the other party was Chinese, he should help them out. Buying some small things wouldn't cost much.

The stall owner glanced at the ivory carving in Zhuang Rui's hand and casually replied, "My surname is Li, and my name is Li Yunshan. That's five US dollars, or five thousand Burmese kyats. It'll be a little cheaper if you buy it in US dollars..."

In Myanmar, the US dollar is a hard currency; one dollar can be exchanged for 800 kyats, and on the black market, it can be even higher.

Zhuang Rui did the math in his head. It was only a little over forty RMB, which was still a good deal. More importantly, the ivory carving was made of old ivory. Upon closer inspection, it was solid and dense, with a soft and smooth luster. The entire object was pure white with a slight yellow tinge, as if it were something that had been around for a long time.

Ivory, though described as white gold, is actually mostly yellowish in color. There are two types of ivory: African ivory and Asian ivory. Both male and female African elephants have tusks, which are mostly pale yellow, with a fine texture, good luster, and high hardness. Asian ivory is whiter, but it will also turn yellow over time. Therefore, the age of an ivory carving is usually determined by its color.

Some collectors prefer its white color and will soak it in soybean residue before rubbing it to naturally whiten it. After bleaching, it also has a glossy, oily white sheen and a smooth, delicate feel, making it a top-quality product. In contrast, most bone imitations are bleached, resulting in a dry, rough texture. Plastic imitations have a dull, unnatural, and lackluster white color.

Since the 1980s, due to concerns about elephant population protection, the international community, including China, temporarily banned the ivory trade. This significantly impacted the domestic ivory carving market, which relied entirely on imported ivory.

After my country ceased direct imports of ivory from Africa on June 1, 1990, and completely banned international trade in ivory and its products in 1991, no commercial imports of ivory were approved. The ban on raw ivory fueled a surge in ivory collecting, and ivory carvings saw their value continuously rise during this period of prohibition.

With the ban on ivory trade and the shortage of raw materials for ivory products, the quantity of ivory carvings has dwindled. As the market depletes these pieces, surviving ivory masterpieces will become increasingly rare. Consequently, the price of ivory artifacts has skyrocketed by 100% for some time, and ivory carvings are highly sought after by collectors.

Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and other places are considered the homeland of Asian elephants, so ivory products are still very common there.

"Business is alright, just enough to make ends meet. I've heard things are developing well in China now, and I'd like to go back if I have the chance..."

Li Yunshan was very talkative. Although there were many Chinese tourists in Myanmar, he didn't often use Chinese. He then started chatting with Zhuang Rui at length.

"Um, this... and these few too, I'll take them all. Brother Li, could you calculate how much they're worth in total?"

Zhuang Rui picked out several ivory carvings from the stall. These items are currently highly sought after by domestic collectors, and their value is over a thousand yuan. If they are ivory miniature carvings or royal utensils from the Song or Ming dynasties, their value can even reach hundreds of thousands or millions of yuan. They are priceless treasures and extremely rare.

However, Zhuang Rui wasn't interested in making that much money. He mainly wanted to enrich his basement, which was rather shabby, except for a few pieces of porcelain and ancient paintings.

"Young man, it's \$138 in total. Just give me \$130, and I'll wrap it up for you..."

Zhuang Rui bought quite a lot of things, more than a dozen in total, and the prices were all different. Li Yunshan took out more than a dozen small boxes from the large box behind him, each containing a corresponding ivory carving, and put them in one by one.

"Brother Li, why don't you sell jade here? Isn't Myanmar a jade-producing region? I've seen other stalls selling it..."

While Peng Fei was paying, Yang Hao, who had been standing aside watching for a long time, finally couldn't hold back any longer. The stall had rubies, ivory carvings and other items, but surprisingly no jade, which puzzled Yang Hao.

"Yes..." Hearing Yang Hao say that, Zhuang Rui also realized that there were indeed no jade or jewelry items on this stall, while other stalls had more or less some.

"Hehe, is this your first time in Myanmar, young men?" Li Yunshan asked with a smile.

"Yes, what's wrong? Does Myanmar prohibit the buying and selling of jade?"

Even Zhuang Rui was puzzled. Banning the export of raw jade was one thing, but if the Myanmar government were to restrict finished jadeite as well, that would be going too far. Moreover, doing so would prevent their domestic jewelry companies from developing.

"It's not that buying and selling is prohibited, but when you two buy jewelry and jade, especially jadeite, you must go to a regular store and do not buy raw jade, that is, unprocessed raw stones, as these fall under the scope of national export control."

After purchasing, be sure to ask for a receipt for inspection at customs. Most of what those people sell is fake jade. Even if they have real jade, without an invoice, it will still be cleared through customs. I don't want to deceive my customers, so I simply don't display it..."

Li Yunshan looked down on the behavior of the other stalls, his face showing a dismissive expression.

Zhuang Rui and the others were hearing this for the first time. No wonder Myanmar is rich in jadeite, but there isn't a single famous jade company. It turns out that it is indeed restricted by the government. But thinking about it, it makes sense. Myanmar's jadeite is probably like Arabia's oil, a major source of foreign exchange earnings, so it is naturally subject to government control.

"Thank you, and we welcome you to visit China again in the future..."

Zhuang Rui took the ivory carvings that had been placed in the packaging bag, stood up, and was about to say goodbye to his fellow countryman when his eyes were suddenly drawn to an item in the box behind him where the boxes were placed. He then pulled back the foot he had taken in front of him.

"Brother Li, are the things in that box of yours for sale?"

Because he had been squatting, Zhuang Rui could only see clearly when he stood up that in the box next to the stall owner, there was an ivory Buddha statue about fifty centimeters tall and as thick as a child's arm. The statue's clothing was decorated with openwork, and the design was elegant and the carving was extremely exquisite.

What surprised Zhuang Rui was not these things, but the shape of the Buddha statue. It was the wrathful Vajra in Buddhism. As the saying goes, "Bodhisattvas lower their eyebrows, Vajras glare fiercely." This Buddha statue had a fierce Vajra face and held a vajra. The amount of material used in the entire carving was rare. Moreover, a ruby was even inlaid on its forehead, like the Vajra's heavenly eye, which made the entire ivory carving even more imposing.

Zhuang Rui liked the object from the bottom of his heart the moment he saw it. How impressive it would be to display this in the living room of a courtyard house! Speaking of which, such a large ivory carving is really rare in China, apart from the exquisite large ivory carving of children playing with Buddha and the ivory carving of a sailboat in the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall.

"This thing..."

A hint of hesitation appeared on Li Yunshan's face. This item was something his grandfather had seized from the Japanese years ago and kept as a war trophy. However, his grandfather passed away a few years ago, and the item was left to him.

Although he was planning to sell it, he was actually a little reluctant to part with it when Zhuang Rui asked him to buy it.

Chapter 438-439: A World Within

"Brother Li, could you let me take a look at this ivory carving first?"

Zhuang Rui was unaware of Li Yunshan's thoughts, nor did he know that Li Yunshan feared his deceased grandfather would scold him for selling off ancestral land without a second thought. Zhuang Rui simply liked the large ivory Buddha statue and wanted to hold it and admire it.

"Sure, of course you can. Come and take a look; this thing isn't light..."

The item was quite large, and ivory carvings are relatively fragile. Li Yunshan invited Zhuang Rui to his stall to take a look, still pondering whether he should sell it or not, and if so, how much he should sell it for.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui didn't stand on ceremony. He stepped over the stall, walked to the box, picked up the ivory carving that was almost as tall as the box, and placed it on the ground.

In this way, the entire ivory carving was fully presented to Zhuang Rui. The Vajra figure on this wrathful Vajra ivory carving had one foot on the ground and the other slightly raised. The face was extremely exaggerated, with a wide-open mouth, nostrils pointing to the sky, and eyes glaring forward. The right hand held a vajra, and the chest was bare, revealing strong muscles. The robes in front of him fluttered, making him extremely beautiful.

Zhuang Rui had read some books about ancient Buddhist sculptures, and this ivory carving should be a typical Buddhist statue from the Sui and Tang dynasties, which not only adheres to the exaggerated and freehand style of traditional Chinese carving, but also conforms to modern people's aesthetic appreciation of human health and beauty.

It's just a mystery how this statue, which should belong to its own country, ended up in Myanmar. In the past, it was only China that bullied Myanmar; Myanmar never had the power to burn, kill, and plunder in China.

Upon close observation of the details, Zhuang Rui could see that the sculptor of this piece possessed extremely profound skill. Every stroke was precise and decisive, with simple and smooth lines and clear and natural details. Most notably, the entire piece was covered with tool marks, yet no artificial polishing was used to remove the carving traces, fully showcasing the characteristics of ivory.

This unadorned and natural approach not only enhances the work's strength, grandeur, and appeal but also demonstrates the artist's complete confidence in their carving skills.

Without using his spiritual energy to appraise it, Zhuang Rui could assert that this ivory Buddha sculpture was definitely an old object, probably dating back to the Qing Dynasty. Not only is ivory rare nowadays, but even during the Republic of China era, craftsmen with such skills were extremely rare, truly master-level artisans.

With his back to Yang Hao and the others, Zhuang Rui released his spiritual energy into the ivory carving. As he expected, as soon as the spiritual energy seeped into the surface of the carving, Zhuang Rui discovered that it contained a rich purple spiritual energy. "Ming Dynasty! At least it's an object from the Ming Dynasty..." Zhuang Rui was overjoyed and wanted to acquire it even more.

"Huh? Why is there a crack?!"

Zhuang Rui did not delve deeper with his spiritual energy. On the side of the ivory carving, below the arm, he found a crack about five centimeters in size that extended inwards, as if it had been repaired before. It looked like a small round door had been opened there and then closed.

"What the hell is this?"

Zhuang Rui's gaze followed the small door further inside, and he was suddenly stunned, because a section of the Buddha statue's chest had been hollowed out, and in that very small space were two wax balls.

"Damn it, what the hell is this thing?!"

This thing naturally couldn't withstand Zhuang Rui's spiritual energy's ability to see through things. The spiritual energy instantly enveloped the wax pill, and Zhuang Rui discovered that inside the wax pill were

two small crumpled pieces of paper. This left Zhuang Rui dumbfounded. Even with his skill, he couldn't discern what was written on those pieces of paper.

At this moment, Zhuang Rui felt as if he were being scratched by a cat, unbearably itchy. Humans are inherently curious, and the contents inside the Buddha sculpture were clearly hidden there by later generations with great care. This mystery must lie within the two wax pills. This secret, so close yet unsolvable, caused Zhuang Rui immense distress.

"Mr. Zhuang, I can sell it, but this thing has been in my house for many years. In our Chinese terms, it's an antique, right? So the price can't be calculated like these handicrafts..."

After hesitating for a while, Li Yunshan decided to sell it. After all, this thing couldn't be eaten, and he had grown up surrounded by Chinese people, including his mother, who was also Chinese. Unlike the Burmese who were Buddhist, he didn't feel there was anything wrong with selling the Buddha statue.

Such a large and exquisite ivory carving would be treasured and worshipped day and night in the home of a Burmese. However, in Li Yunshan's home, it had been kept under the bed for decades, and the old man would occasionally take it out to "reminisce" when he was bored.

"Hmm, Brother Li, this is fine. Let me take a closer look. This ivory carving seems to have been repaired..."

Zhuang Rui's mind was focused on the ivory carving. Following his habit of haggling when buying things, he casually replied, but he regretted it as soon as the words left his mouth. If the stall owner noticed anything amiss, he would suffer a huge loss.

"Oh, you mean that crack? I've had it since I was a child. My grandfather probably cracked it by accident. It shouldn't matter, right?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Li Yunshan couldn't help but feel a little nervous. Since he had decided to sell, he naturally wanted to get a high price. If Zhuang Rui brought up the crack, Li Yunshan really didn't know how to negotiate the price, since he knew nothing about antiques.

"It doesn't matter. The overall shape of this ivory carving is very good. It's normal for it to have a few flaws. Let me take another look. Brother Li, could you give me an estimate first? We can talk about it later..." After taking a few deep breaths, Zhuang Rui calmed himself down.

Zhuang Rui now focused his attention on the repaired surface. He discovered that the repaired surface and the materials used inside were made of milky white silicone, which had turned slightly yellow over time. If one did not use spiritual energy to see it, it would be difficult to notice with the naked eye.

This made Zhuang Rui even more curious. He knew that latex only became popular in the early 20th century; such a material couldn't have existed during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

The wax ball inside the ivory ornament is a unique method of transmitting secret messages in ancient China. It seems that since the Qing Dynasty, secret messages sealed with sealing wax have been used instead. The combination of these two completely unequal events from different eras left Zhuang Rui somewhat puzzled as to what secrets were hidden within.

"Let's buy it first and then talk about it..."

Zhuang Rui made up his mind. He knew he couldn't possibly decipher the writing on the paper ball inside the wax pill using only his spiritual energy. To figure it out, he had to take out the wax pill, which meant he first had to make the ivory Buddha sculpture his own.

"Brother Li, I won't lie to you, this ivory Buddha sculpture is probably an old piece from before the Republic of China era, it can be considered an antique. I really like this item, it would look nice to display in my home. Please name your price, if it's reasonable, we can make a deal..."

Because of Li Yunshan's initial attitude, Zhuang Rui was afraid that he would no longer be willing to sell. In order to show his sincerity, he bluntly said that the item was an antique. However, Zhuang Rui played a little trick on the date. He only said that it was before the Republic of China, but did not say that the item was from the Ming Dynasty. Of course, the Ming Dynasty was before the Republic of China.

"Well... I don't know much about this either. If you really want it, young man, here's the price..."

After thinking for a while, Li Yunshan held up two fingers.

Seeing Li Yunshan's gesture, Zhuang Rui asked, "Twenty thousand US dollars? That's a bit expensive..."

As he spoke, he frowned, but this was all an act. The truth was, if this item were taken to China and its provenance could be traced, it could easily fetch seven or eight million at auction. However, business is about bargaining, and Zhuang Rui naturally wanted to lower the price.

Zhuang Rui didn't notice that after he said the price of 20,000 US dollars, Li Yunshan's pupils contracted for a moment. This is a normal reaction when people are surprised. It's not that Li Yunshan thought Zhuang Rui had too little money, but the price had shocked him. The two fingers he held meant that it was only 2,000 US dollars.

It's worth noting that ivory carvings are quite common in Myanmar. Although the ivory used in this piece is not small, there are some larger items in Myanmar that cost only a couple of thousand US dollars. Given that the average income in Myanmar is very low, a couple of thousand US dollars is enough to support a family for several years.

Li Yunshan sets up a stall here and does business. He only earns a few hundred US dollars a month. If it is the twenty thousand US dollars that Zhuang Rui said, then it is a huge sum of money for Li Yunshan.

"Young...young man, can you lower the price a bit more? How about 18,000? This thing was passed down from my grandfather. If he were still alive, I wouldn't sell it..."

Li Yunshan was so excited that he stammered. Afraid that Zhuang Rui wouldn't buy it, he took the initiative to lower the price by two thousand dollars and said that it was his grandfather's heirloom.

"Eighteen thousand..."

Zhuang Rui muttered something to himself, then circled the Buddha sculpture again, nodded heavily, and said, "It's fate that we met Brother Li. Eighteen thousand, it's eighteen thousand it is. But Brother Li, can this be taken out of the country? If customs confiscates it again, that would be a real injustice..."

Zhuang Rui was unaware whether Myanmar prohibited the export of such items. If, as he claimed, they were to be bought and then confiscated, it would truly be a waste of money.

"No, no, how about this, young man, wait a moment, I'll go get you an invoice for the handicrafts..." Li Yunshan didn't actually know if this thing was prohibited from being exported, but he knew that things bought in Myanmar could definitely be taken out of the country as long as they had an invoice issued by a state-owned store.

Li Yunshan called over a familiar stall owner at a nearby stall and asked him to keep an eye on things for him. Then he excitedly ran towards the state-run store at the entrance of the Golden Pagoda.

"Brother Zhuang, is it worth spending over 200,000 yuan on this?"

Seeing Zhuang Rui caressing the ivory Buddha statue with obvious delight, Yang Hao asked, somewhat puzzled. In his mind, most of the things sold at tourist attractions were fake. Zhuang Rui was just throwing out 200,000 yuan; he might get ripped off by Li Yunshan.

As the saying goes, "Fellow countrymen, backstabbing." Among the tourists visiting Myanmar, Chinese people make up the largest group. As for whether Li Yunshan would treat Chinese people differently, Yang Hao certainly didn't believe it. Businessmen are profit-driven and will rip off their own people.

"It's worth it, of course it's worth it. Such a large and complete ivory carving is rare even in China. The price of ivory carvings has risen sharply in recent years, and it might even double in value if I take it back..."

Zhuang Rui didn't dare to say too much. If he said that this thing, after being verified to be of its age and heritage, could be worth seven or eight million, it would definitely scare Yang Hao. Zhuang Rui had a feeling that such a large object would definitely be recorded in some domestic materials.

"Hey, Brother Zhuang, your eye for talent is truly amazing. Making money here is just too easy..."

Yang Hao stuck out his tongue and said enviously, "Although I haven't known Zhuang Rui for long and we've only met three times, every time we meet, Zhuang Rui's net worth seems to skyrocket."

As the two were chatting, Li Yunshan hurriedly ran back, carrying a rectangular bamboo box that looked just the right size to hold the ivory Buddha statue. This was a bamboo box, a specialty of Myanmar, and it cost thirty or forty US dollars. Li Yunshan bought it as a gift for Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui, with Li Yunshan's help, carefully placed the ivory Buddha statue horizontally into the bamboo box. They then stuffed the box with sponges and waste newspapers. The bamboo box itself was flexible, so even if there were any collisions, the contents would not be damaged.

"Young man, please take this..." After packing up, Li Yunshan pushed the box to Zhuang Rui and handed him the invoice he had just issued. It was in Burmese, which Zhuang Rui couldn't understand. After taking the invoice, he handed it to Peng Fei.

Peng Fei glanced at the invoice, nodded, handed the eighteen thousand US dollars he had just counted to Li Yunshan, and picked up the bamboo box from the ground. The box had handles and was very convenient to carry.

...

With this large suitcase in hand, there was no way to continue exploring. Fortunately, they had already finished visiting the Shwedagon Pagoda, so Zhuang Rui, Yang Hao, and Peng Fei took a taxi back to the hotel.

The Myanmar New Year jade auction is scheduled to open on January 1st, and most domestic and foreign merchants arrived in Yangon today. After entering the hotel, Zhuang Rui saw many familiar faces. The jade gambling circle is only so big, and there are only a few well-known jewelry companies. It's hard not to run into them.

After greeting the wool merchants from China, Zhuang Rui rushed into the elevator. He felt like a giant panda, with everyone wanting to touch him. Just now, even a plump woman reeking of perfume tried to give him a hug, which terrified Zhuang Rui.

"Peng Fei, you're really not being a good guy. The boss is surrounded, and you didn't even offer to come and help..."

After saying goodbye to Yang Hao and returning to his hotel room, Zhuang Rui looked at Peng Fei with dissatisfaction and said, "This guy ran away very fast with a suitcase just now, but at least he knew to wait for me at the elevator door."

"Hehe, boss, based on my analysis, that woman definitely meant you no harm..."

Perhaps because his younger sister had been settled, Peng Fei had been talking more these past few days. He would occasionally joke with Zhuang Rui. He respected Zhuang Rui from the bottom of his heart, but on the surface, he didn't call him "boss" all the time like Hao Long did. This was also an attitude that Peng Fei showed after acknowledging someone.

"Alright, enough talk, just take out this ivory carving. I'm going to take a shower first..."

Zhuang Rui was eager to uncover the secrets of the ivory carving, but after his trip, he felt sticky and uncomfortable, so he went to the bathroom for a shower.

When Zhuang Rui came out, the ivory Buddha statue had already been placed on the living room table, and Peng Fei was examining it carefully.

"You little rascal, you've been running for ages and you haven't even broken a sweat..."

Zhuang Rui glanced at Peng Fei with envy. The first time he met him was when the temperature was several degrees below zero. The kid was dressed so thinly but didn't seem cold. Now, in this sweltering heat, he didn't seem to be sweating at all.

"Brother Zhuang, is this thing really worth hundreds of thousands?"

Peng Fei had circled the ivory carving several times, but it was just a little unusual in design. He couldn't understand why something that couldn't be eaten or drunk was so valuable.

"Hundreds of thousands? Ha, Peng Fei, you should add a zero after that..."

Zhuang Rui laughed smugly. As the saying goes, gold is valued in times of chaos and antiques in times of prosperity. In times of war and turmoil, these things are worthless and even cumbersome to carry. But in the present day, they are priceless treasures. In short, Zhuang Rui will not sell this thing.

"Several...millions?"

Peng Fei's lips twitched, staring at the Buddha sculpture in disbelief. He now understood where Zhuang Rui's money came from; it was even more lucrative than drug trafficking, and without any risk. At this moment, even Peng Fei was wondering if he should learn about antiques, since he couldn't stay in security forever.

"Well, but I'm not selling this. You probably can't find more than a few in China..."

Zhuang Rui had now focused his attention on the ivory carving. He was thinking about how to open the repaired "door" again and take out the wax ball inside. Of course, Zhuang Rui didn't want to damage the Buddha carving; otherwise, he would have just thrown it on the ground to make a sound and taken out the object.

"Brother Zhuang, I heard you went out and got something good? You didn't even tell me to invite your brother to come along..."

As Zhuang Rui was engrossed in looking at the ivory carving, he suddenly heard Song Jun's voice. Looking up, he discovered that Song Jun and Fatty Ma had entered the room at some point. Zhuang Rui hadn't heard the doorbell ring or Peng Fei opening the door at all.

"One of you is afraid of the heat, and the other is afraid of walking. I can't get either of you to move..."  
Zhuang Rui smiled wryly, but he didn't mention that he was worried about safety at the time.

"What a find! It's truly amazing! Such a large ivory carving is incredibly rare. And judging from the shape and the quality of the ivory, it must be from the Ming or Qing dynasty. Brother Zhuang, you've really struck gold! How come you always seem to stumble upon such treasures..."

Song Jun held a magnifying glass and examined the ivory carving for a long time. Then he looked Zhuang Rui up and down. His little brother was simply amazing. He could find good things wherever he went. This ivory carving was clearly an old item from China, but he managed to find it in Myanmar.

Zhuang Rui was both amused and exasperated by Song Jun's words, and replied irritably, "That's because you're lazy. Even if it were you, let alone me, you would definitely buy it if you saw it. If you had gone to see the Shwedagon Pagoda first, maybe I wouldn't have had a chance to see this thing..."

"It's all about timing and fate. What's meant to be yours can't be taken away by anyone. But Brother Zhuang, how about you transfer this to me? The old man will definitely like it..."

Song Jun's eyes lit up, and he wanted Zhuang Rui to sell the item to him. Seven or eight million was nothing to Song Jun. Some time ago, due to the old man's poor health, the Song family's business underwent some adjustments, and many investments were recovered. Now, Song Jun had at least several hundred million in spare cash.

"Brother Song, don't even think about it. My courtyard house is still missing these things. By the way, Grandpa Song likes calligraphy and painting, which has nothing to do with this. Don't try to use this as an excuse..."

Zhuang Rui refused Song Jun without hesitation. He now regretted selling the manuscript and Tang Bohu's "Li Duanduan Picture" to Song Jun. Zhuang Rui now realized how difficult it was to find those items again. The antique markets in China were full of fakes.

"You little rascal, fine, but you absolutely have to find that jade you promised me..."

"When did I agree to that? You're being unreasonable..." Zhuang Rui was somewhat helpless. This Song Jun was over forty years old, and his child was probably in high school. He was practically a princeling, and when he started acting like a rogue, even Zhuang Rui couldn't handle it.

"Alright, if I happen to run into one, I'll definitely save it for you, okay?"

Zhuang Rui spoke kindly as he saw the two out of the room. He had no time to argue with Song Jun; the mysterious wax pellet in the ivory carving was making him quite eager to explore it.

"Boss, this spot doesn't look like it was touched, otherwise it wouldn't be so neatly shaped, right?"

Seeing Zhuang Rui intently examining the armpit area of the ivory carving, Peng Fei also leaned over to take a look. He had a sharp eye, and although the repair marks were very faint, Peng Fei could still tell that the shape didn't seem to have been caused by a bump or knock.

"Hmm? You noticed it too? This doesn't look like a crack caused by a fall; it looks more like it was dug out, like a small door deliberately made. In ancient times, people often liked to hide treasures inside the bellies of Buddha statues. Do you think there might be something inside here too?"

Zhuang Rui glanced at Peng Fei and deliberately tried to guide him with words. Zhuang Rui did not want to hide the contents from Peng Fei, so he needed a suitable reason.

Chapter 440 There's more to it than meets the eye

"Brother Zhuang, you're joking, right..."

Peng Fei didn't quite believe it. Why would someone hide a treasure inside a Buddha statue? ㄨ "A joke? I'm telling the truth..."

Zhuang Rui's claim that ancient people often hid treasures inside the bellies of enshrined Buddha statues is not unfounded; there are historical anecdotes to support this.

During the Han Dynasty, Buddhism was introduced to China from India. During the Northern and Southern Dynasties, Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties, Buddhism reached its peak of development. The level of Buddhist studies in China surpassed that of India, and China replaced India as the center of Buddhism in the world. At that time, Buddhists had a very high status. Almost all temples owned large amounts of land and were exempt from taxes.

During that period, although there were many eminent monks like Xuanzang and Jianzhen, there were far more scoundrels in the Buddhist community. They bullied men and women, and forcibly seized houses and farmland. However, since the emperor was a Buddhist, local officials mostly turned a blind eye and did not bother to investigate.

After amassing a large amount of gold and silver jewelry, those monks, in order to hide it, used the guise of casting Buddha statues to produce and cast many large bronze Buddha statues. They appeared to be solid Buddha statues, but in fact, they concealed a secret: the Buddha statues' bellies were all hollow, hiding the enormous wealth that the monks had plundered inside.

Ironically, the three most famous anti-Buddhist movements in Chinese history occurred precisely during the Northern and Southern Dynasties and the reign of Emperor Wuzong of Tang. Especially during the reign of Emperor Wuzong of Tang, almost all temples in the country were destroyed, and millions of monks and nuns were forced to return to secular life, which nearly led to the extinction of Buddhism in China.

The official explanation for this is that it stems from the inherent political characteristic of Chinese society, where "divine authority is absolutely subordinate to royal authority." The emperor felt that his authority was being challenged by that ethereal divine authority, so he sought to suppress Buddhism.

However, later researchers believe that the root cause of the persecution of Buddhism was economic. During the reign of Empress Wu Zetian, Di Renjie once submitted a memorial stating: "The temples and monasteries are rich in resources, and the amount of money they extract is enormous. The number of water mills and estates is also considerable. Many monks flee from the land to avoid punishment, gathering at Buddhist temples. There are tens of thousands of nameless monks. The capital has already seized several thousand. Even if no one cultivates the land, they still suffer from this. Many are living off the land and robbing people of their wealth..."

The passage above means that temples are wealthy, own fertile land, and that becoming a monk allows one to escape legal punishment. There are tens of thousands of monks without official status throughout the country who do not farm and live a life of ease, having food and clothing provided to them.

When the country was wealthy, it didn't matter if these monks were a little rich. But when the emperor had to tighten his belt to make ends meet, it was a sin for the monks to still be so rich. So, during the reign of Emperor Wuzong of Tang, the third anti-Buddhist movement in Chinese history was launched.

At that time, countless treasures were cleared from the temple, and when the gold and bronze Buddha statues were melted down, it was discovered that a large amount of gold and silver jewelry was hidden inside the Buddha statues. In Mr. Cha Liangyong's book "Liancheng Jue" in Hong Kong, the so-called treasure was hidden inside the Buddha statues.

"Brother Zhuang, are you telling the truth? But there probably isn't any treasure hidden inside this Buddha statue..."

Peng Fei listened with great interest to Zhuang Rui's story, but when he gestured to the repaired area, he didn't believe there was anything hidden inside.

"Who knows if it's there or not? We'll only know if we take out the piece of ivory that was used to fill it in..."

Zhuang Rui continued following Peng Fei's words, but it was not easy to remove the contents of the Buddha sculpture without damaging it, because the silicone used for the repair had completely fused with the ivory, making it very difficult to pry it out.

Seeing Zhuang Rui's worried expression, Peng Fei couldn't help but laugh and said, "Brother Zhuang, do you really want to take out this repaired ivory?"

"Of course, think about it, who would bother to cut a hole in a perfectly good Buddha sculpture? Maybe there's something valuable inside. It's not a loss for us to pry it out and take a look. I'll have someone repair it, and the workmanship will definitely be better than this..."

Zhuang Rui was telling the truth. Repairing this thing with silicone would indeed ruin this ivory Buddha statue. There are many modern materials that can restore it so that no one can tell that it has ever been repaired.

"Brother Zhuang, wait for me a moment, I'll be right back..."

Peng Fei gestured to the area to be repaired, said something to Zhuang Rui, and then left the room.

"This kid..."

Zhuang Rui shook his head, looking at the thing with some distress. Before, when the thing wasn't his, he wasn't in a particular hurry, but now that the thing was in front of him, he couldn't take the contents

out. It felt to Zhuang Rui like Qin Xuanbing had taken off her clothes, but his thing was impotent, and he was completely helpless.

"Boss, I'm back..."

About twenty minutes later, while Zhuang Rui was still frowning, Peng Fei walked into the room. Zhuang Rui's eyes lit up when he saw that Peng Fei was holding an alcohol stove in his right hand.

"Peng Fei, are you planning to heat the needle until it's red-hot and melt away the silicone filling? But we don't even know how deep the ivory has been removed..."

Zhuang Rui initially thought it was a good idea, but upon further reflection, he realized that the ivory piece used for filling was six or seven centimeters long, which ordinary needles could not penetrate. Long needles were too thick to insert, so this method was not advisable.

"Is this long enough?"

Peng Fei raised his left hand, and Zhuang Rui then noticed that Peng Fei was holding an extremely thin steel wire, about twenty or thirty centimeters long, between two fingers on his left hand. Zhuang Rui flicked the wire and found that it was very tough. He was overjoyed, as all the problems were now solved.

Zhuang Rui got up and walked to the door, flipped the sign outside to "Do Not Disturb," then went back inside, gave Peng Fei a thumbs-up, and said, "Good lad, if there's any treasure inside, you get a share..."

Zhuang Rui took out a lighter from his pocket and lit the alcohol stove, while Peng Fei placed one end of the thin steel wire on the flame to heat it. Since the wire itself conducts heat, within ten seconds, a section of the wire was still glowing red.

Zhuang Rui glanced at the wire in Peng Fei's hand and reminded him, "It's probably not long enough. Heat it a little more until it's red-hot..."

Peng Fei began to move the steel wire in his hand across the flames. Before long, the tip of the wire, about three to five centimeters long, was red-hot.

"Give me....."

Zhuang Rui placed the ivory carving horizontally on the ground, took the steel wire from Peng Fei, and inserted it into the silicone gap at the repair site. The red-hot steel wire melted the silicone inside as easily as cutting tofu with a knife, requiring no force at all.

A foul smell of burning rubber wafted out, and a wisp of smoke rose from where Zhuang Rui had started. He slid the wire along the gap to one side, and when he realized it felt rough and wasn't getting hot enough, he quickly pulled the wire out. At this point, the wire was covered with a layer of gelatinous substance.

"Keep burning..."

Zhuang Rui handed the wire to Peng Fei, then stood up and opened the hotel room window, ignoring the fact that the air conditioning was still on and the smell of burning rubber was unbearable.

The steel wire conducts heat quickly, but it also dissipates heat extremely quickly. Basically, once it's heated to red-hot, it can only melt a silicone layer two or three centimeters wide. It took Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei more than two hours to completely melt the silicone that was fused with the ivory.

"Aunt Fang? Lunch? I'm so sorry, Aunt Fang, I have something urgent to attend to and can't leave right now. Would you mind coming over later?"

Just as he finished applying the silicone to the ivory carving, Fang Yi called. However, Zhuang Rui couldn't care less about his mother-in-law's thoughts at the moment. He was already excited about getting the two wax pellets in his hands soon.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui say that something urgent had happened, Fang Yi hung up the phone without saying anything. She turned around and immediately used her woman's imagination to say to her husband, "This child, could he be doing something bad behind Xuanbing's back?"

If Zhuang Rui knew what Fang Yi was thinking at this moment, he would definitely feel more wronged than Dou E. Therefore, it is best not to refuse a woman's invitation, whether she is a young woman or a menopausal woman.

"Everyone has their problems sometimes. Xiao Zhuang isn't that kind of kid. Don't overthink it..." Qin Haoran gave his wife a disapproving look. If Zhuang Rui heard this, it would cause a conflict.

...

Zhuang Rui was no longer concerned about what his mother-in-law was thinking, because Peng Fei was using his small, wolf-tooth-like knife to pry open the piece of ivory that had been stuffed in as filler.

The blade of the knife was extremely thin, allowing it to penetrate to a depth of about one centimeter. As Peng Fei flicked his wrist, the ivory tusk gradually protruded upwards. Finally, with a clear "snap" sound, the small ivory tusk was removed, revealing a circular hole about three or four centimeters square under the armpit of the ivory carving.

"Brother Zhuang, there's nothing in here?"

Naturally, he couldn't put his hand in. Peng Fei picked up the ivory carving upside down and shook the small hole downwards, but nothing came out.

Zhuang Rui didn't answer. Instead, he took the charred steel wire, went to the bathroom to wash it, dried it, and twisted one end into a hook shape. Then he said to Peng Fei, "Raise it up a bit, with the opening facing down. I'll use this to try and pry it out..."

Zhuang Rui naturally knew whether there was anything inside, and he also knew that the reason why Peng Fei hadn't poured out the wax pill was because some silicone had dripped onto the wax pill when the silicone was being dissolved. Although it didn't melt the wax pill, it stuck to the inside of the abdominal wall.