

Golden 541

Chapter 541 Ruixuanzhai

"4.5 million RMB? Mr. Zhuang, didn't we agree on 600,000 RMB per year? Over 7 years it should be 4.2 million RMB. This extra 300,000 RMB is..."

Zhao Hanxuan picked up a contract from the table and first looked at the amount. He was immediately stunned; he didn't understand why the figure on the contract was 300,000 yuan more than what had been agreed upon.

As the saying goes, one should not accept a reward without merit, and there is no such thing as a free lunch. Zhao Hanxuan had just suffered a big setback a while ago because he wanted to take advantage of others, and now he was quite frightened.

"Old Zhao, take a look at the other contract first, then we can talk..."

Zhuang Rui smiled and waved his hand. Seeing his niece curiously looking at the shop, he bent down, picked her up, and walked to a square table that was waist-high.

Shops selling stationery must have writing desks, which is also a place to showcase China's unique traditional culture. Many foreign tourists who come to China often buy Xuan paper, brushes, and inkstones after seeing the magical calligraphy.

Shuyazhai is no exception, with a table in the middle of the shop for customers to try out their brushes.

"Darling, shall your uncle write you a piece of calligraphy?"

Zhuang Rui spread out a three-foot square sheet of Xuan paper, picked out a wolf-hair brush from the brush holder, held it in his hand, rotated his wrist to test it, and felt it was pretty good.

Zhuang Rui had studied calligraphy since elementary school, but it was just a hobby and not something he could be proud of. Later, after studying antique appraisal, he gained a deeper understanding of

calligraphy. He believed that although his writing was not very good, it should not be out of shape, so he dared to make a fool of himself in front of everyone.

"Uncle, what are you going to write?" The little girl reached for Zhuang Rui's calligraphy brush, but Zhuang Rui quickly handed her to his brother-in-law; it wouldn't look good to have her face covered in smears during the New Year.

Someone was going to demonstrate calligraphy on the spot, and the customers in the shop all gathered around. This was a great opportunity to observe. Little did they know that Zhuang Rui was just doing it spontaneously and was not a member of the calligraphy world at all.

"good!"

"Well written!"

After thinking for a moment, Zhuang Rui wrote down the words "May the New Year bring abundant joy and may the festive season last forever".

Although the distribution and connection of the characters are slightly lacking, the strength of the brushstrokes is quite impressive, even to laymen. A chorus of praise rang out from the audience.

"I'm making a fool of myself..."

Zhuang Rui bowed repeatedly to those around him. He was still self-aware enough to know that if his handwriting were placed in the eyes of an expert, it would be no different from that of a primary school student who had just learned to write with a pen. It was full of flaws and was just something he wrote for fun during the New Year.

"Boss Zhuang's couplet has a hidden meaning..."

It took Zhuang Rui more than ten minutes to come up with these words after thinking about them. Zhao Hanxuan had already finished reading the contract and came over to join in the fun. However, he said

that the couplet was good, but he didn't say that Zhuang Rui's writing was good. Those who understood this laughed good-naturedly.

The couplet written by Zhuang Rui, "May the New Year bring abundant joy and may the festive season last forever," is indeed very meaningful.

According to the "History of the Song Dynasty: The Shu Family", Meng Chang, the ruler of Later Shu at the time, ordered the scholar Zhang Xun to write this couplet on a wooden board made of peach wood. This is the first Spring Festival couplet in China. Because it was originally written on peach wood, the Spring Festival couplet was still called "peach charm" until the Song Dynasty.

Most Chinese people who browse shops selling the Four Treasures of the Study (writing brush, ink stick, inkstone, and paper) are cultured individuals who appreciate calligraphy. Some who knew the story behind it explained it to others. Don't underestimate this simple couplet; writing it requires a deep understanding of classical Chinese.

Zhuang Rui's suggestion sparked a flurry of responses from some self-important individuals, who also requested to write a few words. Since the New Year is all about having fun, no one cared about writing a few words. Zhao Hanxuan found a helper to arrange it for everyone.

"Mr. Zhuang, may we speak privately for a moment?"

There are currently twenty or thirty people in Zhao Hanxuan's shop outside. With someone wanting to do calligraphy on the spot, and a group of onlookers crowding in, it's quite noisy and not a place for conversation.

"Okay..." Zhuang Rui nodded, and the two entered the inner cubicle.

"Old Zhao, you've read the contract. What do you think? Should you sign it or not?"

After today, Zhuang Rui will be busy and won't have time to beat around the bush with Lao Zhao, so he went straight to the point.

"Boss Zhuang, I'm the one who got the better deal. No problem, I've signed it, and you can rest assured that I'll manage the shop. It'll be a sure thing..."

When Zhao Hanxuan faced Zhuang Rui, he felt not only admiration but also a sense of awe. He knew that if it were him, he would not have offered such a contract, even if he didn't kick him while he was down.

The extra 300,000 yuan in Zhuang Rui's contract was clearly stated to be a prepayment of 10 months' salary to Lao Zhao. Zhao Hanxuan didn't feel grateful to Zhuang Rui for this, but a later clause did tempt him, and he greatly admired Zhuang Rui's boldness.

Zhuang Rui gave Lao Zhao two contracts. One was the transfer contract for "Shuyazhai", which was very simple and only contained some transfer clauses. However, the other employment contract had several special features.

In this contract, Zhuang Rui included a clause stating that once the inventory of the goods in Shuyazhai was cleared, Zhao Hanxuan would receive 20% of the gross profit from the sale of the newly acquired stationery. In other words, Zhuang Rui was giving Zhao Hanxuan more than 20% of the stationery without him having to invest any capital.

Some people may feel that 20% is not much, but that's wrong. What's written above is the gross profit, which is the profit after deducting the main operating costs from the total sales. To be more specific, it only deducts the purchase price of the goods.

This doesn't include expenses like utilities, rent, depreciation, and employee salaries. Zhao Hanxuan, having been in business for so many years, knew that if he calculated it carefully, Zhuang Rui might end up earning less from stationery than he did.

Old Zhao knows the business situation of "Shuyazhai" best. The inventory can be sold in six months at most. In that case, after six months, Zhao Hanxuan will be running his own business without having to bear any risk. If he does well, he may earn no less money than before.

Zhao Hanxuan also realized that Zhuang Rui planned to focus on antiques and jewelry, but his shop was big enough that setting aside such a section would not affect the sales of stationery.

Zhuang Rui offered these conditions, so he wasn't worried that Zhao Hanxuan wouldn't work his butt off. That was what he admired most about Zhuang Rui: if you want a horse to run, you have to feed it first.

To be honest, Zhao Hanxuan was still somewhat dissatisfied before. He was selling the shop instead of selling himself, but Zhuang Rui had linked the two things together, taking advantage of his urgent need for money to tie him to this year.

When Lao Zhao called Zhuang Rui, he agreed verbally, but he wasn't very happy inside. However, after seeing the contract, his dissatisfaction vanished.

"Old Zhao, you don't need to thank me. I know absolutely nothing about the business of stationery items. Even if you train two apprentices for me in the future, I'm afraid I'll still be clueless about the business. You've been in this business for so many years, so handing it over to you will make money for everyone. Why not?"

Zhuang Rui made this contract after a long period of consideration. Although he had two candidates in mind to take over Lao Zhao's job, upon closer examination, he realized that even if those two studied for two years, they might not be able to graduate. In that case, he would definitely not be able to continue working in the field of calligraphy and painting.

The shop is large enough that Zhuang Rui only needs a small space to run his antique and jade business, so he wants to continue his stationery business. This means that Lao Zhao will need to continue working here for another year.

Zhuang Rui knew that people who had been bosses before would find it difficult to work for others again, because many people couldn't psychologically accept this change. They would rather start over from scratch with a small business than listen to someone else's sales pitch.

Especially for someone like Lao Zhao, who comes from a cultural circle, is rather aloof and values face highly. If there isn't a contract that satisfies the other party, Lao Zhao will definitely leave the store after the one-year agreement.

If that were the case, Zhuang Rui would not be able to continue running his stationery business a year later. So, while it might seem like Zhuang Rui was at a disadvantage by offering Lao Zhao this condition,

he was actually actually getting a good deal. After all, he didn't expect to make a lot of money from the stationery business, so having an additional source of profit was like getting something for free.

"Old Zhao, I'm leaving Beijing tomorrow. I'll trouble you to handle the paperwork and other formalities. Also, find a few workers to do some minor renovations on the exterior, like making some high-end glass display cases. We'll talk about the rest when I get back..."

After giving Lao Zhao a few instructions, Zhuang Rui suddenly remembered something and quickly said, "By the way, we need to change the name of this shop. Let's call it Ruixuanzhai..." Zhuang Rui took out paper and pen and wrote the name down for Zhao Hanxuan to see.

Although Zhuang Rui also wanted to name it something like "Rongbaozhai," it was a century-old brand with a registered trademark. So, as a second choice, he simply combined one character from his own name and one character from Qin Xuanbing's name to create the shop's name.

"Okay, tomorrow is the fourth day of the Lunar New Year, everyone should be back to work soon, I'll go and take care of these paperwork tomorrow..."

Zhao Hanxuan nodded and agreed. The conditions Zhuang Rui offered him were already very generous, and changing the store name was not something he couldn't accept.

Chapter 542 Seeking a Calligraphy (Part 1)

After Zhao Hanxuan signed and affixed his fingerprint to both contracts, Zhuang Rui handed him a cash check for 4.5 million yuan. From that moment on, the shop was considered Zhuang Rui's property.

Zhao Hanxuan also handed Zhuang Rui a list of all the goods in the store. He had compiled it in great detail. The list included not only the purchase price but also the retail price, including several valuable antique inkstones, all of which were clearly listed, making it easy to understand at a glance.

Zhuang Rui's expertise is in finance. Looking at these lists, he was quite satisfied with Zhao Hanxuan's competence and character. Zhao Hanxuan had initially said that the goods in his store were worth around 1 million yuan, but now, looking at the lists, the total price was 1.18 million yuan, which was slightly higher than what he had said.

After finishing his business, Zhuang Rui put away his two contracts and was about to leave when Zhao Hanxuan stopped him: "Boss Zhuang, could you please arrange for another accountant to come over..."

"Finance? I work in finance myself, so I don't need that, right?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment. This tiny shop didn't need an accountant. He could manage all the accounts by himself.

"Boss Zhuang, it's really necessary to hire an accountant and a cashier. I used to be quite unprofessional in many things, and it wouldn't be good if the accounts got messy..."

Previously, it was his own private shop, and Zhao Hanxuan controlled all the money. The expenses were quite chaotic, and he would use the shop's money for any expense without thinking. Zhao Hanxuan was afraid that he would get used to spending the shop's money and accidentally treat it as his own.

Zhuang Rui thought it made sense. Even close brothers keep clear accounts. Although he trusted his employees, it was better to be open about some things. So he asked, "Old Zhao, how's the security in Panjiayuan? Have there been any thefts or robberies?"

Old Zhao was a little puzzled. How did the conversation turn to finances and then to public security? But he still replied, "Panjiayuan is now a window for Beijing to promote Chinese culture. The public security is very good. Robberies are absolutely nonexistent. However, pickpockets are another story. Sometimes when there are many tourists, wallets are stolen..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand and said, "I'm referring to whether there have been any thefts or robberies in the shops, or if anyone has pried open the doors or locked the doors after closing time..."

"No, Panjiayuan always has security guards and police patrolling there. I've never heard of anything like this..." Zhao Hanxuan shook his head.

"Okay, let's do this: we'll buy a good safe and put it on the second floor. I'll arrange for a cashier to come once a day and put the daily revenue into the safe. If there's any need for expenditure, you can just call the finance department and ask the cashier to come..."

Zhuang Rui didn't plan to hire any more financial staff. He intended to have the accountant and cashier from Qin Ruilin Jewelry Store handle the work here. Since neither store was particularly busy, the cashier only needed to make one trip a day. If there were large transactions, the cashier could deposit the money into the bank.

Of course, since they are doing two jobs, their salaries should be increased appropriately.

"Okay, that's for the best. Sometimes, for small expenses, we won't have to go through the hassle of going to the bank..."

Zhao Hanxuan nodded in agreement with Zhuang Rui's idea. When he raised this issue, he was also a little worried about the inconvenience, but having a safe in the store would solve the problem of some small expenses.

There used to be a safe in the shop, containing several antique inkstones. But after the incident, Zhao Hanxuan took the safe home, fearing that it might be taken by creditors, whose value would be impossible to calculate.

"Fourth Brother, please take my sister and the others home later. I still have some things to take care of..."

After leaving the cubicle with Zhao Hanxuan, Zhuang Rui stopped Ouyang Jun. Just as he was mentioning the shop's name to Zhao Hanxuan, Zhuang Rui suddenly remembered something: he should probably get a signboard written for his storefront.

After leaving "Shuyazhai" alone, Zhuang Rui squeezed into the crowd. He remembered that on the way here, there was a Daoxiangcun store set up in the temple fair. This year's Beijing New Year Temple Fair brought together the storefronts of all the century-old shops to showcase China's traditional culture and snacks to guests from all over the world.

Daoxiangcun was originally called "Lianjiapu". It makes all kinds of southern-style pastries and meat dishes, which are not only beautiful and delicious, but also rich in oil and sugar, and can be stored for several days without drying out. It is very popular in Beijing with its dry climate.

Back then, Daoxiangcun's winter melon cakes, Suzhou pepper salt cakes, and lard-filled steamed cakes made their debut in Beijing, allowing Beijingers, who were used to eating northern "big buns," to enjoy exquisite and authentic southern delicacies.

This Southern-style mixed food shop quickly became a hit, spreading like wildfire throughout the streets and alleys, attracting a constant stream of customers, from celebrities and officials to ordinary people.

Today, Daoxiangcun has grown into a large enterprise with annual sales of 700 million RMB. Zhuang Rui squeezed in front of Daoxiangcun and bought four boxes each of almond shortbread and ham cake. He carried them in his hand. These things are famous and really not cheap. Eight boxes of pastries cost several hundred RMB.

After Zhuang Rui got into the car with the snacks, he drove straight to Jin Pangzi's house. He didn't need to call to know that Jin Pangzi would definitely be staying at home today, since it was the third day of the Lunar New Year.

According to Chinese tradition, the third day of the Lunar New Year is also known as the Red Dog Day, which is considered an unlucky day. The Red Dog is a god of wrath, and encountering it is believed to bring misfortune. Therefore, traditionally, older generations of Beijingers would stay at home on this day to avoid encountering evil spirits.

This wasn't a good time to visit, but Zhuang Rui was leaving Beijing the day after tomorrow, so he didn't care about that now. After driving into the neighborhood where Fatty Jin lived, he took out his phone and dialed the number.

Don't let Jin Pangzi's claim of being involved in traditional culture fool you; his place of residence is anything but traditional. It's a rather upscale neighborhood in Beijing, and in a great location. Even back in 2005, you couldn't buy it for less than three to five million yuan.

Sure enough, Fatty Jin was indeed at home, and Zhuang Rui took the snacks and went into the elevator.

"Happy New Year, Teacher Jin!"

As soon as Zhuang Rui entered the room, he placed the snacks by the door and clasped his hands in a respectful gesture.

Fatty Jin said with a big smile, "Hey, bro, why be so polite now that we're home? Call me Fatty Jin or 'brother' if you want, no need for all this 'teacher' stuff..."

The old traditions of Red Dog Day must be observed, but visiting in person is perfectly acceptable. Fatty Jin is a shrewd person, and besides, he knows a lot about Zhuang Rui's background. For him to personally come to wish me a Happy New Year is something I probably don't have the face for. He must have something else on his mind.

"Yanzi, come out my tea set, we have a distinguished guest..." As Fatty Jin shouted, the door to the inner room was opened.

A young girl with a ponytail and wearing a tight sweater walked out of the room. The girl had a baby face, which was somewhat similar to Fatty Jin's round face. She looked to be no more than twenty years old. Zhuang Rui thought she was Fatty Jin's daughter.

"Luckily, I brought a pearl pendant with me today. Otherwise, if I were to be on equal footing with Fatty Jin and had no gift to give to a junior like him, that would be quite embarrassing..."

When Zhuang Rui went out today, he remembered what happened to Meng Yatou that day, so he took a pearl pendant from the basement and put it in his pocket.

This pearl pendant is set in silver. The pearl is large and round, and the craftsmanship is exquisite. Although it is not as valuable as a black pearl, it is quite old and can be considered an antique. It could be worth ten or twenty thousand yuan. I immediately thought of taking it out and giving it to this girl named Yanzi.

"Yanzi, come here, let me introduce you. This is Zhuang Rui. Let's keep to ourselves, you can call him Brother Zhuang. Little brother, if this were in ancient times, you'd have to call her sister-in-law..."

"Brother Zhuang, hello, welcome to my home..." the girl greeted Zhuang Rui obediently.

Jin Pangzi's words almost made Zhuang Rui, who was sitting on the sofa, stumble and fall. Luckily, Jin Pangzi said it first, otherwise the misunderstanding would have been huge when he delivered the gift.

To be honest, this girl is quite pleasing to the eye. Not only does she have a good figure, but her round face is also quite cute. However, no matter how Zhuang Rui looks at her, he feels that this girl named Yanzi and Fatty Jin look more like father and daughter than lovers.

"Uh, well, Yanzi, your brother Zhuang came today without bringing anything. Take this and wear it..."
Zhuang Rui pulled out the pearl pendant from his pocket.

"Wow, bro, you're really generous! This is some old stuff. Well, Yanzi, thank you, Brother Zhuang, this gift is quite substantial..."

The chain of this pendant was made of old silver, and its color was easily distinguishable from modern silver. Fatty Jin recognized it at a glance, examined it carefully in his hand, and then handed the pendant to Yanzi.

"Thank you, Brother Zhuang..."

Although Yanzi didn't know how much the thing was worth, she knew what Jin Pangzi was doing. She gave Zhuang Rui a sweet smile, which made Zhuang Rui very jealous. This Jin Pangzi was really an old cow eating young grass.

"Brother, you must have something to say since you've come all this way, right? Just say what you need to say, and I'll definitely get it done for you if I can..."

After exchanging a few polite words with Zhuang Rui, Fatty Jin got straight to the point, knowing he didn't have the face to ask Zhuang Rui to come and pay a New Year's visit.

Zhuang Rui smiled and said, "Brother Jin, there really is something going on. I've taken over that shop in Panjiayuan that we were talking about a while ago, but I'd like to change the name..."

"Hehe, I know, brother, you want to ask the teacher for a piece of calligraphy, right?" Fatty Jin laughed upon hearing this.

Chapter 543 Seeking a Calligraphy (Part 2)

"Hey, Brother Jin, you're right. I really did come here this time to ask the master to write a name for a plaque..."

Talking to someone as sharp-eyed and witty as Fatty Jin is so satisfying. Before Zhuang Rui could even finish a sentence, Fatty Jin already knew why he'd come.

The reason Zhuang Rui sought help from Fatty Jin was that among the living masters of calligraphy and painting, Fatty Jin's teacher was the only person Zhuang Rui could admire.

The old man was a few years older than Zhuang Rui's maternal grandfather. He came from a noble family, but his life was full of hardships. There were many titles that could be applied to him, such as famous educator, classical literature scholar, calligrapher and painter, cultural relic appraiser, scholar of "Dream of the Red Chamber", poet, and master of Chinese studies. They were almost too numerous to count.

The elderly man lost his father at a young age and his family fell into poverty. After dropping out of Beijing Huiwen Middle School, he devoted himself to self-study and studied calligraphy, painting and classical literature with many famous masters. Qi Baishi, a famous painter in modern times, was once his teacher.

The master's family background was extremely illustrious. He was the eighth-generation descendant of Prince Hongzhou, the fifth son of Emperor Yongzheng of the Qing Dynasty. His ancestor, Prince Hongzhou, was a famously eccentric prince in history. He liked to hold funerals and eat sacrificial offerings. However, some historians pointed out that he actually used his "eccentricity" as a pretext to avoid getting involved in the struggle for the throne between Hongshi and Emperor Qianlong.

The old man rarely mentioned his family background. He never mentioned or liked others to say that his surname was Aisin Gioro. In his ID card, household registration book and all official documents, there was never any mention of Aisin Gioro.

There was once a very interesting story. Many people wrote to the master, and they would add the surname Aisin Gioro before their names on the envelopes. The old man was so annoyed that he simply wrote "No such person found, please return" by hand. Unexpectedly, after the letters were returned, the envelopes were kept and collected by many people, which is quite a wonderful anecdote.

Zhuang Rui had recently read the master's oral biography and, while learning calligraphy and painting appraisal from Uncle De, had repeatedly heard Uncle De mention the master's character and scholarship. Therefore, he wanted to acquire a piece of the master's calligraphy to decorate his antique shop.

Zhuang Rui once read in the master's autobiography that after the old man became famous, he would gladly comply with the requests of those who sought his calligraphy, regardless of their social status, and could not bear to refuse them.

In the places where the master once worked, from the principal to ordinary workers, especially the ordinary workers, almost everyone had a piece of his calligraphy. Sometimes the master would even write something and deliver it to them. The old man once joked, "The only place I haven't written anything is in the toilet..."

Although the master rarely refuses to write calligraphy for people, he couldn't just go to him on his own, so Zhuang Rui thought of Fatty Jin and asked him to make an introduction.

"Brother, it's not that I'm not giving you face, this matter..."

After explaining Zhuang Rui's purpose, Fatty Jin looked troubled, which puzzled Zhuang Rui. To be honest, because the master was always willing to grant requests, his calligraphy was widely circulated in the antique and calligraphy market and was not very expensive. Ordinary people could easily obtain it. Could it be that Fatty Jin, his closed-door disciple, couldn't even get a single piece of his master's calligraphy?

"Brother Jin, are you perhaps asking for payment? No problem, just tell me how much you need..."

The "runbi" mentioned by Zhuang Rui refers to the fee for writing articles for others, which is a practice that has been recorded since the Jin and Song dynasties and became more common in the Tang dynasty.

However, at that time it was not called "manuscript fee" but "writing fee", and what was written was mostly epitaphs or postscripts, which was the signboard that Zhuang Rui sought.

However, in today's society, some local officials, who are fond of calligraphy but whose handwriting is not very good, go around writing inscriptions for people and collecting money and gifts, euphemistically called "writing fees," which is actually a different kind of bribery.

"No, no, don't get me into trouble. The teacher never charges for writing. I didn't mean it that way..."

Jin Pangzi was startled by Zhuang Rui's words and waved his hands repeatedly, saying, "The main problem is that the teacher is too old now, over 90 years old. Although he's still in good spirits, he can't walk anymore, and his eyesight isn't very good either."

So many people ask him to write calligraphy that his teacher is heavily indebted; his little notebook is filled with the names of hundreds of people he owes. We students don't want to burden him too much, so we rarely ask him to write anything now. Brother Zhuang, can you understand?

Seeing Zhuang Rui come to him seeking help and bring such an expensive gift, only to be refused, Fatty Jin felt a little embarrassed. After thinking for a moment, he continued, "How about this? I'm going to see my teacher tomorrow, and you can come along. Let's see how he's feeling. Maybe if you don't ask him, he'll write to you instead..."

"Okay, Brother Jin, I'd also like to pay a visit to the old master. It would be wonderful to hear his teachings in person, regardless of whether they're actually spoken..."

Zhuang Rui was overjoyed when he heard what Fatty Jin said. He knew that a man of the master's age was nearing the end of his life and might pass away at any time. To Zhuang Rui, being able to meet the master was even more valuable than obtaining a piece of calligraphy.

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After agreeing to visit the master with Fatty Jin the next morning, Zhuang Rui left Fatty Jin's house and returned to the courtyard house. He found that his grandparents had moved back to Yuquan Mountain. The environment of the courtyard house was rather noisy and not suitable for the elderly to recuperate.

"Brother Hao, Happy New Year! How's everything at home?"

After Zhuang Rui took the white lion for a walk in the yard, he went to the front yard and saw Hao Long coming out of the room.

"Boss, everything's fine, everything's fine, hehe..." Hao Long saw Zhuang Rui and quickly ran over, his face full of joy.

"What's wrong, Brother Hao? Why are you so happy? Did your family introduce you to someone?" Zhuang Rui joked.

Upon hearing this, Hao Long actually became shy and hesitant, stammering for a while before saying, "I don't even know if she'd be interested in me..."

It turns out that Hao Long's trip home was indeed arranged for him to go on a blind date. The matchmaker was a distant relative of Hao Long's in the city. Hearing that Hao Long had become successful, she introduced him to a girl who was a graduate student in Beijing and about the same age as Hao Long.

Nowadays, the higher a woman's education level, the harder it is for her to get married. According to Hao Long, the girl's family was also from the countryside. She was very quiet and didn't look down on Hao Long for being a high school student. She said that the two of them could date first.

Zhuang Rui burst into laughter upon hearing this, teasingly saying, "Brother Hao, you're amazing! You managed to find a graduate student without making a sound. Here's what we'll do: if you can win that person over, I'll prepare a new house for you in this front yard. If you don't like living here, I'll give you a house outside..."

"Boss, it's not even close to happening yet. That girl is a graduate student, as you know. I only graduated from high school, and I'm not very good at talking. Could you teach me how to get along with girls?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Hao Long looked somewhat worried. Clearly, the other man's educational background made him feel inferior, and he felt that the two of them were not a good match.

"How am I supposed to teach you? I'm not some Ximen Qing who specializes in this kind of thing..."

Zhuang Rui rolled his eyes. He thought to himself, "I haven't been a virgin for long either, I'm not much better than you." But after thinking for a moment, Zhuang Rui said, "A higher education doesn't mean anything. You two both come from rural areas, so your lifestyles shouldn't be that different. But your hobbies are a bit of a problem..."

"Yes, when I was with her, there were some things she talked about that I had never heard before, so I couldn't keep up with the conversation..."

Hao Long also looked worried. He was originally a country boy, and after spending so many years in the army, in a place where even cockroaches were male, he had no chance to meet girls, let alone know what girls' interests and hobbies were.

"How about this, Brother Hao? These days, high school students can apply for undergraduate programs in adult college entrance exams. You don't have anything to do here anyway, so why don't you study for it and take the adult college entrance exam this May or June? If you pass, at least you can be closer in terms of academic qualifications, and you'll have more in common. What do you think?"

Zhuang Rui knew that Hao Long had good grades before joining the army, but he joined because his family was too poor to afford university. Back then, there were no student loans or similar things. If he studied hard now, he might be able to pass the exam.

"Hey, Hao, what's wrong with trying your best for your own happiness? Even if you don't succeed, going to university isn't a bad thing..." Seeing Hao Long's furrowed brows, Zhuang Rui added fuel to the fire.

"Okay, boss, we'll do it your way..." Hao Long's brows relaxed, and he clenched his right fist tightly, as if he were preparing to participate in a competition to win the championship.

Zhuang Rui smiled and said, "Alright, after I'm done with my work in a few days, I'll find you a set of adult college entrance exam study materials..."

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Zhuang Rui played with the white lion in the yard for a while. Ouyang Jun and the others also returned. The New Year celebrations weren't over yet, so naturally they continued drinking that night. The children set off firecrackers in the yard. Although Ouyang Gang had moved back to Yuquan Mountain, the courtyard still had a festive atmosphere.

After having a good meal and seeing Ouyang Jun off, Zhuang Rui returned to the backyard and went into the basement through the side room. He wanted to find a piece of calligraphy or painting to show the old man for his appraisal the next day.

Zhuang Rui himself is a collector, and he also knows that the master never claims to be a calligrapher. He once said that he was just a teacher and an antique appraiser, and that calligraphy and painting were just hobbies.

For collectors, seeing authentic works of art from ancient times is the most exciting thing, and Zhuang Rui's actions can be seen as catering to their tastes.

Chapter 544 Seeking a Calligraphy (Part 2)

The next morning, Zhuang Rui left the courtyard house carrying a painting by Giuseppe Castiglione, "Emperor Qianlong and His Concubines Enjoying the Garden," along with some seasonal fruits rarely seen in winter. These were gifts for his maternal grandfather, and Zhuang Rui was essentially using them as a pretext to offer them to his grandfather.

The place where Zhuang Rui arranged to meet Fatty Jin was the famous little red building at Beijing Normal University. The master had lived there since the last century and had never moved. Since he couldn't drive the car directly downstairs, Zhuang Rui could only wait for Fatty Jin at the back gate of Beijing Normal University.

"Brother, the fruit is fine, but the teacher won't accept this..."

Fatty Jin rolled down the car window and frowned when he saw what Zhuang Rui was holding. He could tell that Zhuang Rui was holding a painting. Although the old man accepted gifts, he mostly accepted very cheap things and never accepted antiques.

Zhuang Rui smiled and said, "Brother Jin, this is a painting I brought back from Hong Kong. It's closely related to the old man's ancestors. I wanted to show it to the master to see if it was painted by a painter from that time."

"Don't mention anything about the teacher's family background; he doesn't like hearing that. Go inside and find an opportunity. I'll let you take out the painting, but the teacher's eyes... sigh, let's go..."

Jin Pangzi parked the car and took out a fluffy panda toy from it, leaving Zhuang Rui dumbfounded. Wasn't it said that the old man didn't have any children? What was Jin Pangzi doing with a toy?

"Hehe, the teacher is getting old, but he's very humorous and has a childlike heart. We students give him some fun things. This panda is to say that the teacher is a national treasure, and there's a story behind it..."

After Jin Pangzi finished telling the story, Zhuang Rui laughed. He had heard the story before, but from Jin Pangzi's version, Zhuang Rui heard the original version.

This is a well-known joke about a gentleman who, due to poor health and a constant stream of visitors, became quite annoyed. In his usual humor, he wrote a note and posted it on the door: "The panda is sick, no visitors allowed!" The visitors, upon seeing it, smiled knowingly, turned around, and left, no longer bothering the old man.

The joke circulated for so long that many people believed it to be true. Even some of the teacher's students wrote it into their articles with great certainty. Later, the teacher came out and said, "This is a misconception. I have enough self-awareness to not dare to call myself a national treasure."

Actually, the gentleman had a huge debt of writings to repay, and too many people were asking for his calligraphy. He couldn't do anything at home and couldn't get anything done properly, so he had to hide in the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, because there were armed police on guard there and ordinary people couldn't get in.

But hiding for too long wasn't an option. After returning home, the man wrote four sentences: "I am hibernating. No visitors allowed. Knocking on the door will incur a one-yuan fine." He posted the note on the door, but it was only there for a day before someone took it down and kept it.

Frustrated, the man wrote another note a few days later with a ballpoint pen: "I am ill and unable to socialize. Please leave a message if you have anything to say. A gentleman should respect himself." He then stuck the note firmly to the door with glue, but visitors continued to come afterward.

Later, cartoonist Ding Cong learned of this and drew a cartoon titled "The Giant Panda is Sick," which he gave to the gentleman. This is the truth of the story.

Upon arriving at the Little Red Building, Fatty Jin greeted an elderly man who looked to be around 60 years old, asking, "Happy New Year! Are there many people visiting your teacher today?"

"No, you are the first group, go up..." The old man smiled kindly. He was the master's nephew, a very honest teacher who had served the master for decades and was very familiar with students like Fatty Jin.

"Thankfully, not many people came today, otherwise the teacher would have had to expend a lot of energy..."

Jin Pangzi called out to Zhuang Rui, and the two went up to the second floor of the small building. This kind of small building has only two floors. The first floor is where the master's nephew lives, and the master himself lives on the second floor. One of the two rooms on the second floor is the master's studio.

Fatty Jin knocked hard on the door. The gentleman's hearing wasn't very good, but soon a cough came from inside, followed by a question: "Who is it?"

"Teacher, it's me. I've come to wish you a Happy New Year. Can you recognize my voice?"

"You little rascal, come in, and close the door behind you..." The man's laughter came from inside, not loud, but very clear.

"Teacher, I'm kowtowing to you to wish you a Happy New Year..."

In the antique and calligraphy and painting trades, which have a long history, the rules that people in the trade generally follow are those passed down from ancient times. For example, Uncle Benshan from Northeast China once caused a great controversy in society because of his apprentice kowtowing. But this is a tradition. In the eyes of the older generation, heaven, earth, ruler, parents, and teacher are the foundation of society, and kowtowing to one's master is a matter of course!

As soon as Fatty Jin entered the room, he didn't care whether the floor was dirty or whether the old man could see it. He casually put down what he was holding, knelt down on both knees, and kowtowed three times in a row. Zhuang Rui heard it all clearly.

"Alright, you little fatty, come here and let the teacher see what gift you brought..."

Zhuang Rui was startled by Jin Pangzi's actions and didn't have time to look at the master. Now, looking in the direction of the sound, he found the master sitting in a wheelchair in front of a square table, holding a magnifying glass in his hand, seemingly reading a book, and was disturbed by the two of them.

The master had a delicate and pretty face, which at first glance resembled that of a woman. However, he had many age spots on his face, and his hair was very sparse but neatly combed. At this moment, he had a childlike smile on his face, making him look like a kind elder.

Jin Pangzi is over forty years old, but in his husband's eyes, he is still a little fat man. If his husband had children, his grandchildren would probably be older than Jin Pangzi.

"Teacher, I brought you a panda toy. It's fluffy, feel it..."

Fatty Jin picked up his toy and placed it on his teacher's lap, which drew a burst of laughter and scolding from the teacher: "You little fatty, I already said that story was fake, why did you still give me this? Teachers aren't national treasures, they're just schoolteacher..."

The old man's words filled Zhuang Rui, who was standing beside him, with awe. He could tell that the old man was speaking from the bottom of his heart, without any pretense.

The gentleman's humble and peaceful demeanor instantly calmed Zhuang Rui's somewhat agitated mood, which had been aroused by the busyness of the New Year. Perhaps this is the charm of a person's character.

"Are there still guests? Please, have a seat..."

The old man's eyesight was very poor. Without a magnifying glass, he could only vaguely see two figures sitting in a wheelchair, waving to Zhuang Rui to sit down.

"Sir, I am a collector. I admire your knowledge and character, and I have come here specifically to wish you a Happy New Year..."

Zhuang Rui first stood in front of the old man and bowed three times respectfully before sitting down on the sofa. However, when he sat down, he felt as if he were sitting in a pile of books, because the sofa was covered with all kinds of books.

Only then did Zhuang Rui have time to look around the room. It turned out that in this small room, apart from the bed, bookshelves, desk, sofa, and coffee table, the rest of the space was filled with books.

The man waved his hands repeatedly, saying, "I don't deserve it, I don't deserve it. I'm only a few years old, I can't accept your words. My hearing and eyesight aren't very good, young man, please speak louder..."

The old man smiled and continued, "Last year, a few people came to my house and asked me to serve as an honorary director of the China Disabled Persons' Welfare Foundation. I thought it was perfect, since I'm blind and hard of hearing now, practically disabled. I said I was determined to join the Federation..."

The man's words made Zhuang Rui and Fatty Jin laugh. His open-minded, cheerful, and humorous personality was very infectious to those around him.

"Sir, you're in very good health. You can definitely hear me..."

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he silently released a few wisps of spiritual energy, which seeped into the old man's ears and eyes.

During his time in Beijing, Zhuang Rui conducted experiments on his grandfather and Grandpa Song. He discovered that elderly people, perhaps due to severe decline in bodily functions, become very sluggish in their response to spiritual energy. Even if they are not asleep, they will not detect the input of a small amount of spiritual energy.

"Hey, I can really hear it. People are in high spirits when they have good news. Little Fatty, check if the door is closed properly. I feel a bit of a chill in the air."

Because the old man was so old, and Zhuang Rui had used a bit too much spiritual energy, the old man felt a slight coolness on his face, which was especially noticeable in the heated house.

"Teacher, the doors and windows are all closed properly..."

Upon hearing this, Fatty Jin became nervous and quickly checked on the old man. Winter was the hardest time for the old man; even a minor cold could lead to extremely serious consequences.

"Hmm, my eyes are a little sore. I guess I read for too long just now. Sigh, actually, even with my half-blind eyes, I couldn't see many big words clearly..."

The old man took out a handkerchief, wiped his eyes, and said to Zhuang Rui, "Young man, is that a painting you're holding? Who painted it?"

Zhuang Rui replied respectfully, "Sir, it is a painting titled 'Imperial Concubine's Garden Stroll' by Giuseppe Castiglione, the court painter of Emperor Qianlong of the Qing Dynasty. I brought it here specifically for you to appreciate..."

"Lang Shining? There aren't many forgeries of his paintings, but there aren't many genuine ones either. It's a pity my eyesight isn't good enough to see them clearly..."

The old man shook his head slightly. That was just how he was. He wouldn't speak carelessly about things he couldn't see or understand. As a leading figure in the domestic calligraphy and collecting world, not only was his word worth a thousand pieces of gold, but his words were also worth a thousand pieces of gold.

"Wait a minute, teacher, how did you know that Xiao Zhuang brought a painting?"

Jin Pangzi suddenly raised a question. He knew that the teacher's eyes could only distinguish a person's silhouette at most, so how did he see what Zhuang Rui was holding?

Chapter 545 Rectification of Names

"I saw the little guy holding a drawing..."

The old man didn't think much of it and casually answered the student's question. However, after speaking, he paused slightly, realizing that he hadn't been able to see certain objects clearly for almost two years.

"Teacher, can you really see?"

Upon hearing this, Fatty Jin was both surprised and delighted. If the teacher could regain his sight, it would be a great thing for the country, because he had many tasks that he couldn't do because of his inability to see.

"If you can see it, you can see it. What's so strange about that? I also suddenly couldn't see clearly back then. Now that I can see clearly, it's just that God is telling me to do more work..."

Throughout his life, the old man was remarkably magnanimous. Nearly a century of ups and downs, as well as the unique changes in his family, enabled him to remain unperturbed by honor or disgrace.

Even now that some of his vision has been restored, it hasn't elicited any particular reaction from the elderly man. He simply expresses genuine joy at being able to work again.

The human body is the most complex subject in the world. In Chinese history, there have been instances of people in their 90s having their hair turn black and their teeth growing back. For the elderly, if they can't figure something out, they shouldn't think about it. They might as well use that time to do something else that they should be doing.

To be honest, the master's calm attitude completely calmed Zhuang Rui, who was initially a little uneasy because he was afraid that the old man might discover something. Although the idiom "calm and composed" is often used to describe someone, this was the first time Zhuang Rui had ever witnessed it firsthand.

"Teacher, you and Xiao Zhuang can chat for a while, I need to go to the restroom..."

Fatty Jin wasn't as easygoing as the old man. After saying hello, he went downstairs to discuss with the old man's nephew about having the master go to the hospital for a checkup, fearing it might be a final burst of energy before his age.

The master beckoned to Zhuang Rui and casually said, "Come here, young man, bring your painting over. Where did you get this painting from?"

Besides teaching, the old man's greatest hobby in his life was appreciating antiques. Unfortunately, due to his eye disease, he has rarely helped people appraise antiques in recent years. As for writing, it does not affect him, because for the old man, writing has become a habit, and he can still write even if he cannot see.

The old man's eyesight was exceptionally clear today, and since he hadn't appraised antiques for several years, he was quite eager to try something new. So, before Zhuang Rui could even speak, he opened his mouth and asked a question.

However, the old man asked this question out of politeness, because deep down he didn't really believe that the painting Zhuang Rui brought, supposedly by Giuseppe Castiglione, was an authentic work by Castiglione.

Although Giuseppe Castiglione painted many court paintings, the paper used for oil paintings is different from ordinary Xuan paper. Most oil paintings were painted on Korean paper, which is thickened by

multiple layers of adhesive. In old Beijing, it was often used to cover windows. The texture is relatively rough, and oil paintings painted on it are not easy to preserve.

The number of Qing Dynasty court oil paintings that have survived is extremely small. There are only about twelve or thirteen oil paintings that can be identified as genuine works by Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining), most of which are collected in museums in Beijing and France, as well as in a few private hands.

The master once authenticated several oil paintings signed by Giuseppe Castiglione, also known as "Old Lion and Young Lion," in the Palace Museum in Beijing. However, they can no longer be fully opened; they will break apart if opened, and there is no good way to repair them now.

If even the scrolls preserved in the Palace Museum are in such poor condition, those that have circulated among the public are even more difficult to preserve. This is one of the reasons why the old gentleman doesn't believe Zhuang Rui's painting of Lang Shining is genuine. Of course, given his refined taste, he would still examine the object before making a comment.

"Sir, I acquired this painting from a foreigner in Hong Kong. It is said that his ancestors, who were Austrians, visited China in the early 20th century..."

Considering the old man's background—a genuine member of the former Qing dynasty imperial family—Zhuang Rui put it more tactfully, not daring to mention that the shipping magnate's ancestor had once been an officer in the Eight-Nation Alliance.

"Oh? Then we need to take a closer look. At that time, most of Giuseppe Castiglione's paintings ended up in France and Austria. Not only his paintings, but also portraits of emperors and concubines by other painters were mostly in these two countries..."

The old man was somewhat moved after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. When he was the chairman of the National Cultural Relics Appraisal Committee, he had written several books on cultural relics and had conducted in-depth research on the whereabouts of some precious cultural relics lost by the country. He also had a deep understanding of that period of history.

Before the Qing Dynasty collapsed in the last century, the Shouhuang Hall, one of the palaces in Beijing where ancestors were worshipped, was the headquarters of the French Expeditionary Force. Other royal

palaces were the garrisons of Austrian or German troops. As a result, many precious imperial seals and portraits of emperors ended up in these countries.

To give a simple example, the German military headquarters was stationed in the Ziguang Pavilion in Zhongnanhai, which was where the portraits of meritorious officials were stored during the Qianlong reign. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the first appearance of the "Portraits of Meritorious Officials of Ziguang Pavilion" on the international ranking market was in Germany.

The reason why many of the imperial portraits in the Qing Palace came from the French Frey family is that Frey was the highest-ranking French general during the Eight-Nation Alliance invasion of Beijing in 1900.

The appraisal of antiques requires consideration not only of their stylistic features and artistic expression, but also of their provenance and other factors. It is a very complex discipline. Therefore, after hearing Zhuang Rui explain the origin of the painting, the old man immediately thought of the treasures that had been lost from China in the past.

"Come on, young man, unfold the painting a little more slowly, I need to take a look first..."

The old man, holding onto the wheelchair handles, almost tried to stand up, but failed. This was the first time he had shown any sign of anxiety since Zhuang Rui entered the room, but it could be understood as a testament to the old man's dedication to art.

"Sir, please don't worry, you can keep this painting and look at it at your leisure..."

Zhuang Rui smiled and first pushed the old man in front of the coffee table. After handing the magnifying glass on the table to the old man, he opened the scroll of "Emperor Qianlong's Concubines Visiting the Garden". The scroll was very long, about three meters long. Zhuang Rui only unfolded about sixty or seventy centimeters according to the old man's instructions.

The old man remained silent, taking out a magnifying glass and almost bending over as he carefully examined the slightly cracked paper scroll. After a long while, he said, "Roll this up and look at what's underneath..."

The old man was very interested in the painting. He didn't even notice his nephew and student entering the room. He looked at it for about half an hour before letting out a long sigh and saying, "It's an authentic work by Giuseppe Castiglione. Although it's unsigned, it's definitely one. Judging from the materials, the style, and the social context of the time, it's undoubtedly genuine..."

Zhuang Rui didn't react to the old man's words, because he had already decided in his heart that the painting was an authentic work by Giuseppe Castiglione. However, it startled Fatty Jin, who was also an expert in the appraisal of calligraphy and painting. He naturally knew how rare Castiglione's paintings were, and he didn't expect that Zhuang Rui could actually find such a treasure.

Fatty Jin immediately took the magnifying glass from his teacher and examined it carefully. After a while, he nodded and said, "Teacher is right. Judging from the time period of this painting, the only person who could paint an oil painting of this level and technique, and who had the opportunity to paint emperors and concubines, was Giuseppe Castiglione..."

Jin Pangzi paused for a moment, then continued, "However, there is a great deal of controversy surrounding Lang Shining's surviving works. This painting should have been directly transferred from the Qing Palace. It lacks the seals and signatures of famous collectors and Lang Shining himself, so it will definitely be controversial if it is taken out..."

After hearing the student's words, the old man nodded slightly and looked at Zhuang Rui, asking, "Young man, are you planning to sell this painting? Or keep it for your own collection, or donate it to the country?"

Zhuang Rui hadn't expected the old man to ask such a question. He thought about it seriously for a moment before answering, "I will absolutely not sell it. At this stage, it's for collection, or maybe in the future, when conditions allow, we can open a museum. As for donating it to the country, forget about it. There are many cultural relics in the Palace Museum that the country doesn't even have the funds to maintain right now..."

Zhuang Rui was speaking from the heart. He probably wouldn't be short of money for the foreseeable future. He had thought about opening a museum before, and since the old man asked, he just mentioned it.

Donating it to the country? Zhuang Rui had never thought of that. It was his own stuff. If he had the money, he could set up a museum for people to visit. That would be much better than donating it to the country and having it stored in a warehouse that wouldn't be properly stored.

The old man nodded upon hearing this and said, "What you say makes sense. Bringing these artifacts left by our ancestors back from abroad is a contribution to the country. Whether we donate them or not is not important. Little Fatty, bring me my seal and calligraphy brush."

Young man, may I inscribe a few words on this painting and affix my seal?

The old man had advised countless people throughout his life to donate their collection of national treasures to the country, but he also knew that Zhuang Rui was right, so he did not force him at the moment.

"Yes, of course, it would be my honor if you could inscribe something on it, sir..."

Zhuang Rui was overjoyed upon hearing this. The old man was essentially legitimizing his unsigned painting by Giuseppe Castiglione. With the old man's inscription, even if it was a fake, it would become genuine.

Chapter 546 Inscription

Calligraphy and paintings hold a very special place among antique categories. Compared to ceramics, bronzes, or other antiques, they are not only more difficult to collect and preserve, but also differ in many ways.

For example, with some antiques, adding or deleting something can be like gilding the lily, significantly reducing their value, while calligraphy and paintings are a different story.

Among existing antique paintings and calligraphy, the more inscriptions or seals are added, the higher their collection value. This is because not only are the paintings and calligraphy themselves antiques, but the people who inscribed them are often important figures in history. Their handwriting is already extremely precious, and this is an added bonus.

Some works by unknown figures throughout history have become famous and their prices have skyrocketed after being collected and inscribed by renowned figures in later generations.

Because many of those who wrote inscriptions on calligraphy and paintings were themselves famous calligraphers and painters or historical figures, the value of the inscriptions by collectors throughout history is often many times higher than the value of the works themselves.

For the master to inscribe his name on this painting would not only be icing on the cake, but also signify his legitimacy. Given the old man's reputation in the Chinese art collecting world, once he inscribed his name and stamped his seal, the authenticity of this painting by Giuseppe Castiglione would be irrefutable. As far as China is concerned, no one would raise any objections to its authenticity.

"Teacher, the brush is ready..."

Since the gentleman hadn't been writing for anyone for a while, he had to moisten his brush first. This involved wetting the brush bristles with water and then hanging the brush upside down until the brush tip regained its resilience. If he wrote without moistening the brush first, the bristles would become brittle and easily break after being pressed down and stomped, resulting in poor elasticity.

This is a rat whisker brush, specially made for writing small characters. It's crafted from the whiskers of a house mouse, producing a clean, smooth, and pointed stroke. The resulting characters are both soft and firm. Wang Xizhi's famous "Preface to the Poems Composed at the Orchid Pavilion" was written with this type of brush.

The gentleman asked Zhuang Rui to unfold the scroll. After thinking for a moment, he dipped his brush in ink and wrote on the blank space of the scroll: "On the fifth day of the first month of the year Yiyou, I am delighted to see Lang Shining's long scroll painting. Respectfully left by xx." Then he asked his nephew, who was standing to the side, for his seal and pressed it down firmly on the inscription.

Although it consists of only a few dozen characters, it is evident that the gentleman's calligraphy is as elegant and classical as ever, imbued with a scholarly air, and also carries a sense of freedom and ease, just like his unrestrained thoughts. This is also a unique style of calligraphy created by the gentleman.

"Thank you, thank you sir..."

Zhuang Rui was surprised by this unexpected surprise and immediately thanked the master profusely.

"It's alright. Just bring back more of the things our country has lost overseas in the future..."

The old man waved his hand, his smile radiant. Yes, radiant was the only word to describe it, because his almost childlike, innocent smile and heartfelt words could easily dispel the gloom in people's hearts and make them unconsciously become cheerful.

"Teacher, your eyesight and hearing have improved. I was thinking we should go to the hospital for a checkup?"

Seeing that the old man's gaze was still fixed on the painting by Giuseppe Castiglione, Fatty Jin said cautiously, "No one wants to go to the hospital during the New Year. Even if the teacher is easygoing, there's no guarantee he won't go."

The old man smiled and waved his hand, saying, "You little fatty, your teacher is in good health. I'm over 90 years old; every extra day I live is a bonus. Going to the hospital or not doesn't matter..."

"Let's go take a look. Xiao Jin just parked his car downstairs..." the old man's nephew also chimed in, trying to persuade him.

"Alright, you guys...maybe when I get back from the hospital, I won't be able to see anything anymore..."

The old man shook his head repeatedly, but still agreed. Just as Fatty Jin walked behind him, ready to push the wheelchair, the old man suddenly said, "Wait, this little boy is coming today, I want to write a calligraphy piece for him..."

The master never felt his calligraphy was worth much money. Although most of his visitors came seeking his calligraphy, he would often write for those who didn't, whenever he could.

This also shows the kind nature of the old man. There are many counterfeit calligraphy works of the old man on the market. Once, the old man was browsing a calligraphy and painting shop with a friend. The friend pointed to a piece of calligraphy that was being sold and asked, "Is this piece of calligraphy real or fake?" The old man smiled and said, "It is better than mine."

Many people suggested that he investigate the origin of the fake calligraphy and paintings, but he smiled faintly and said, "It's a good thing to use my calligraphy to exchange for some firewood and rice; it can be considered as making good connections."

Fatty Jin knew why Zhuang Rui had come today, so he stopped what he was doing and said, "Teacher, he really wants you to write a piece of calligraphy for him. He bought a shop in Panjiayuan and wants you to write his name..."

"Okay, I can't write very big characters while sitting down. I'll try to write them as big as possible, and you can take them to be enlarged before having them engraved on the signboard..."

The old man had thought things through carefully. He asked Fatty Jin to bring him a brush for writing large characters. After moistening the brush, he looked at Zhuang Rui and asked, "Young man, what name do you plan to give the shop?"

Zhuang Rui quickly replied, "The name will be Ruixuanzhai. My girlfriend and I are getting engaged soon, so we'll take one character from each of our names. Is that alright, sir?"

The old man pondered for a moment and said, "The 'Three Forgivenesses' in the 'Confucius Family Sayings' says: 'Be wise and intelligent, but guard your foolishness.' The 'Bo Xi' in the 'Book of Songs' has the story of daylilies that dispel worries. The ancients also referred to men and women as yin and yang, with yin in front and yang behind. Young man, I think your shop name would be better if you took the sound of 'Xuan' and called it Xuan Rui Zhai. What do you think?"

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and immediately felt that it was wonderful. The brush, ink, paper and inkstone of the Four Treasures of the Study mostly refer to Xuan paper, and the jade and jewelry passed down from ancient times are the embodiment of the wisdom of our predecessors. The name Xuanruizhai is far better than the one he chose.

"Thank you for bestowing the name upon us, sir. Xuanrui Zhai will be it!" Zhuang Rui agreed without hesitation.

After Jin Pangzi laid out the Xuan paper, the old man picked up his brush and wrote three characters on it. Although the characters were not large, they were elegant and unrestrained, vigorous and powerful.

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to praise them, the old man suddenly shook his head and said with great dissatisfaction, "Not good, write one again..."

"Brother Jin, don't throw it away, I'll keep it..."

When Zhuang Rui saw Jin Pangzi move the three characters aside, he quickly reached out and snatched them back. This was the master's calligraphy; even if the master wasn't satisfied, he was.

"Haha, you want that piece of writing that's been written to a fault? I'll write a postscript for it too..."

The old man laughed heartily, gestured for Zhuang Rui to place the calligraphy on the table, wrote his own name on it, and then rewrote it for Zhuang Rui.

The old man was very meticulous in his work. He didn't stop until he had written on the fifth sheet of paper, which was when he was finally satisfied. However, Zhuang Rui was even more satisfied because the old man had also written his name on the first four sheets.

For Zhuang Rui, this is more than just a piece of calligraphy; it represents the old man's earnestness and dedication, which is something Zhuang Rui should cherish even more.

"Wait, let me write another one..."

The old man was in high spirits today, perhaps because he hadn't written in a long time. He asked Fatty Jin to lay out a new sheet of Xuan paper, and after asking Zhuang Rui and Qin Xuanbing's names, he picked up his brush and wrote the eight characters " (a harmonious union, a perfect match) on it.

The inscription reads: "Wishing my dear friend Zhuang Rui and his wife Qin Xuanbing a harmonious and loving marriage, and a lasting union. 【Date:】 The fifth day of the first lunar month of the year Yi You."

"Thank you, thank you sir..."

Seeing the master's forehead covered in sweat and his hands stained with ink, Zhuang Rui's eyes couldn't help but well up with tears.

He only knew Fatty Jin, and had absolutely no connection with the master. He never expected that after writing the inscription, the master would write such a congratulatory message for him. Zhuang Rui was truly moved by the master's actions.

Compared to the practice of high-ranking officials charging tens or hundreds of thousands of yuan for writing a piece of calligraphy that looks like dog's scratch, the master's attitude of treating everyone who asks for his calligraphy equally, regardless of class or social status, was something Zhuang Rui had never expected before he came. He was deeply impressed by the old man's personal charm.

"No, no, you're the guest. The two of them are fine..."

After washing the old man's hands, Jin Pangzi and he lifted the old man's wheelchair, one on each side. The old man waved his hand repeatedly, indicating that his nephew should lift him.

"Sir, this is nothing. I'm not carrying just anyone; you're a giant panda..."

Zhuang Rui knew the old man was humorous and open-minded, so he made a joke.

"Okay, if it really is a giant panda, then the two of you won't be able to lift it..."

The old man laughed heartily and didn't insist any further. However, when he opened the door, the cold wind blew on his face, and he shivered.

Unbeknownst to the old man, in that instant, the spiritual energy in Zhuang Rui's eyes surged into the old man's body from behind, without sparing any amount of spiritual energy.

Zhuang Rui had no other way to help the old man, so this was the only way he could feel better. This was also the first time he had risked being discovered to use his spiritual energy to treat someone else's body.

"I should have come out for a walk a long time ago. This cool breeze feels quite nice..."

When Zhuang Rui received that spiritual energy, he felt a cool sensation, but afterwards he could feel an indescribable comfort within his body. Even though the old man's physical functions had deteriorated significantly, Zhuang Rui still felt it even though he had almost exhausted all his spiritual energy.

After seeing the old man off in Fatty Jin's car, Zhuang Rui, led by the old man's nephew, retrieved the calligraphy pieces the old man had written for him, tears streaming down his face. He couldn't help but cry; the sparkle in his eyes had been almost completely drained this time.

Chapter 547 The King White Lion

The sixth day of the Lunar New Year is also the Beginning of Spring.

Since the beginning of winter, the weather in Beijing has never been as good as it is today. The long-unheard whistling of pigeons flying in the sky has also begun, as they fly overhead.

Several pigeons, tired from flying, made cooing sounds and landed on the roof of Zhuang Rui's house.

After leaving the master yesterday, Zhuang Rui went to an old shop in Liulichang that specializes in making plaques and gave them the calligraphy written by the master to be enlarged and made into a shop plaque.

As for the eight-character couplet that the gentleman inscribed for his wedding, Zhuang Rui planned to take it back to Pengcheng to see if the reclusive Mr. Fang in Pengcheng had time to frame it for him. A famous framing master would also show his respect for the work of a master.

Today, Zhuang Rui's family is returning to Pengcheng. However, Ouyang Wan and Zhuang Min are taking their little girl back by plane, while Zhuang Rui and his brother-in-law are driving back.

Although it was much more troublesome, Zhuang Rui had no choice but to do so in order to bring the white lion along. Given the size of that big guy, let alone getting on a plane, he hadn't even left the courtyard house during this time. Although Zhuang Rui's courtyard house wasn't small, it was still a very small territory for the white lion.

They set off from Beijing early in the morning and arrived in Pengcheng close to evening. Zhuang Rui was exhausted and went back to his villa to sleep.

"Hey, you pervert, are you sleeping with your wife in your arms in the middle of the night? Why are you bothering me?"

Zhuang Rui was sound asleep when he was woken up by his phone ringing. When he saw the number and the time, he was furious. This guy is married, yet he's still so irresponsible. In this freezing weather, who would disturb someone in the middle of the night?

"Get out of here, you know your wife went back to Hong Kong for the Lunar New Year. I'd love to hug her though..."

"Fine, go ahead and hug any woman you like. There are hotels right outside your house, 300 for the whole night. Haven't you been wanting to for a while? I'm going to sleep, buddy, I've been driving all day..."

Zhuang Rui replied curtly and was about to hang up. What kind of situation was it if his wife wasn't giving him any more trouble?

"Damn it, buddy, I haven't had a full night's sleep in almost a week. Do you think you don't want to manage things now that you're no longer the major shareholder of the dog kennel?" Liu Chuan's exasperated voice came through the phone.

"What's wrong with the mastiff kennel? It's doing just fine without me, isn't it?"

Zhuang Rui was taken aback. What did his sleeping have to do with the mastiff kennel? To be honest, he could count the number of times he had been to the kennel on one hand since it was built, and he had never cared about anything there.

"Hey, the female mastiff has given birth! I kindly called you here to see, and you're not even grateful..."

Liu Chuan's words brought Zhuang Rui to his senses. To be honest, he was really interested in this. Witnessing the birth of life, no matter what kind of creature it was, was something to look forward to.

"Wait, I'll be right there..."

Zhuang Rui glanced at his watch; it was 1:30 a.m. Ignoring the freezing weather outside, he put on a thick coat, rushed out of the room, and ran to the garage to back out his car.

"White Lion, come up..."

Zhuang Rui's actions startled White Lion. After Zhuang Rui opened the front door, White Lion, with its massive size, nimbly sat in the passenger seat.

Half an hour later, when Zhuang Rui's car was a few hundred meters away from the Tibetan Mastiff kennel, he could clearly hear the deep growls of the Tibetan Mastiffs everywhere. The kennel, which was usually quiet at night, was now filled with the sound of the Tibetan Mastiffs. The sound was very penetrating and could be heard clearly even from a great distance.

The police dog base of the Public Security Bureau, not far from the Tibetan Mastiff kennel, was eerily quiet. They must have been terrified by the Tibetan Mastiffs. Previously, someone from the police dog base had approached the kennel, saying that the barking of the Tibetan Mastiffs was causing a decrease in the number of qualified police dogs at the base. →

When Zhuang Rui drove to the entrance of the Tibetan Mastiff kennel, the dogs inside became increasingly agitated. The howling of countless Tibetan Mastiffs gathered together sounded terrifying to Zhuang Rui's ears. He believed that even a real lion would have no choice but to flee in the face of so many angry Tibetan Mastiffs.

"Waaaaah..."

The white lion's mood was also affected by the Tibetan mastiff outside, and it became a little impatient. It kept gently patting the car window next to it with its paws. Fortunately, it didn't really use its strength, otherwise, the car window might have been smashed.

"Alright, White Lion, get out of the car..."

Zhuang Rui turned off the car engine at the entrance of the Tibetan Mastiff kennel, fearing that the roar of the engine would further agitate the Tibetan Mastiffs inside.

Unexpectedly, after the white lion opened the car door with its paw and jumped out, it stood two or three meters away from the car and roared to the sky, as if announcing the arrival of its king.

Tibetan mastiffs are different from ordinary dogs; their barks are not barks, but howls, or more accurately, roars.

At this moment, the white lion looked very strange. Its fur stood on end, its facial expression did not seem to be furious, and its mouth did not open and close wide. When listened to closely, it did not sound particularly fierce or harsh, but its voice could be heard from miles away.

The white lion's voice was like a smooth, round pebble striking the bronze drum with all its weight, slowly rising until it slowly and resiliently tore the bronze skin into a pile of rubble.

When the white lion's high-pitched roar suddenly rose from the deep sonic waves, the likely consequence for the other Tibetan mastiffs was a huge disaster for their eardrums. When the white lion's roar sounded, the mastiff kennel suddenly fell silent, without a sound. The only sound that filled the world was the white lion's roar.

Standing next to the white lion, Zhuang Rui was also gripped by the sound. The surrounding environment was so quiet it was almost unsettling. Zhuang Rui felt as if he were in a desert or a vast grassland, completely empty.

At that moment, Zhuang Rui suddenly realized that the reason why many temples in Tibet use Tibetan mastiffs as guardian beasts might be because in areas where lions cannot appear, the Tibetan mastiffs, with their majestic roars, demonstrate the dignity of Buddhism.

Just as the white lion unleashed its regal dignity and vented its primal wildness without restraint, another majestic roar rang out in the mastiff kennel, seemingly responding to the white lion's voice. Zhuang Rui could tell that it was the roar of the Golden Mastiff King.

"Mr. Zhuang... could you... could you put a chain on this Tibetan Mastiff?"

Two or three minutes passed, and the roars from the white lion and the mastiffs in the kennel gradually subsided. Then, a weak voice came from the gate of the kennel, clearly frightened by the white lion's roar.

"It's alright, the white lion doesn't need to be chained..."

Zhuang Rui recognized the security guard and refused his request. From the time the white lion was born until now, Zhuang Rui had always treated it as his friend and family, and had never put a leash on the white lion.

After being rescued by the white lion, Zhuang Rui developed an inseparable bond with it and decided that if possible, he would take the white lion with him when he went out. Otherwise, he would not have given up taking a plane and driving for more than 10 hours to bring the white lion back to Pengcheng.

The white lion seemed to understand the security guard's words. It shook its big head unhappily and growled at the guard booth, which frightened the guard so much that he dared not open the door.

"Mr. Zhuang... Mr. Zhuang, you should probably put him on a leash. The female mastiffs at the kennel have been giving birth lately, and the male mastiffs have been very unstable. He's injured people twice already, and even Brother Zhou almost got bitten. I'm scared..."

Even though the security guard knew that Zhuang Rui was the owner of the Tibetan Mastiff kennel, he didn't dare to come out of the guard post to open the gate. At most, the owner could only fire himself, but the Tibetan Mastiff was different; it could kill him. He clearly understood which was more important.

"Okay, I'll hold it here, you open the door and then go into the guard booth, is that alright?"

Zhuang Rui was both amused and exasperated by the security guard's words. Not to mention that he never wore a dog leash, even if he did, he would never put it on the white lion.

The guard post had been reinforced with additional steel plates. When the security guard saw Zhuang Rui put his arm around the neck of the snow-white Tibetan mastiff, he weighed the situation in his mind and decided that he couldn't lose his job. So he carefully came out from the guard post, opened the gate, and then "whoosh"ed back inside. His movements were so agile that Zhuang Rui was amazed.

As soon as the white lion entered the kennel, it ran towards the mastiff area. Zhuang Rui turned around, closed the gate, and chased after it. He was worried that someone who didn't know the white lion might use a tranquilizer gun to kill it. For safety reasons, the kennel was registered with the Public Security Bureau and was equipped with a total of five tranquilizer guns.

"Wood, I knew it was you guys when I heard the white lion roar. Why has this little guy become so impatient? Male mastiffs are best bred after they're two years old, otherwise it's very bad for their health..."

Liu Chuan came from afar to greet the white lion, but avoided it as it was running. The male mastiffs in the kennel had been very unstable these past few days, and he was afraid that the white lion was the same.

Zhuang Rui grabbed Liu Chuan and pulled him towards the mastiff section, saying, "Has it been born yet? Take me to see it..."

"They're not over there. The six female mastiffs that are preparing to give birth have been given separate kennels..."

Liu Chuan broke free from Zhuang Rui's hand and continued, "But apart from Brother Renqing Cuomu, that Lion King won't let anyone near it. We'll go to the monitoring room later to check; I've installed cameras in all those mastiff kennels..."

"Damn it, those two, stop fighting, Brother Renqing Cuomu..."

Liu Chuan looked up and saw that the white lion had already run to the side of the Golden Mastiff King. He immediately became anxious. In the past few days, the Golden Mastiff King had not recognized anyone except Renqing Cuomu. Even Zhou Rui, who had once subdued it with his bare hands, did not show it any respect.

Chapter 548 The Birth of Life

As the Golden Lion King, he is the king of this kennel, and all the female mastiffs are his consorts. However, to ensure the purity of the Tibetan Mastiff bloodline, in addition to the Golden Lion King, Rinchen Tsomu also brought a male mastiff.

However, Rinchen Tsomu had to place the male mastiff and several female mastiffs far away from the Golden Mastiff King, for fear that they would fight each other.

Now that the white lion was running over so boldly, not only were Liu Chuan, Zhou Rui and the others on edge, but even Renqing Cuomu, who knew the habits of Tibetan mastiffs well, was a little at a loss. He didn't know where such a powerful and tall snow mastiff had suddenly appeared from.

"White Lion, come back!!!"

Zhuang Rui was also a little anxious. He knew that some animals are most aggressive and irrational when their mates are giving birth. Although the white lion was given to him by the Golden Mastiff King, Zhuang Rui had always been suspicious of the relationship between the white lion and the Golden Mastiff King. It felt a bit like two African blacks giving birth to a white person.

"Waaaaah..."

The white lion shook its big head, turned around and growled at Zhuang Rui, then ran to the side of the golden mastiff king.

What puzzled Renqing Cuomu was that her old companion did not react excessively at all. Instead, it rubbed its big head against the white lion's head. Renqing Cuomu, who was familiar with the habits of Tibetan mastiffs, knew that this was a gesture of affection from the Tibetan mastiff.

The white lion, like a curious child, ran to each of the mastiff kennels and sniffed the inside. The female mastiffs inside the kennels behaved strangely, remaining completely still. It should be noted that even the Golden Lion King would bare his teeth if the female mastiffs got close.

"Brother Zhuang, it's a pleasure to see you again, my friend..."

Seeing that no conflict had broken out, Renqing Cuomu breathed a sigh of relief. However, he then asked curiously, "Brother Zhuang, I've never seen this Tibetan Mastiff from the snowy mountains before."

Tibetan Mastiffs develop and grow later than other dogs; males don't reach full size until they are 2 to 3 years old.

So, although Renqing Cuomu knew that Zhuang Rui had a white Tibetan Mastiff puppy, he never dreamed that this Tibetan Mastiff, which was already comparable in size to the Golden Retriever King, would be the same little guy who was born a year ago.

"Brother Renqing Cuomu, it's the little Tibetan Mastiff I brought with me when we met last year..."

Zhuang Rui laughed. The white lion had been growing bigger and bigger lately, now weighing over 200 pounds. It really looked like a white lion, walking with its head held high, as majestic as a proud emperor.

Although Song Jun and Liu Chuan's two Tibetan mastiffs grew very quickly, if they stood next to the white lion, people would definitely think that they had been abused and were stunted.

"Is it really that little Tibetan Mastiff?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Renqing Cuomu disregarded the dust on the ground, knelt down before the white lion with her hands clasped together, muttering something under her breath. Finally, she placed her palms up on the ground and respectfully kowtowed to the white lion.

"Brother Zhou, what's wrong with Brother Renqing Cuomu?"

Zhuang Rui was somewhat confused and nudged Zhou Rui, who was standing next to him, with his elbow.

"Brother Renqing Cuomu is saying that the white lion is the incarnation of the Snow Mountain Goddess, a deity who protects the Great Snow Mountain..."

Zhou Rui's words left Zhuang Rui speechless. The white lion was clearly a male mastiff, wasn't it? No matter what, it had nothing to do with a goddess. Did the Snow Mountain Goddess have to be like Guanyin Bodhisattva, a woman in a man's body?

"Alright, it's fine as long as Brother Zhou is here. I'll take you to see the Tibetan Mastiffs that have already been born. We'll wait in the monitoring room later..."

The weather was still quite cold even though it was only the beginning of spring. Although Liu Chuan was wearing a military green overcoat, he was still shivering from the cold and pulled Zhuang Rui to head back.

"They've already had cubs? Let's go take a look..."

"Let's see tomorrow. The puppies are sleeping now, and the mother is very protective of her pups, so we shouldn't disturb them in the middle of the night..."

Zhou Rui's professional knowledge was clearly superior to Liu Chuan's, and he stopped the two who were excitedly preparing to disturb the puppy's sleep.

"Fine, let's go back to the monitoring room. Wood, let me tell you, that Tibetan Mastiff was even smaller than the white lion was back then, it was so cute..."

Zhuang Rui was left speechless by Liu Chuan's words. He had been brought here in the middle of the night, only to find that the Tibetan Mastiff had not been born. Was he supposed to have come here just to watch the surveillance footage?

Seeing Renqing Cuomu pacing around the Tibetan Mastiff kennel from time to time, Zhuang Rui said, "Brother Renqing Cuomu, everyone should go and rest. This female Tibetan Mastiff doesn't necessarily give birth at night..."

"Both of these female Tibetan Mastiffs have been very quiet today. Based on my experience, they should give birth within 24 hours. I'll wait..."

Renqing Cuomu shook her head and waved for Zhuang Rui to leave first. This Tibetan mastiff was too big, and the mothers weren't very good at it. If too many puppies were born, they could easily be crushed to death while the mastiff was nursing or turning over.

"Oh well....."

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to leave with Liu Chuan, a "whimpering" sound suddenly came from behind. Before he could turn around, the white lion suddenly rushed over, its huge body crashing into a golden behemoth.

"Come back, more cases!"

Renqing Cuomu's voice also rang out. He had clearly seen that just as Zhuang Rui was about to leave, his own dog, the Golden Mastiff King, suddenly ran behind Zhuang Rui, opened its mouth as if to bite him, but was knocked away by the white lion.

The white lion didn't care what relationship it had with the Golden Mastiff King. The first person it saw after it was born was Zhuang Rui. In its heart, Zhuang Rui was its father and its master. Now, the white lion's fluffy fur stood on end, and it let out a low roar as it stared intently at the Golden Mastiff King.

"What's going on? Will the golden retriever attack me?"

Zhuang Rui snapped out of his daze and saw the two large creatures facing off. He quickly calmed the white lion down, while Renqing Cuomu stroked the neck of the enraged golden mastiff king.

Although the Golden Mastiff King had always treated the White Lion like a child, not bothering with it, the White Lion's actions just now had truly enraged it.

"Don't come any closer, Duoqi is emotionally unstable..."

After seeing Zhuang Rui finish comforting the white lion, Renqing Cuomu walked towards her and quickly waved to Zhuang Rui, signaling him not to come any closer.

"It's okay, I know the Golden Retriever. He probably wasn't trying to bite me, was he?"

Zhuang Rui walked to the Golden Retriever's side and reached out to touch the Mastiff King. Sure enough, the Golden Retriever King obediently lowered its head, allowing Zhuang Rui's hand to rest on its head. It showed no signs of suddenly attacking or hurting anyone, which relieved Renqing Cuomu, who was tightly hugging the Mastiff King's neck.

However, after Zhuang Rui stroked it, the Golden Lion King immediately raised its head, opened its mouth and bit the hem of Zhuang Rui's down jacket, pulling it towards the kennel. When it reached the door of a kennel, it kept making "whimpering" sounds.

"Hey, Brother Renqing Cuomu, is that Tibetan Mastiff about to give birth?"

Standing at the entrance of the mastiff kennel, Zhuang Rui noticed that inside, under the female mastiff's body, there seemed to be several small creatures. They were very small, somewhat like large rats, and their bodies were still wet.

"It really is true..." Renqing Cuomu hurried over after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. Zhou Rui and Liu Chuan wanted to follow, but were barked back by the Golden Mastiff King.

Although the female mastiff in the kennel was somewhat weak, she struggled to stand up when she saw several figures standing at the door. Only after hearing Renqing Cuomu's voice did she lie back down.

"One, two, three, four, five... Brother Renqing Cuomu has given birth to five little ones in total..."

Zhuang Rui counted them under the lamplight. There were five wet little ones lying on the mother dog's belly, their eyes tightly closed, tightly sucking on their mother's nipples.

"No, Zhuoma looks like she's in pain, like she's uncomfortable. She must be carrying a Tibetan mastiff..."

Renqing Cuomu and Zhuang Rui observed from different perspectives. He didn't look at how many puppies had been born, but instead kept observing the mother mastiff's condition.

Upon hearing what Renqing Cuomu said, Zhuang Rui also noticed that the female mastiff named Zhuoma was indeed acting strangely. After lying down again, her eyes were unfocused, and her body was twitching from time to time.

"Waaaaah..."

Just then, the golden retriever gently nuzzled Zhuang Rui with its big head and made a whimpering sound. Zhuang Rui immediately understood that the golden retriever had pulled him over so that he would help save the female mastiff.

The dog kennel specially prepared for the mother to give birth wasn't very big. Zhuang Rui quietly channeled his spiritual energy into the mother dog's body.

Seemingly exhausted, Zhuoma slowly opened her eyes after the spiritual energy entered her body. She looked up and gave Zhuang Rui a "grateful" glance. Beneath her, a pure black Tibetan Mastiff was born into this world.

This was the first time Zhuang Rui had ever witnessed the birth of a new life!

"There's one more, there's one more..."

After this Tibetan Mastiff puppy came out, another Tibetan Mastiff puppy slid out from between its mother's legs. However, these two little guys seemed to have stayed in their mother's womb for too long, and they were listless and not very lively after they came out.

"These two probably won't survive, what a pity..."

Renqing Cuomu, who was standing next to Zhuang Rui, sighed. In nature, survival of the fittest means that only the strongest animals have the right to survive. These last two animals were obviously born

with some disadvantages. Even if they were fed the most expensive formula milk powder, their survival rate would still be very low if they did not get breast milk at the beginning.

However, something immediately happened that left Renqing Cuomu dumbfounded: the two little guys, who were half a meter away from the mother mastiff's belly, suddenly twitched their little noses and slowly climbed up to the mother mastiff's belly.

The two little ones rudely pushed their siblings aside and began to enjoy their mother's milk.

Chapter 549 Shares

Purebred Tibetan Mastiffs, unlike some mixed-breeds, typically give birth to 4-6 puppies. And whether in animals or humans, the first puppies to emerge from the womb are usually the strongest, allowing them to enjoy the nourishment of their mother's milk immediately.

However, what happened today has clearly overturned everyone's understanding. Not only did a litter produce 7 Tibetan Mastiff puppies, but judging from their lively appearance now, the survival rate should be quite high.

The two little ones, who were originally listless and on the verge of death, have now pushed aside their brothers and sisters in front of them. Not only have they taken over their mother, but their little feet are also not behaving themselves, kicking aside their older brothers and sisters who were not in their way.

At least their appetite was clearly limited. After nursing for a while, the two domineering little ones fell asleep in their mother's arms. Their eyes were closed and they looked so lazy that it was really adorable.

Renqing Cuomu took the prepared cardboard box from the staff and opened the iron gate of the Tibetan Mastiff kennel. He was going to put the Tibetan Mastiff puppies, who had just nursed for the first time, into the cardboard box to prevent them from being crushed to death by their mother when she turned over. Such things happen frequently on the grasslands.

The first breastfeeding of a puppy is very important, but afterwards, you can start artificial feeding with calcium-fortified puppy milk powder.

"Brother Zhuang, please don't come in. The mother mastiff is very protective of her pups..."

When Renqing Cuomu saw Zhuang Rui following him into the mastiff kennel, he immediately stopped. He knew that he and Zhuang Rui had a good relationship, but these female mastiffs that had just given birth were very wary. They would not allow any strangers to approach them except their owners and mates, and sometimes they would not even allow the father of their puppies to get close.

"Waaaaah..."

Just as Renqing Cuomu finished speaking, the female Tibetan Mastiff, whose spirits had improved considerably, suddenly raised her head and let out a soft whimper towards Zhuang Rui. Having lived with Tibetan Mastiffs for decades, Renqing Cuomu naturally recognized this as a sign of affection from the female, and was greatly surprised.

"That's strange, Brother Zhuang. Maybe it's because you were blessed by the Living Buddha of Jokhang Temple?"

Rinchen Tsomu's understanding of Tibetan mastiff habits was insufficient to explain what he saw, so she simply attributed all the credit to the Living Buddha. In this world, anything can be explained once religious beliefs are involved.

"Hehe, maybe so..."

Zhuang Rui smiled, squatted down beside the mother mastiff, and infused her with a wisp of spiritual energy. After the mother mastiff closed her eyes comfortably, he looked at the few little lives in her belly.

At this moment, the Tibetan mastiff puppies had all drunk their fill of their mother's milk. They curled up in their mother's arms, and the tiny creatures, no bigger than a palm, looked incredibly cute with their eyes tightly closed.

The birth of life is always the greatest miracle on Earth. Looking at this litter of Tibetan mastiff puppies, Zhuang Rui had a realization: no matter what species they are, their birth is unique and worthy of being remembered and moved.

Zhuang Rui put his little finger near the mouth of a Tibetan Mastiff puppy, and the little guy actually opened his mouth and started sucking like a child, making Zhuang Rui's finger tickle. This reminded him of the time when he adopted the white lion, who was probably also very young at that time.

The mother Tibetan Mastiff opened her eyes and glanced at Zhuang Rui, then closed them again with relief. However, when Renqing Cuomu picked up the two Tibetan Mastiff puppies, the mother let out a low growl from her throat, clearly not satisfied. Her growl also woke up the other puppies.

Just like human babies, the little ones, upon waking up, immediately used their sense of smell to bring their mouths to their mother's nipples, smacking their lips and starting to eat.

"Brother Zhuang, put those two strongest little guys into the box..."

Renqing Cuomu stopped when the mother Tibetan Mastiff warned him. While Tibetan Mastiffs are loyal, they can be unreasonable at times, and he dared not disobey the mother's wishes and forcibly take the two pups away. This task could only be carried out by Zhuang Rui, who had received the blessing of a Living Buddha.

Sure enough, when Zhuang Rui picked up the two little ones, the mother mastiff only opened her eyes and whimpered a few times, but did not make any further moves. However, those two whimpers were enough to frighten Renqing Cuomu, this grassland man, into a cold sweat. He only breathed a sigh of relief after leaving the mastiff kennel.

The white lion, who had been lingering outside the kennel, came over when Zhuang Rui came out. It sniffed the cardboard box in Zhuang Rui's hand, then shook its long fur and walked away uninterested.

"Brother Renqing Cuomu, shouldn't I find a female Tibetan Mastiff for my white lion?"

Zhuang Rui noticed that Bai Shi's behavior today was very unusual, so he asked Renqing Cuomu for advice.

"The white lion is only a little over a year old. It would be best to wait until it's two years old; that would be good for it..."

Zhuang Rui nodded, but he was thinking about when to find a mate for the white lion. He would use his spiritual energy to groom the white lion's body whenever he had free time. The white lion should develop earlier than ordinary Tibetan mastiffs.

"Wood, let me see. These two little rascals are quite domineering. Let's keep them for ourselves..."

Liu Chuan came running out of the monitoring room, panting, and snatched the cardboard box from Zhuang Rui's hand. He looked at the two sleeping Tibetan mastiffs curled up together inside and kept grinning foolishly.

Liu Chuan truly loves animals; otherwise, his first question would have been how much these two Tibetan mastiffs were worth. However, this is also why Renqing Cuomu approves of him and Zhuang Rui. On the grasslands, herders treat Tibetan mastiffs like family members.

The fur on the two little guys was completely dry by now, and it was clear that they were two Tibetan Mastiffs with iron-clad fur. Like their father, they would grow up to be like the Golden Lion King.

After carefully observing the two Tibetan mastiff puppies, Renqing Cuomu nodded and said, "These two have relatively pure bloodlines and can be kept for breeding..."

"Okay, but you need to make sure the puppies are different from the ones born to the other female mastiff..."

"Alright, let's talk about it when we get back. It's cold outside, and the little one might get cold..."

When Zhuang Rui saw them discussing the business of the mastiff kennel, he quickly interrupted them. They were really learning something new. He didn't want to stay here any longer. Although the staff at the mastiff kennel usually paid a lot of attention to hygiene, the smell in the kennel wasn't very pleasant.

"Yes, yes, let's go back..."

Liu Chuan cherished the two little guys very much. He took off his coat, wrapped the cardboard box in it, and ran back to the heated room. The successful birth of these little guys also represented the future development of the mastiff kennel.

Before leaving, Zhuang Rui circled the pens of the other two pregnant mastiffs, infusing them with some spiritual energy, believing that even without him, the two female mastiffs would be able to give birth smoothly.

On the way back to the office from the kennel, Liu Chuan had a beaming smile on his face, as if he had just given birth. Zhuang Rui was also quite happy; he could understand Liu Chuan's feelings at that moment.

The current dozen or so Tibetan mastiff puppies alone are enough to recoup the initial investment in the kennel. Keep in mind that these are not the offspring of ordinary mixed-breed Tibetan mastiffs, but rather the purest offspring of a Golden Retriever King and a grassland female mastiff, each costing over a million yuan.

However, even though there are already more than 10 newborn Tibetan Mastiff puppies, it is still far from meeting market demand. Liu Chuan has sold more than 20 of them at Ouyang Jun's club alone. There are still Tibetan Mastiffs to keep for breeding, and when exchanging with other Tibetan Mastiff kennels, he may also bring back some Tibetan Mastiff puppies to enrich the bloodline of the Tibetan Mastiffs in the kennels.

After Liu Chuan led the Golden Lion King to participate in the Shanxi Mastiff Garden Conference, Pengcheng Mastiff Garden was able to gain a foothold in the domestic market. This is not just a nominal title, but can bring a lot of benefits to the Mastiff Garden.

Putting aside everything else, before the Spring Festival, there were more than 10 mastiff farms that wanted to breed with the Golden Lion King, some of which even offered a sky-high price of 300,000 yuan per session. However, in order to ensure the smooth operation of the mastiff farm, Liu Chuan refused them all. According to their plan for the mastiff farm, the breeding business would not start until two years later.

Back in the monitoring room, Liu Chuan carefully placed the cardboard box containing the two little ones, then looked at Zhuang Rui and said, "Wood, how about I give you another 20% of my shares..."

Although Liu Chuan and Zhuang Rui grew up together, Liu Chuan still felt a little guilty. Zhuang Rui was the one who planned the kennel and invested the most money in it in the early stages, but now that it has yielded results, Zhuang Rui has the fewest shares, which makes Liu Chuan feel a bit embarrassed.

"Alright, stop being so sour. I don't even want 10% of the shares I own..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand to interrupt Liu Chuan. Although the mastiff kennel's profits this year might reach tens of millions, Zhuang Rui didn't really care. Putting aside the jade mine in Xinjiang for the time being, the jadeite mine in Myanmar would definitely be a treasure trove after the vein was discovered, and the profits would probably be calculated in hundreds of millions.

"Fine, whatever. I'm going to sleep. Are you going home to sleep, or are you going to make do on my sofa for the night?"

Liu Chuan didn't mince words. Their relationship really wasn't suited for talking about money. For example, when he helped Zhuang Rui move gold a while ago, Liu Chuan didn't mention a single word about money.

Zhuang Rui said with a smile, "I'm not leaving. I'll sleep here. We'll go to your house together tomorrow. I still need to wish my godmother a Happy New Year. This is the last time I'll receive a red envelope this year..."

"What a joke, you're just short of those two New Year's money?" Liu Chuan glared at Zhuang Rui with annoyance.

Zhuang Rui stopped Liu Chuan, who was about to pull the blanket over his head, and asked, "Don't sleep yet, I need to ask you something. How are things going with Da Xiong and Monkey at the flower and bird market?"

Chapter 550 Helping Out (Part 1)

"Why are you asking about those two kids? They came to our house to pay New Year's visits with Li Bing a few days ago..."

Liu Chuan wasn't really sure about Da Xiong and the monkey's current situation; he hadn't checked on the pet shop for almost half a year..

The share of the pet shop originally intended for Zhou Rui was also transferred to the mastiff kennel. Except for the shop building, which still belonged to Liu Chuan, all other business was handed over to Li Bing. Even the business license was changed to a different name, and Li Bing was responsible for all profits and losses.

Zhuang Rui didn't answer Liu Chuan's question, but continued to press, "What are Da Xiong and Monkey like? I'm asking about their character..."

"Xiaobing said that the two of them are quite quick-witted. They used to be unwilling to do anything serious, but now they seem to be doing quite well. Should I call Xiaobing now and ask them?"

As Liu Chuan spoke, he took out his phone, but Zhuang Rui snatched it away, saying, "Are you crazy? Look at the time! If it were anyone else, they'd be furious if you kept bothering them at 1 a.m...."

Liu Chuan knew that Zhuang Rui didn't talk as much nonsense as he did, and that he must have a reason for asking about the two of them, so he asked, "Hey, what do you want with those two?"

"I've taken over an antique shop in Beijing and want to find a couple of people to look after it, but I can't find anyone I can trust..."

Zhuang Rui spoke frankly, saying that he had been planning this ever since he took over "Shuyazhai". Although he was not short of money, he was short of people. Moreover, in this industry, even if you have money, you may not be able to find suitable candidates.

Zhuang Rui considered it for a long time. Peng Fei and Hao Long were definitely not suitable. If those two stood at the door, probably no one would dare to enter the store. Moreover, antique stores are different from other businesses. People in this line of work must have considerable social experience.

Like that joke I told before, the shop assistant in an antique shop must have the ability to call a deer a horse, to say black is white, and he must also have a thick skin, so that he can keep smiling even after being ridiculed, the kind of person who turns the other cheek.

And you also need to have the ability to turn your back on someone without hesitation, otherwise who will compensate you if the items in the store are broken?

If you were to randomly recruit a few college students from the job market, they might not even last a week before being swindled out of their underwear. There's a saying in Beijing's antique circles: if you want to hear stories and crosstalk, you don't need to go to Deyun Club at all. Just go to Panjiayuan, find a place to chat, and you can hear all sorts of unusual things.

After thinking it over, Zhuang Rui realized that the only people he knew and understood even slightly were Da Xiong and Monkey.

After seeing how anxious Monkey was when Da Xiong was arrested by the police last time, Zhuang Rui could tell that the two brothers were quite loyal and their character shouldn't be too bad.

As the saying goes, "The most righteous are often butchers, while the most ungrateful are often scholars." Butchers generally value loyalty and brotherhood, and it is not uncommon for them to die for their principles.

On the contrary, many scholars often despise the code of chivalry, consider themselves superior yet have no desires, think they have lofty aspirations, but most of them are just seeking fame and fortune and pursuing personal gain. Only a few are truly noble.

"Can those two be trusted?" Liu Chuan curled his lip in disdain.

Zhuang Rui shook his head and said, "At least those two guys are loyal. Last time at the police station, Monkey almost knelt down for me, just because he was worried that Da Xiong would get beaten up inside..."

"You know what, even though I chased Da Xiong for several blocks before, those two kids are actually quite decent. They might be a bit rough around the edges, but they don't do anything underhanded. Plus, they've been in the market for so many years, they can spot most shady dealings. They'd be suitable for you to mind the shop..."

Liu Chuan nodded, agreeing with Zhuang Rui's words, and said, "I'll call Xiaobing tomorrow and ask him first..."

The next day, when Zhuang Rui woke up, he found that the other two female mastiffs had also given birth. One had five puppies, and the other had eight. Including the previous mothers, the kennel had produced a total of thirty-two puppies this year, an extremely rare number considering their pedigree.

Zhou Rui and Renqing Cuomu were exhausted after working all night yesterday, so Liu Chuan didn't accompany Zhuang Rui home. However, he called Li Bing this morning and learned that Da Xiong and the other two were doing well at the pet shop, earning around three thousand yuan a month, which was considered quite good in Pengcheng.

Liu Chuan didn't say what it was about on the phone, only that Zhuang Rui wanted to see them and they had arranged to meet at Song Jun's tea house that afternoon.

Zhuang Rui had lunch at Liu Chuan's house, where his mother was also there. After handing his engagement invitation to the two elders, Zhuang Rui went to Pengcheng Antique Market first.

It was still a bit early before the time he was supposed to meet Da Xiong and the others, so Zhuang Rui decided to wander around the antique market. As the place where he made his first fortune, Zhuang Rui naturally had a very good impression of it.

"Look at that person, doesn't he look like that jade expert surnamed Zhuang from the treasure appraisal show that's been airing these past few days?"

"Come on, they have TV on every day. Would he come all the way to Pengcheng if he wasn't in Beijing?"

"Hmm, that's true..."

"You guys don't know anything! Don't you know this show is pre-recorded?"

As soon as Zhuang Rui entered the antique market, he heard whispers around him. Not only the stall owners, but also the tourists who came to hunt for treasures were pointing and talking about Zhuang

Rui. If it weren't for the fact that Zhuang Rui was carrying a huge Tibetan mastiff, someone would probably have come up and asked him questions.

"Excuse me, are you Mr. Zhuang from the Spring Festival treasure appraisal program?"

This is the aftereffect of appearing on CCTV. People who used to wander around the antique market are very interested in antique-related programs, and those who are new to the industry think that appearing on TV makes them experts. Some people couldn't wait any longer and went up to Zhuang Rui to ask him questions.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui immediately shook his head vigorously, speaking in a thick Pengcheng accent, "Oh, I wish I could, but CCTV won't invite me..."

"I told you, this is what people from Pengcheng are like. Didn't you see that expert on TV speaking with such a strong Beijing accent?"

"No, I still think it looks like it, hey, Teacher Zhuang..."

However, after overhearing the conversation, Zhuang Rui abandoned his plan to stroll through the market and pay New Year's respects to Old Master Lü. He took White Lion out of the market and headed straight for Song Jun's tea house.

However, bringing the white lion almost caused trouble again, because the little girl at the entrance of the tea house screamed in fright when she saw the size of the white lion, which almost made the manager who arrived later call the police.

In the end, it was only after Song Jun, who was in Beijing, made a phone call that the manager of the tea house let Zhuang Rui in and opened the private room where Song Jun was entertaining guests.

Zhuang Rui was sitting in Song Jun's office, pouring himself some tea, when the manager pushed open the door to the private room, followed by two men, one burly and one thin, namely Da Xiong and Monkey.

"Mr. Zhuang, your friend has arrived. Would you like a tea master to serve you tea?"

Zhuang Rui was a guest whom the boss instructed to give special attention, so the manager dared not neglect him.

Zhuang Rui smiled and waved his hand, saying, "No need, thank you. I'll just chat with these two friends..."

Although Zhuang Rui's appearance hasn't changed much from a year ago, he now exudes an irresistible personal aura in front of strangers, a confidence that comes from within.

Although the manager wanted to curry favor with the boss's friend, he still followed Zhuang Rui's advice and left the private room.

"Brother Zhuang, Happy New Year! I've been meaning to call you, but neither of us has your phone number..."

The monkey was very sweet-talking; as soon as it entered, it bowed to Zhuang Rui. The two of them seemed to have learned something new, as they didn't look around after entering and went straight to the sofa where Zhuang Rui was sitting.

"Hey, monkey, you're getting a sweet talker now. How are the elders at home? Give them my regards..."

Zhuang Rui chuckled upon seeing the monkey. This guy, even in a dragon robe, wouldn't look like an emperor. He was currently wearing a bright yellow silk jacket, but no matter how you looked at him, he still resembled a palace eunuch. His movements were exactly the same as when Zhuang Rui had seen him a year ago.

"Brother Zhuang, I haven't had a chance to thank you for what happened last time..."

Da Xiong, on the other hand, was much more composed. He walked to the table, poured Zhuang Rui a cup of tea, and presented it to Zhuang Rui with both hands. Although Zhuang Rui was younger than him, Da Xiong called him "brother" willingly.

Zhuang Rui waved his hands repeatedly, took the cup of tea, and said, "I'm not even as old as you, Da Xiong. Just call me by my name. Sit down, everyone..."

After the two of them sat down, Zhuang Rui said, "Da Xiong, I got a cricket gourd from you back then, but it even caused you to go to Tianjin to pay for the lesson by getting a fake one. Actually, it's my fault..."

"Brother Zhuang, please don't say that. I was greedy back then. Otherwise, after working in the antique market for several years, I wouldn't have been fooled by someone's story..."

When Da Xiong heard Zhuang Rui mention this, his old face turned bright red, and he quickly stood up. To be honest, he still had some lingering resentment about this matter, but now that he was earning two or three thousand yuan a month, he had long forgotten about this grudge.

No one is born wanting to be a bad person. Back then, when Da Xiong and the monkey were swindling and cheating in the antique market, although they could occasionally make a little money, they were always uneasy. After all, people who are born to do bad things and feel at ease are a very small minority.

However, since money comes easily and is spent easily, the two of them have never saved much money. But now that they receive their monthly salaries, they know how hard it is to earn money, and they are living a more secure life.

After exchanging a few pleasantries with the two men, Zhuang Rui got straight to the point: "We're practically acquaintances now. I have a business deal in Beijing and I'd like to ask you two to come and help out. I wonder if you'd be willing?"

"help?"

Upon hearing this, Da Xiong and Monkey looked at each other in bewilderment. Before they came, they had guessed why Zhuang Rui wanted to see them, but they never dreamed that Zhuang Rui wanted to invite them to Beijing.