

Golden 591

Chapter 591 Private Museum (Part 2)

Zhuang Rui initially had no idea that this matter was actually under the approval of the Ministry of Culture. Even if Ouyang Zhenwu refused to help, wasn't there still Ouyang Jun? When Zhuang Rui drank with Ouyang Jun, he often heard the guy boast about using the old man's name to handle personal matters.

On the other hand, Zhuang Rui felt that this was all for the purpose of promoting national culture and welcoming the return of national treasures, so it was only natural for the government to make some exceptions.

Hey, don't be so skeptical. If you're so capable, why don't you get your hands on a batch of artifacts like that from a foreign museum? Without those Picasso sketches in Zhuang Rui's possession, you probably wouldn't even be able to get into the curator's office.

Seeing Zhuang Rui's actions after returning, Qin Xuanbing realized it wasn't a joke. She walked over to Zhuang Rui and asked, "Zhuang Rui, are you really going to open a private museum?"

"Of course, all the information is ready. Hey, White Lion, bring it here..."

Zhuang Rui had just raised the fax in his hand when Bai Shi misunderstood. He bent down, snatched the fax from Zhuang Rui's hand, and threw it into the trash can by the door. Qin Xuanbing and Peng Fei, who were standing next to him, burst into laughter. Bai Shi's cleverness was wasted.

"Waaaaah..."

White Lion growled at Zhuang Rui twice, feeling wronged. "I'm doing this for free and I still get scolded. I'm not going out with you next time."

"Alright, go find your brother Peng Fei to play..."

Zhuang Rui, quite unethically, sent the white lion to Peng Fei's side and picked up the fax paper he had just retrieved to read.

Wei Ming faxed over two documents: one was the Ministry of Culture's "Museum Management Measures" which contained specific regulations on the establishment of museums, and the other was the "BJ City Museum Regulations" which contained specific regulations.

Both are equally applicable, because if Zhuang Rui cannot find a house in Beijing, it is possible that he will build the museum in Pengcheng or the surrounding area of Beijing.

After seeing these regulations, Zhuang Rui realized that Huangfu Yun was right. Applying to establish a private museum is actually not very complicated. The Ministry of Culture's "Museum Management Measures" state that as long as the following requirements are met, private individuals can apply for and be approved to establish a museum.

First, it must have a fixed location, with dedicated exhibition halls (rooms), storage facilities, and cultural relic protection technology sites. The area of the exhibition halls (rooms) must be commensurate with the scale of the exhibition, and the exhibition environment must be suitable for public access. Whether it meets the requirements must be verified and approved by specialized personnel from the Museum Department of the Ministry of Culture.

Secondly, having the necessary funding to establish the museum and the funds to ensure its operation is also very important. Otherwise, if the approval is successful and you open for business, but then you have to close down after only two months due to business failure or cash flow problems, wouldn't that be a waste of money and effort?

Third, it is necessary to have a certain number of systematic collections that are consistent with the museum's mission, as well as the necessary research materials. When a museum opens, you have to show things to visitors, right?

Let alone antique museums, even folk museums need to display some items. Otherwise, people pay for tickets, and you're just defrauding consumers. Be careful, someone might call 315 (China's consumer rights hotline) and report you; they'll definitely win.

Fourth, it is necessary to have professional and technical personnel and management staff who are consistent with the museum's mission. This requirement is for the proper management of private museums. Otherwise, if you turn a perfectly good museum into a hotel, wouldn't that damage its image?

The fifth rule is the code of conduct that all public places must follow, which is that they must have safety and fire protection facilities that meet national regulations. This point needs no further explanation.

The sixth point is a legal issue, which is also particularly important: museums can independently bear civil liability. If any problems arise with the collections, the relevant departments will hold you accountable.

Additionally, it should be noted that non-state-owned museums are generally not allowed to include words such as "China," "Chinese," or "National" in their names (abbreviated as "China").

However, there is a special side to the matter. If you feel that your collection is profound and can represent traditional Chinese culture, and that the word "China" is not enough to represent your museum, then you can submit an application, which will be reviewed and approved by the Office of the Central Institutional Organization Commission in conjunction with the State Council's cultural heritage administration department.

However, under normal circumstances, it is very difficult for private museums to be approved. For example, the museum that Mr. Pian'erbai opened around 2000 is called: BJ Muming Tang Ancient Porcelain Specimen Museum.

The museum that Mr. Ma Weidu, the first person in China to open a private museum, officially opened on January 18, 1997, was not named with the character "国" (Guo, meaning country/state). Instead, it was called Guanfu Classical Art Museum. Although the museum's location has changed many times since then and it has opened several branches in Xiamen and Hangzhou, the name has always remained the same.

Don't these two want to give their pavilion a name that starts with "China"? Absolutely not. Having "China" in the name would be so prestigious! The problem is, it simply won't get approved.

Zhuang Rui continued reading. The outlines of the Ministry of Culture and Beijing City were roughly similar, but Beijing City was much more detailed in terms of the specific rules and required documents.

The Beijing Municipal Museum Ordinance sets forth clear requirements for museum directors: they must have a bachelor's degree or above and at least two years of experience in museum management.

"Damn it, besides state-owned museums, who among private museums has experience?"

Upon seeing this, Zhuang Rui frowned slightly and cursed in annoyance.

If this museum can be established, Zhuang Rui will definitely be the museum director without question. However, his more than two years of experience in museum management is holding him back. Does he have to hire someone else to be the director?

Qin Xuanbing, who had been sitting next to Zhuang Rui and studying the regulations with him, gently nudged him and said, "Zhuang Rui, what's the rush? Keep reading..."

"Hmm? Or someone with expertise in a related field could also serve as a museum director, that's more like it..."

With this in mind, things become much easier. Zhuang Rui has earned the title of "King of Jadeite in the North" in the jade industry, and he also holds a position in the National Jade Association. He should be considered to have expertise in this field, right?

Where should we choose the address?

After solving this problem, Zhuang Rui was still scratching his head. Without a doubt, if he wanted his future museum to attract more tourists, the first location to choose was Beijing, where the flow of people was unmatched by any other city in China.

However, land prices in Beijing are high. Even if Zhuang Rui had another 30 to 50 million yuan, it probably wouldn't be enough to buy land to build a museum, unless he drove it beyond the Seventh Ring Road. But if that were the case, probably not many people would visit it.

Zhuang Rui's idea to open a museum was not a spur-of-the-moment decision. He had been thinking about it for a long time. Rather than letting those national treasures rot in the basement, he thought it would be better to bring them out so that the Chinese people could truly experience the profound and extensive ancient culture of China.

So since he was going to do it anyway, Zhuang Rui didn't plan to rent a house to renovate. He wanted to go all the way and buy the land directly to build, so that security and prevention measures could be strengthened from the beginning.

It's just a short-term matter. Asking Zhuang Rui to acquire a piece of land is really beyond his capabilities. He wants both a good location and a cheap price. Although he has a keen eye for antiques, when it comes to land speculation and buying houses, Zhuang Rui is just as clueless as the old ladies selling vegetables at the market.

However, the first thing you need to do when applying for a private museum permit is submit proof of the right to use the premises. Without this, how can you display your antiques on the street? So the premises become the most important thing.

"Oh? Right, how could I forget about that..."

Zhuang Rui suddenly slapped his thigh, his mind turning to Ouyang Jun again.

"Damn it, who's got their eye on me again?"

Ouyang Jun, who was driving home with his wife thousands of miles away, sneezed unexpectedly, and then his phone rang.

"Fourth Brother, are you done with your work? I need your help with something small..."

Zhuang Rui was afraid that Ouyang Jun would hang up, so he got straight to the point and said that he had something to do. People in Beijing care about face, and even if they weren't relatives, Ouyang Jun probably wouldn't have the nerve to hang up. Zhuang Rui had a good grasp of Ouyang Jun's intentions.

"What is it? Speak up! Achoo! Were you just talking about me?"

Ouyang Jun rolled down the car window a little, afraid that he might catch a cold and infect his wife, who was pregnant with their son.

"Fourth Brother, is the sales office for our housing development finished yet? I saw it last time and the interior design was quite nice."

Zhuang Rui's words left Ouyang Jun somewhat bewildered. His younger brother had always avoided real estate projects like the plague, so why was he suddenly asking about the project?

Despite his doubts, Ouyang Jun replied, "It's finished, and it's already on sale. Brother, let me tell you, our development is absolutely a hit. I guarantee that within the entire Third Ring Road of Beijing, there's no better property than ours. Plus, there's a villa area there, which is even more..."

"Stop, stop, Fourth Brother, I know we made a fortune on that house. You've done a lot of work for us. When it comes to the shares, please give me a bigger share, just give me a smaller one. I can't accept something for nothing..."

When Zhuang Rui heard Ouyang Jun boasting on the phone, he quickly interrupted him. This brother of his had been under the strict control of the big star Xu recently and generally didn't have time to go out and fool around. He didn't even have many people to talk to. If he were caught by Xu, Ouyang Jun could talk about even the smallest thing for two hours straight.

"Hey kid, what's up? When did you become so humble?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Ouyang Jun immediately became alert. There are always people who complain about not having enough money, but no one who complains about having too much. He wondered what Zhuang Rui was up to by saying such a thing.

Chapter 592 Private Museum (Part 2)

"Hehe, Fourth Brother, I have something to ask you. Could you leave me a few rooms in that house we built?"

Zhuang Rui's words struck Ouyang Jun as odd. He slowly pulled the car over to the side of the road and parked, saying, "Those houses won't be available for sale until almost the end of the year. What's the rush? Besides, you're the second-largest shareholder. Even if it's thirty or fifty units, you can choose whatever you want..."

Ouyang Jun felt that Zhuang Rui was acting a bit strange today. He had just asked about the museum application process, and now he was asking about the house. Suddenly, an idea popped into his head, and he said, "Hey kid, you're not thinking of using this house to build a museum, are you? Let me tell you, don't even think about it. The blueprints are all designed, and they won't change them because of you..."

"Fourth Brother, how could that be? Even if I were confused, I couldn't possibly build a museum on a ten-story building..."

Seeing that Ouyang Jun had seen through his little scheme, Zhuang Rui simply said, "Fourth Brother, I don't want the residential property, but there's such a large empty space in our sales center. Give it to me. It's on the outskirts of the community; I can build a museum there, and it'll even attract more people to our neighborhood..."

Zhuang Rui had been dragged to the construction site by Ouyang Jun. The sales center there was quite large, with three floors and a building area of nearly 20,000 square meters. It was decorated in a lavish, opulent style, and even had a scaled-down model of the actual development, making it look very high-end. 🏠👁️ 69hù(X).com 😊🐱

Zhuang Rui was quite puzzled at the time. Why build a sales center so nicely? He could understand hiring some pretty girls to sell the properties and attract customers, but building such a large and beautifully decorated sales center that would be useless in the future made Zhuang Rui quite critical.

However, this is also good. The structure and area of the sales office are more than enough to be converted into a private museum. Although it cannot compare to the 200,000 square meters of the National Museum, 20,000 square meters is already quite large for a private museum. It can probably be considered the largest private museum in China.

Although Zhuang Rui's collection is relatively small at present, all the items he has are of the finest quality, and he can gradually add more in the future. Zhuang Rui intends to turn it into a top-tier private museum in China, and he also plans to apply for a national-level designation. He's not going to do it at all, but if he's going to do it, he'll do it the best!

"Where is there any space next to the sales center? It'll all be green space in the future, and they're going to build a swimming pool there. Where would you find a place to build a museum?"

Ouyang Jun was completely confused by Zhuang Rui's words. That area was all already planned out, and Ouyang Jun didn't recall having any open space left. (69shux.com - Performance)

"Fourth Brother, I didn't mean the area next to the sales center, I mean the sales center itself!"

Upon hearing that Ouyang Jun had misunderstood him, Zhuang Rui quickly corrected him, saying that even if there was open space nearby, Zhuang Rui wouldn't want it; there was no place as convenient as a ready-made one. The sales center could be put into use immediately with minor modifications and the addition of some security facilities.

"What?! You want that sales center?!"

Ouyang Jun finally understood. His voice immediately rose eight octaves, and he slammed his right hand heavily on the steering wheel. Luckily, he had parked the car on the side of the road. If he had been driving on the road, he might have been driven to the brink of death by Zhuang Rui.

"Kid, don't even think about it. I have plans for that area, so don't even think about getting involved..."

Ouyang Jun had a plan for that sales center. He intended to transform it into a high-end clubhouse after the properties were sold out, to provide leisure facilities for the residents. Otherwise, would he have been so foolish as to leave more than 20,000 square meters of that prime real estate empty?

Ouyang Jun never expected that before he could even get things sorted out at his club, Zhuang Rui would already be targeting him. This kid couldn't help with anything, and now he's causing trouble. Ouyang Jun was furious.

“Speak properly, how can you talk to your brother like that...”

Sitting in the passenger seat, Xu Qing couldn't stand it anymore and pinched Ouyang Jun. Speaking of which, the jewelry Zhuang Rui and Ouyang Wan had given them had already bribed the big star. 🙄👉

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"Women rarely deal with business matters..."

Just as Ouyang Jun was about to show off his power, he suddenly noticed the big star's protruding belly and immediately lowered his voice, saying, "Speak properly, I'll speak properly, okay?"

"That's more like it..."

Xu Qing smiled charmingly, and Ouyang Jun's hands immediately became restless. He had just touched the big star's stomach when his hand was slapped away.

"Fourth Brother, it's just a place to sell buildings, right? Once the buildings are sold out, the land will be empty. Why don't you let your younger brother use it? Or, I can give you some shares in exchange, is that alright?"

Putting aside the couple's flirting, Zhuang Rui, who was on the other end of the phone, had finally figured out the museum's address, and he wasn't going to let Ouyang Jun dismiss him with a few words.

"Brother, it's not that I don't want you to use it. We're brothers, why are we talking about money? It's just that I'm keeping that place for my own use. It's already planned out. Aren't you making things difficult for your older brother?"

Ouyang Jun, unusually patient, explained to Zhuang Rui, only doing so out of consideration for his wife.

"Fourth Brother, you already have a clubhouse, so let me use the house. I'm promoting national culture here, and if it becomes popular, your whole neighborhood will benefit..."

Zhuang Rui knew that this club was different from that club, but he deliberately confused the issue and said that the two were the same. Given the current level of development in Beijing, Zhuang Rui really couldn't find a suitable place for him to set up a museum if he didn't go to that place.

"Hey kid, why are you so stubborn? How about I set aside a piece of land for you and build a museum for you..."

Ouyang Jun was a little annoyed. When had he ever spoken to anyone so politely? This whole thing was being made to look like he was begging Zhuang Rui.

"Fourth Brother, it's not that I'm being unreasonable, but I need this museum urgently. Let me tell you, it's like this..."

When Zhuang Rui heard that Ouyang Jun was really angry, he explained on the phone that he had exchanged cultural relics with the Guimet Museum, and especially emphasized that the items he wanted to exchange were all looted by the Eight-Nation Alliance more than a hundred years ago, and that his actions were truly bringing glory to the country.

Zhuang Rui knew that even though Ouyang Jun was almost forty, he truly inherited his grandfather's sense of national mission. If he explained the matter clearly, Ouyang Jun would definitely jump up and down.

Ouyang Jun grew up in Beijing. From elementary school to high school, the school would organize a trip to the Yuanmingyuan ruins every spring. When he was a child, Ouyang Jun often stomped his feet and cursed the Eight-Nation Alliance there.

Sure enough, after Zhuang Rui explained the reason, there was silence on the other end of the phone. After a short while, Ouyang Jun's voice rang out: "Damn it, those foreign devils are all the same. Brother, if you can bring back a lot of stuff, then I'll let you have the club..."

"Fourth Brother, you must keep your word. But this matter has put you in a difficult position. Let's count my 40% share as 30%, and I'll go back and change the paperwork with you..."

A plot of land of nearly 20,000 square meters, even at 10,000 yuan per square meter, would be worth 200 million yuan. Zhuang Rui didn't want to take advantage of this for nothing, and it would be more convenient to register the property as his own in the future.

"Ten percent? Okay, you're really rich, kid. That's settled then..."

Zhuang Rui's 40% stake will be worth more than 2 billion yuan after the market opens. Zhuang Rui gave away nearly 500 million yuan at once, which is quite a generous move. Ouyang Jun's original feeling that he had been extorted by Zhuang Rui again suddenly felt a little better.

"Hey, Fourth Brother, turning that land into a museum will require your help. It would be best if you could get busy these next few days and help me with the museum application procedures..."

Zhuang Rui knew that if he were to handle these approvals himself, it would take three to five months to get them done smoothly. It would be too foolish not to use the rightful heir to the Ministry of Culture.

"Take Wei Ming to handle this. Give him the information, and I'll put in a good word for him later. But let's make it clear first, the first floor will still be used for sales for now. I'll have Wei Ming find someone to renovate the second and third floors. Anyway, you just need a name for it right now. At the latest, it'll be cleared out for you in three months..."

After listening to Zhuang Rui's words, Ouyang Jun thought for a moment and nodded in agreement. Zhuang Rui's matter was not a big deal; it was just applying for a private museum. As long as he met the requirements, it would be a piece of cake for Ouyang Jun to put in a good word for him.

"Okay, thank you, Fourth Brother!"

Zhuang Rui was overjoyed upon hearing this. With a location for the museum secured, the rest would be much easier.

"Wait, something's not right..."

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui felt something was off. He was the second largest shareholder of that land, and he couldn't possibly acquire the sales office at the market price, could he? If he bought it at the development price, the cost would probably be only about one-fifth of what he had calculated. Had he been too generous just now?

However, having already made that boast, Zhuang Rui couldn't go back on his word. He could only smile wryly and accept it reluctantly. In truth, he didn't care much. Once he had a lot of money, it was just a number in the bank.

With the house settled, Zhuang Rui finally felt relieved. He found a blank sheet of paper and began calculating his current net worth. You see, according to Beijing's regulations, applying for a private museum requires submitting a catalog of the collection.

If you want to apply for a private museum with the name "Guo" (国) in your name, the catalog of your collection is particularly important, as there are certain requirements regarding the quantity of national first-class cultural relics.

After listing them on paper, Zhuang Rui realized that he already had quite a few nice items.

According to the national standards for classifying cultural relics, the paintings and calligraphy by Giuseppe Castiglione and the Qing Dynasty imperial porcelain obtained from gambling in Hong Kong should all be listed as national second-class protected cultural relics.

The Longshan Culture black pottery jar, the Dingguang sword that I just acquired, the three-legged ding I bought in Jinan, and the Ru kiln porcelain I found in Pingzhou, among other items, should definitely be listed as national first-class protected cultural relics.

Chapter 593 Auction (Part 1)

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and simply listed all the items, including the blue-and-white porcelain jar depicting Guiguzi descending the mountain (currently belonging to Ezkena) and the white jade tiger belonging to the Guimet Museum. Having a large number of national first-class protected cultural relics in the application would be beneficial for the approval process.

In addition, Zhuang Rui also included Huangfu Yun's batch of antique swords and knives, as agreed beforehand. With over 20,000 square meters of exhibition space, Zhuang Rui's collection alone is simply not enough to showcase the entire collection.

However, Zhuang Rui will definitely not open the entire exhibition hall at the beginning. He will open the museum to a limited extent based on the actual collection, and gradually add items. Rome wasn't built in a day, and this museum will also need to be gradually enriched.

Moreover, once the museum opens, it can collect artifacts from the antique world. The ownership of these collected artifacts still belongs to their original owners. Zhuang Rui simply signs an agreement with them and then displays them in the museum. Of course, Zhuang Rui will have to pay some fees for this.

With the museum's location secured, the current issue is the quantity of its collection. Huangfu Yun's collection of antique swords and knives, including those from domestic and international collections, totals over three hundred.

Adding to the dozens of antiques in Zhuang Rui's possession, although the quantity still feels a bit small, the quality is not low. There are as many as 10 national first-class protected cultural relics alone. In addition, Zhuang Rui plans to keep a few Picasso sketches and apply for a museum name with the word "national" in it, which doesn't seem too bad.

Furthermore, among these are several objects of great significance, such as the "Dingguang Sword" and the bronze "Elephant Zun" that did not yet belong to Zhuang Rui. These are national treasures, and even some famous state-owned museums may not have such collections.

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After compiling the list, Zhuang Rui called Wei Ming, faxed the list over, and then discussed it with Wei Ming on the phone.

To apply for a private museum license, you'll need to complete a registration application form, museum bylaws, exhibition outline, proof of premises usage rights, proof of funding, and academic credentials for the curator and key technical staff, as well as resumes, among other documents.

The registration application form and museum bylaws, including the exhibition outline, are easy to obtain. The Beijing Museum should have readily available materials. Ouyang Jun can simply make a small request, and Wei Ming can just copy a similar one.

As for the land use certificate for the museum site, it should be fine to use the developer's name as a guarantor. As for the proof of funds, Zhuang Rui gave Wei Ming his Euro account information. When the museum verified the funds, his several million Euros were not a small amount.

However, the lack of academic qualifications for the museum's professional staff was a bit of a headache for Zhuang Rui. In the end, Wei Ming came up with an idea: to temporarily recruit staff from several schools in Beijing that offered museum programs. As long as the pay was good, this problem could be solved.

Finally, it's Zhuang Rui's own business. To become the curator, one needs qualifications, but this is no problem for Zhuang Rui. He simply asked the National Jade Association to issue a certificate proving that he is an expert in jade identification, thus making him a truly deserving curator.

"Mr. Zhuang, what would be a good name for our museum?"

After discussing the matter to the last minute, Wei Ming finally asked the question. With Ouyang Jun, such a powerful figure, there shouldn't be any major problems with the procedures, but the museum still needs a name, right?

"name?"

Zhuang Rui was taken aback. He had been so focused on the details that he hadn't thought about the name of the museum. In fact, it was a difficult name to come up with because Zhuang Rui's collection was too diverse, including ceramics, ancient paintings, bronzes, and ancient swords, making it impossible to name it by category.

"The Xuanrui Museum in China? Damn, no way, I'm still young, I'm not going to visit a museum that early..."

Zhuang Rui thought of a name, but immediately rejected it. What kind of place is a museum? It's a place for people to visit and admire. Using your own name would be like cursing yourself, wouldn't it?

"Zhuang Rui, how about we call it the Dingguang Museum? Isn't the Dingguang Sword you have the most valuable thing?"

Seeing Zhuang Rui scratching his head in frustration, Qin Xuanbing couldn't help but suggest a name.

"Dingguang? The China Dingguang Museum?"

Zhuang Rui read it aloud, finding it quite natural. He wasn't particularly concerned about the name, and immediately said into the microphone, "President Wei, let's call it Dingguang Museum. It would be best if we could add 'China,' but if that's not possible, don't force it. How about Beijing Dingguang Museum?"

"Okay, Mr. Zhuang, don't worry, this matter should be resolved in three to five days. I'll call you back later..."

Although Zhuang Rui's official title in the company was Assistant General Manager, and he was under Wei Ming's direct supervision, Wei Ming knew that Zhuang Rui was the second boss of the real estate company. Therefore, he did not dare to be arrogant and respectfully took over the matter. In any case, he did not need to do anything. With Ouyang Jun's instructions, he only needed to send someone to handle the matter.

After hanging up the phone with Wei Ming, Zhuang Rui originally wanted to call Professor Bass, but after thinking about it, he decided that he couldn't appear too hasty. The meaning of "rare commodity" is to have what others don't have, so that others can ask for it and offer a high price.

After finishing all these things, Zhuang Rui and Qin Xuanbing went downstairs to the restaurant for a meal for two. Peng Fei wasn't so lucky; he stayed in the guest room with Bai Shi, eating the takeout that Zhuang Rui had brought up. Of course, the food was pretty good, but... the person he was dining with was a bit... well, you know.

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"Brother Zhuang, you're late! Luckily, the auction hasn't started yet. Let's hurry inside..."

The next morning at 9 o'clock, Zhuang Rui brought Qin Xuanbing to the venue where the Paris Chinese Art Auction was being held.

Huangfu Yun had been waiting at the door for more than half an hour. When he saw Zhuang Rui, he grabbed him and pulled him inside, handing him a number plate. This was something he had applied for for Zhuang Rui in advance. For this auction number, a deposit of 100,000 euros was required. Of course, this deposit was refundable after the auction.

"What's the rush? We're not planning to make a move anyway, so being a little late won't matter..."

Zhuang Rui was quite excited because the museum matter was finalized yesterday. He and Qin Xuanbing did some exercise last night, which was quite intense and difficult, so they woke up late this morning. If Qin Xuanbing hadn't also wanted to see the artifact auction, Zhuang Rui wouldn't have wanted to come.

"Hmm? Brother Huangfu, what's wrong with you?"

After Zhuang Rui finished speaking, he noticed that Huangfu Yun's expression was a little off, so he couldn't help but ask.

"Hey, brother, yesterday I saw a waist knife marked 'Made in the Qianlong Period,' and I felt it looked like Emperor Qianlong's personal sword, so I snapped it up..."

Huangfu Yun went around persuading domestic buyers not to bid at this auction, warning them not to fall into the trap of the auction house and the owner's rigged bidding tactics. But in the end, he himself bid on an item, and he couldn't help but feel a little embarrassed.

Zhuang Rui smiled and shook his head. He could understand how collectors felt when they saw the real thing. He didn't say much, but simply asked, "How much did you pay for it?"

Seeing that Zhuang Rui didn't blame him, Huangfu Yun's face relaxed a little, and he said, "The starting price was 6,000 euros, but I won the bid for 220,000 euros. Including the handling fees, the total cost was about 2.6 million RMB..."

"Sword collecting isn't very popular, so even if you sell and raise the price, it doesn't matter. I believe international speculators aren't targeting this area, Brother Huangfu, it's alright..."

Zhuang Rui comforted Huangfu Yun, saying that what he said was true. Sword collecting is a relatively niche market, and generally no one would deliberately inflate prices because there are few collectors. If the price were over-inflated, the item would be stuck with a bad investment.

The three of them talked as they passed through the verification at the entrance of the auction house and entered the auction hall.

Unlike the blond-haired, blue-eyed foreigners he saw outside, Zhuang Rui saw many black-haired, yellow-skinned faces as soon as he entered the hall. Looking around, he realized that out of the more than 100 people in the auction hall, 70 or 80 would be Asian or Chinese.

However, most of those people were in their forties or fifties. After seeing Zhuang Rui and Qin Xuanbing, they looked at them for a while. It was rare for a young person like Zhuang Rui to participate in such an international auction, unless he was entrusted by some reclusive tycoons who did not want to show their faces.

As for Huangfu Yun, these people were quite familiar with him. In recent years, they had often seen him at such international auctions. As they walked to their seats, people would greet Huangfu Yun from time to time.

Of course, some people pulled Huangfu Yun aside to ask about Zhuang Rui's background, but Huangfu Yun gave vague answers. Zhuang Rui had a buzz cut at the moment, which was quite different from his image when he appeared on CCTV a few months ago, so no one could recognize him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am Jefferson Downey, the auctioneer for this auction. I am delighted that you are all here to attend this special auction of Chinese art. Yesterday, we successfully auctioned eighteen precious Chinese artworks. I believe today's auction will be even more successful..."

About five minutes after Zhuang Rui and the others sat down, a white auctioneer walked to the front of the auction stage and delivered an opening speech in fluent French and English, which was met with sparse applause from the audience.

Actually, yesterday's situation was not as Jefferson described. It is true that eighteen Chinese antiques were auctioned off, but fifteen of them were bought by people arranged by the auction house.

Otherwise, only three lots would probably have been sold yesterday. Jefferson wasn't the main auctioneer yesterday; as an internationally renowned auctioneer, he came to help out today.

Chapter 594 Auction (Part 2)

An auctioneer, also known as a registered auctioneer, is a professional qualification title for hosting auction events.

A skilled auctioneer, after optimizing the combination of items to be auctioned, can determine the best bidding strategy. Coupled with creating a lively atmosphere, they often achieve unexpected results in the bidding process.

What you see is the auctioneer presiding over the bidding at the auction, which is only the final stage of the entire auction process. In reality, the auctioneer's work goes far beyond that.

First, the auctioneer must participate in the collection of items and the signing of consignment contracts. They must also have a detailed understanding of the items to ensure that buyers are well-informed and can effectively guide the bidding process. Next, the auctioneer is involved in attracting buyers, which is one of the more complex aspects of the auction process. Auction houses typically use various channels to disseminate information, such as media announcements. It's not about having as many buyers as possible, but rather about having buyers who are a good fit for the auction items.

Therefore, an excellent auctioneer should have a good grasp of the auction items. Before entering the auction, they should be able to predict which items will be sought after, roughly estimate the maximum value of each item, and even know who the potential buyers of each item will be.

An auctioneer's income depends primarily on the auction house they work for. Of course, their reputation also plays a role; therefore, auctioneers often enhance their value and attract clients' attention through numerous successful live auctions.

In China, the highest-paid auctioneers earn around 100,000 yuan, while the average auctioneer earns between 40,000 and 70,000 yuan. Of course, in some poorly performing auction houses, auctioneers' incomes will be even lower.

Some well-known auctioneers do not work for a particular auction house; instead, they work as freelancers and specialize in hosting top-tier auctions.

Jefferson, a top auctioneer in the international auction world, earns substantial commissions from auction houses while most auctioneers barely make ends meet, a testament to his exceptional auctioning skills. This is undoubtedly due to his outstanding auctioning expertise.

The highest honor for an auctioneer is to receive the "white glove" award. Being awarded the white glove is the highest honor for an auctioneer, signifying that a special auction has achieved a 100% sell-through rate.

A white glove signifies high recognition from others, so if you obtain a "white glove," your status is like that of an Oscar-winning actor in the auction industry, and your income will be very considerable.

Jefferson is a three-time white glove winner, a feat unmatched in the current international auction world. Therefore, the auction committee specially invited Jefferson to preside over the auction, despite the low sales volume yesterday.

Yesterday's auction was a complete failure. Of the twenty-four items, six went unsold, and the remaining eighteen were either bought by the owners themselves or by agents of the auction house. The organizing committee, which had been preparing for several months, was extremely dissatisfied and fired the auctioneer who was made a scapegoat on the spot.

"Chinese artworks occupy an important position in the international art market, and their value has appreciated rapidly in recent years. If I weren't short of money, I would definitely be sitting here today competing with you ladies for business..."

Jefferson, as expected of a world-class auctioneer, did not rush into the main topic after the auction began. Instead, he stood on the stage and chatted idly. His humorous remarks drew laughter from the audience from time to time, which immediately eased the tense atmosphere before the auction.

"Alright, I'm sure you're all getting impatient. You're probably thinking to yourself that I've wasted everyone's time. Now, let's get into the Chinese art auction!"

Jefferson suddenly changed the subject, drawing everyone's attention to the auction. The first item for the day was brought to the table in front of the auction stage by a staff member wearing white gloves. From the old rosewood scroll and the yellowed, curled paper, everyone could tell it was an ancient painting.

"Our first lot today is an oil painting by Giuseppe Castiglione, a Chinese court painter from 300 years ago, which comes from the Frey family collection."

This is a portrait of an imperial concubine from ancient China, embodying the gentleness and grace of Eastern women; it is the "Half-length Portrait of Consort Chunhui".

After authentication by multiple experts from France and China, it has been confirmed that it is indeed a work by Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining), without any forgery, and is one of the three verifiable works by Castiglione in the world today!

Jefferson's words caused a stir in the room. No one who came to the auction expected that Jefferson would bring out the item that was originally scheduled to be the fifth lot ahead of time. This caught those who intended to bid for the painting off guard.

Normally, auctions produce brochures to promote the lots and the auction order, and buyers use these brochures to focus on the items they want. However, Jefferson broke with convention by making the order chaotic, which immediately made some people interested in the painting nervous.

"It is said that after Emperor Qianlong painted this portrait of his concubine, he forbade anyone to see it, and he only saw it three times in his entire life."

This oil painting of an ancient emperor's concubine has a starting bid of 100,000 euros, with each bid increasing by 20,000 euros. Perhaps with just one bid, you could acquire the rights an emperor could enjoy and add this painting to your personal possession...

It seems Jefferson put a lot of effort into this painting, bringing up stories about the Qianlong Emperor and speaking with great persuasiveness, causing the audience to whisper among themselves.

Jefferson was very satisfied with the effect. The reason he asked the painting to be auctioned in advance was because he considered the Chinese people's fervent pursuit of ancient emperors' items. Although it was just a portrait, it was still worth it because it depicted the emperor's woman. Maybe some people with special hobbies would like to fantasize about the painting?

"Alright, the auction begins now. The starting bid is 100,000 euros. Anyone interested, please place your bid..."

With Jefferson's words, the second day of the Paris Chinese Art Auction officially began.

Just like on the first day, there was a nearly one-minute silence after Jefferson called out the price. No one made a bid. The Chinese people who came to participate in this auction were all highly intelligent, and after being reminded by Huangfu Yun, they became much more rational.

Seeing this, Jefferson still had a smile on his face, but his left little finger curled up almost imperceptibly, which happened to fall into the eyes of a white man sitting in the front row of the auction.

"I'll offer 100,000 euros..."

Upon receiving Jefferson's prompting, the white man immediately raised the number in his hand.

"Okay, Mr. Number 12 has bid 100,000 euros. Oh, I didn't expect Chinese art to be so captivating. This must be a British friend who also loves Chinese art so much."

Anyone else bidding? There are quite a few items up for auction today. If not, then congratulations to this British friend, you're about to acquire a concubine of the Chinese emperor! Okay, first time..."

As Jefferson spoke, he actually struck the gavel once. After three strikes, no one expected that Jefferson would strike the gavel so casually without even looking at the reactions of the audience.

Jefferson's behavior was quite different from that of other auctioneers. While other auctioneers would deliberately extend the auction of a work indefinitely in order to fetch a higher price, Jefferson did the opposite. He seemed eager to proceed with the next auction, leaving little time for the audience.

Jefferson's final statement seemed to intentionally or unintentionally omit the fact that it was a painting, directly proclaiming that whoever bid for the work would gain the emperor's concubine, which aroused some of the indignation among the Chinese audience.

"120,000 euros, I'll offer 120,000 euros..."

As Jefferson swung his hammer, seemingly about to bring it down a second time, someone in the audience finally made a bid. Although it was only an increase of 20,000, it made Jefferson, who had been looking calm on stage, finally feel his heart, which had been in his throat, settle down.

"I think it would be amazing to be able to buy a work by Giuseppe Castiglione from over 300 years ago for 120,000 euros. Are there any other bidders?"

Jefferson was reminding everyone in the room that the painting was worth far more than 120,000 euros. Although everyone knew his intention, they were all eager to participate, and even Zhuang Rui had the urge to raise his paddle.

It is important to know that very few of Giuseppe Castiglione's authentic works have survived. Before this one, only two works could be confirmed, one in the Palace Museum in Beijing and the other in the Musée du Maler in Dole, France.

The price of Lang Shining's works should be between 10 million and 20 million. 120,000 euros is only about 1.2 million RMB, which is really a bargain in the eyes of most people.

"140,000 euros!"

A middle-aged Chinese man sitting in front of Zhuang Rui raised his sign, but his bid was not high, showing some restraint.

"160,000 euros..."

"180,000 euros..."

"I'll offer 220,000 euros..."

"280,000, I'll offer 280,000 euros..."

As one person raised the price, the herd mentality of Chinese people finally erupted. In the first two bids, the price only increased by 20,000 euros, but later, the price increased by 40,000 and 80,000 euros.

"280,000, bidder number 21 offered 280,000. Oh, that price is outdated. Bidder number 78 offered 360,000. The current price is 360,000. Anyone else bidding?"

Jefferson felt that the situation was under his control. He stood on the stage with ease, and although he didn't talk as much as before, the price of the painting continued to rise.

Chapter 595 Auction (Part 2)

Huangfu Yun has a wide network of connections in the international auction market, especially in auctions featuring Chinese cultural relics. He has attended many such auctions in recent years, so he knows most collectors of Chinese antiques both domestically and internationally.

Before the auction began, Huangfuyun rallied a group of people to boycott the Chinese art auction in Paris, at the very least to prevent foreigners from cheating them with a "rolling ball" trick.

Huangfu Yun's efforts in connecting the market were quite effective. In yesterday's auction, only three items were actually sold, while the remaining dozen or so antiques were bought by foreigners with blond hair and blue eyes. Everyone saw this and understood why.

However, the situation yesterday was partly due to the auctioneer's poor management, but it was also related to the types of artifacts auctioned. Most of the items auctioned yesterday were relatively niche, such as swords, bamboo and wood carvings, and ivory and horn artifacts. There are not many collectors of these items, so it is understandable that many items went unsold.

However, Jefferson's adjustments today caught everyone off guard, and the starting price for the "Portrait of Consort Chunhui" was outrageously low. Even those who hadn't originally been interested in the painting were swayed by the price and started bidding.

"400,000 euros..."

"480,000 euros..."

"620,000, I'll offer 620,000 euros..."

The price war continues. The oil painting "Bust of Consort Chunhui," which had a starting bid of only 100,000 euros, has now increased sixfold, and judging from the trend, no one is willing to concede, so the price continues to rise.

"Damn, this Jefferson's got some skills. No wonder he's the auction house's front man..."

When Huangfu Yun saw that the collectors who had sworn to him just a few days ago that they would never make a move were now fighting tooth and nail, he couldn't help but mutter a curse under his breath.

"Brother Huangfu, this won't do. If we keep raising the price, I'm afraid even 2 million euros won't be enough..."

Zhuang Rui frowned. Actually, he had originally intended to make a move, but before he could decide, the price skyrocketed.

"780,000 euros! Buyer number 123 has offered 780,000 euros. Are there any other bidders? If no one else bids, congratulations to buyer number 123! This painting, according to our professional appraisal, is worth over 1 million euros..."

When the price reached 780,000 euros, the auction room fell silent. However, Jefferson was not in a hurry. This phenomenon was normal. As soon as someone else made another bid, everyone would immediately start bidding, just like before.

If no one bids, aren't there still his skills sitting below? So Jefferson calmly continued to tempt the crowd with words. What he said was true: the minimum appraised value for Lang Shining's work was 1.2 million euros.

"800,000 euros..."

Finally, after more than a minute of silence, someone started bidding again, but this time the bids were only 20,000 euros. The buyers in the audience all wanted to get the painting at the lowest possible price.

To snag something at an auction, you not only need to outwit the auctioneer, but also to understand the psychology of your fellow bidders. Only by offering a price that is neither too low nor too high, but slightly above others' expectations, can you possibly win the item you desire at the most suitable price.

"Okay, buyer number 132 has offered 800,000 euros. Does anyone want to make another bid?"

Upon hearing someone raise the price, Jefferson was overjoyed. He didn't even need to use his own connections to push the price up; completing the auction was definitely not a problem.

The auction house set a target of 1.2 million euros for the painting for Jefferson. He would receive a commission for any amount exceeding that price. Now, Jefferson is confident that he can sell the painting for a record-breaking 2 million euros.

Generally speaking, for an item priced at €1.2 million, the starting bid should be no less than €500,000. Jefferson defied public opinion and insisted on a starting bid of €100,000, indicating he faced considerable pressure.

But judging from the current situation, Jefferson is completely relieved. He has successfully taken control of the situation. The next question is how much he can raise the price of the painting above the pre-sale price.

"I'm offering 1.2 million euros. Considering the intrinsic value of this antique, this price is quite fair. If someone else makes a bid, I highly suspect that person might be a shill arranged by the auction house."

This was stolen by the Frenchman Fauré back then. The Qing Dynasty's incompetence made us, their descendants, pay for it. I can buy this painting back, but I cannot allow it to be extorted by some people with ulterior motives.

I think we can't let these foreign devils use guns and cannons to force open our country's doors more than a hundred years ago, and now use the things they stole back then to plunder the wealth that rightfully belongs to us!

Suddenly, a clear and powerful voice rang out in the auction hall. Except for the bid of 1.2 million euros, which was said in English, the rest of the words were spoken in Chinese. The resounding words echoed in the huge auction hall for a long time.

Everyone understands the logic, but no one has ever said such a thing at an auction. These words shocked all the Chinese people in the room, and they all stood up and looked in the direction from which the voice came.

The person who stood up and spoke just now was Zhuang Rui. At this moment, Zhuang Rui calmly cupped his hands in greeting to the four directions, then sat back down, his face expressionless, showing neither anger nor joy.

Who is this young man?

"I don't know, they're so young. They seem to have come with Huangfu Yun. I'll ask around later..."

"This person looks familiar, like I've seen him somewhere before..."

"Hey, China is so big, have you seen everyone?"

"Anyone who can afford 1.2 million euros, which is over 1,000 RMB, must be someone of importance. I'm not bidding on this painting..."

"I'm not going to call it anymore. What's the point of fighting over something between our own people?"

"Yes, the foreigners got it for nothing. I'm not going to call this painting anymore..."

After Zhuang Rui spoke, the room became noisy. Everyone was expressing their opinions, and many people were asking about Zhuang Rui's background. However, Zhuang Rui rarely appeared in auctions, so no one knew him.

However, although no one knew Zhuang Rui, it didn't mean they couldn't judge the accuracy of his words. Just as Zhuang Rui said, the painting was worth at most around 1.2 million euros. If they raised the price further, they would indeed be doing the auction house a favor.

Even those who originally liked the painting and had ample financial resources were embarrassed to raise the price further after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. If they did, they might be criticized behind their backs.

Of course, some people suspect that Zhuang Rui's motive for saying this was to prevent others from raising the price, but who could blame him for not thinking of such a method? Now he can only accept it with a heavy heart.

In an instant, the Chinese buyers in the room reached a consensus without any communication: no one would continue bidding on the oil painting "Portrait of Consort Chunhui".

"Ladies and gentlemen, please be quiet. Buyer number 156 has offered 1.2 million euros. Does anyone else have a bid? To reiterate, buyer number 156 has offered 1.2 million euros. Does anyone else have a bid?"

Jefferson, standing in front of the auction stage, only understood Zhuang Rui's initial bid, but he didn't understand a single word of the Chinese that followed. However, Zhuang Rui's words caused a stir in the room, and Jefferson had a bad feeling. He guessed that Zhuang Rui hadn't said anything nice.

Sure enough, after Jefferson stopped the murmurs from the audience, no matter how eloquently he spoke, not a single Chinese buyer in the audience was willing to raise their bidding paddle. Jefferson's smile also became somewhat stiff.

"Quickly check that out. I need the information for buyer number 156. Also, please translate what he just said..."

Jefferson tilted his head slightly, turned his mouth away from the microphone on the auction stage, and used the miniature microphone hanging by his ear to communicate with the auction organizing committee. Zhuang Rui had not participated in the auction yesterday, so Jefferson had not paid much attention to this auction number.

"Brother, you're amazing! You're incredible!"

Huangfu Yun, who was sitting next to Zhuang Rui, did not expect Zhuang Rui to suddenly stand up and make such a statement. He was stunned for two or three minutes before he could react. Only after the room quieted down did he give Zhuang Rui a thumbs up.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the "white-glove" auctioneer on stage looked extremely displeased, while the Chinese collectors in the audience were overjoyed.

Just now, they were caught off guard and instigated by that foreigner to bid against each other. Now that they have come to their senses, they naturally realize that they have fallen into that foreigner's trap. Seeing Jefferson get the short end of the stick, they are naturally extremely pleased.

"Zhuang Rui, is this painting worth that much money?"

Qin Xuanbing asked quietly from the side. Qin Xuanbing also knew that Zhuang Rui was short of money recently. 1.2 million euros was more than 12 million RMB.

"It's worth it, anything under 2 million euros..."

Zhuang Rui replied in a low voice. Although he was sitting far from the display stand, he was still within the range of spiritual energy observation. Zhuang Rui had already detected the authenticity of the painting through spiritual energy and confirmed that it was indeed an authentic work by Giuseppe Castiglione.

According to China's cultural relic classification system, Lang Shining's oil paintings could definitely be rated as second-class protected cultural relics. Zhuang Rui's museum is currently penniless, so it will not let go of these items.

Chapter 596 and Chapters 649-650: The Bottom Line (Part 1 & 2)

The national classification of cultural relics is quite strict. For example, the works of Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining) can only be classified as second-class national protected cultural relics, but their collection and market value is still considerable.

Putting aside everything else, among all the museums in China, only the Palace Museum has a collection of Lang Shining's works, which is quite rare. However, including this one, Zhuang Rui already has three or four of Lang Shining's oil paintings. If he could exchange all of Lang Shining's works from the Guimet Museum for his own, he could open a separate exhibition hall in his own museum.

This is also one of the main reasons why Zhuang Rui took action. A museum should have some unique features, and works by Qing Dynasty court painters are certainly something worth showing.

Moreover, although Lang Shining's oil paintings are far inferior to Picasso's works, and are worth at most one or two million euros on the international market, they can easily fetch twenty or thirty million RMB in China. If Zhuang Rui can acquire them for 1.2 million euros, it will definitely be a sure thing.

"Damn it, how can there be a nationalist..."

Jefferson, who was on stage, had already received the translation through his earpiece and understood the meaning behind Zhuang Rui's words. Although Zhuang Rui had offered 1.2 million euros, it still annoyed Jefferson, as it was far from the bid he had expected.

"1.2 million euros, anyone else interested? I guarantee this painting of a Qing Dynasty concubine has extremely high collector value. In another year or two, it will definitely sell for over 3 million euros. This is a rare opportunity, please consider it..."

Jefferson continued to use his silver tongue to incite the Chinese collectors in the room. If someone made another bid, the current deadlock could be broken, and Jefferson's intention would be achieved.

However, Jefferson underestimated the influence of Zhuang Rui's words. Although Chinese people like to fight among themselves, the people in this setting were all of relatively high status.

Furthermore, according to Chinese behavioral norms, raising the price after Zhuang Rui made those remarks would clearly be disrespectful to him.

Although Zhuang Rui looks relatively young, there's an old Chinese saying: "Better to deceive an old man than a poor young man." No one who can enter this are simple-minded. Who knows what kind of power Zhuang Rui might have behind him? Leaving a way out for others is the thought of many of the seasoned veterans in the room.

"1.2 million euros, this is the second and final chance, ladies and gentlemen. This is a rare opportunity. If you miss this precious oil painting, we don't know if you'll ever have another chance. Please consider it carefully..."

After a full three minutes, Jefferson reluctantly struck the gavel a second time, making a final effort to urge the Chinese buyers present to participate.

Jefferson didn't want his underdog to raise the price again, but he didn't dare, that's right, he just didn't dare!

This is the first time that Lang Shining's work has been auctioned internationally, and the price is between 1 million and 2 million euros. This price was determined by the auction house's organizing committee after extensive research and evaluation.

The price Zhuang Rui offered was just within people's psychological tolerance limit—not too high, but definitely not too low either. It was like a fishbone stuck in everyone's throat, neither going up nor down, and they were afraid of overpaying if they offered any more.

Jefferson felt the same way, because he hadn't reached an agreement with the owner of the painting beforehand, unlike yesterday's auction items where the auction house had made agreements with the owners before the auction started.

But this painting is different. If I let someone bid and no one else bids, the auction house, for the sake of its reputation, will definitely have to buy the painting myself, and that would be a big problem.

So Jefferson hesitated repeatedly, ultimately refraining from sending a signal to the pawns in the audience. The consequences of such an action were unbearable; if the item went unsold or was won by one of his own, he would have ruined his reputation as a "white glove" (a middleman/proxy).

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your last chance. Otherwise, this painting by Giuseppe Castiglione will belong to buyer number 156..."

"Alright, this painting has already taken up almost half an hour of your time. Let's hurry up and move on to the next one..."

Jefferson had barely finished speaking when he was interrupted by an impatient buyer in the audience. These people were all mature middle-aged men, and having already made their decisions, they would not be swayed by Jefferson's words.

"Alright, congratulations to buyer number 156! Today's first lot, the oil painting 'Portrait of Consort Chunhui' by the Qing court painter Giuseppe Castiglione, is yours..."

Hearing the impatient voices below, Jefferson knew his efforts had been in vain, and that it had taken too long and could not be delayed any longer. With no other choice, he brought down the gavel, and the first item of today's special auction fell into Zhuang Rui's hands.

Although Jefferson offered his congratulations, he didn't show much of a smile. He had originally planned to attract everyone's attention with the first item, but now that attention had been drawn, it

was in the wrong direction. The wealthy Chinese in the room were now more interested in Zhuang Rui than in the item itself.

"Young man, congratulations! You're truly a force to be reckoned with at such a young age. Hmm, why do you look so familiar, young lady?"

A lady sitting in front of Zhuang Rui turned around and smiled kindly at him, but when she looked at Qin Xuanbing, she frowned slightly, as if trying to remember where she had seen Qin Xuanbing before.

Zhuang Rui quickly nodded in return, not worried that Qin Xuanbing would be jealous, because this lady was old enough to be his mother.

"Ms. Zhang, my surname is Qin, and my father is Qin Haoran..."

The woman didn't know Qin Xuanbing, but Qin Xuanbing did, and responded politely.

"Oh...I see, so you're the Qin family's little princess. Why do you look so familiar..."

Ms. Zhang laughed upon hearing this, and continued, "Then this must be Mr. Zhuang? I've heard people mention your name a while ago, but I've never met you before. I didn't expect to meet you here. Not bad, not bad at all. What you said just now was very good..."

"I don't deserve such praise. I have a fiery temper; I'm easily provoked. Seeing these foreign devils using the cultural relics they stole from China to make money off the Chinese people just doesn't sit right with me..."

Zhuang Rui didn't recognize the person in front of him, but judging from his demeanor, he must be a person of importance, and he also looked quite old, so he quickly said a few words of humility.

However, the person Zhuang Rui described was the prototype of Liu Chuan. Zhuang Rui had a lot of personal reasons for buying the painting, but he didn't want people to think he was too scheming, so he had to put on an indignant act.

"Hmm, young man, you are indeed a good match for the Qin family's little princess..."

The woman smiled at Zhuang Rui, then turned away. She had only heard that a young man from the mainland had become the son-in-law of the Qin family and had embarrassed Bao Yugang's son-in-law on the gambling ship. However, she had only heard about it and did not take the matter of the younger generation to heart.

"Xuanbing, who is this?"

Seeing the woman turn around, Zhuang Rui whispered in Qin Xuanbing's ear.

"She's someone important..."

Qin Xuanbing brought her mouth close to Zhuang Rui's ear and said, "Don't underestimate her just because she's a woman. She is a director and vice president of the Hong Kong Chinese General Chamber of Commerce, a director and general manager of Daqing Petroleum Co., Ltd., the general manager of Hong Kong Yongxing Enterprise Co., Ltd., the chairman of the bank investment company, and the chairman of the Enterprise Development Center of the Hong Kong Management Professionals Association."

Her assets, even in Hong Kong, would make her a super-rich person, much wealthier than our family..."

"Is it her? Doesn't she have an older brother named Zhang Zongxian?"

Zhuang Rui paused for a moment after hearing Qin Xuanbing's words, then asked.

Qin Xuanbing gave Zhuang Rui a strange look and said, "Yes, she and her brother are both celebrities in Hong Kong. What, do you know them?"

"I don't know them, but those two siblings are very famous in the collecting circle..."

Zhuang Rui had never met Zhang Yongzhen and her brother, but he had heard many anecdotes about them.

Zhang Yongzhen comes from a family of antique dealers. Her grandfather, Zhang Jiru, was famous for his skill in carving fan ribs. Her father, Zhang Zhongying, was one of the most famous antique dealers in old Shanghai during the Republic of China era. He opened "Juzhenzhai" on the Bund, specializing in antiques. Even renowned ceramic collectors like Qiu Yanzhi frequently visited his "Juzhenzhai".

When Uncle De was teaching Zhuang Rui about antiques, he mentioned "Juzhenzhai" in old Shanghai more than once, often saying that if he were a few years older, he would definitely apply to "Juzhenzhai" to be the manager.

Zhang Yongzhen's brother is Zhang Zongxian, a renowned antique master both at home and abroad. Influenced by her family from a young age, Zhang Yongzhen has always been very interested in traditional Chinese culture and art.

In the mid-1970s, Zhang Yongzhen, along with Fok Ying-tung's second son, Fok Chun-wan, and others, registered and established Hong Kong Daqing Petroleum Company to distribute China Petroleum.

With her extraordinary courage and resourcefulness, Zhang Yongzhen pioneered a 24/7 oil delivery business and established a sound sales network in Hong Kong. She then invested in mainland telecommunications, transportation, commerce, and real estate industries, solidifying her status as a successful businesswoman in Hong Kong and making her assets far exceed those of her brother, Zhang Zongxian.

Zhang Yongzhen's success in her career could not overshadow her reputation in the world of collecting. Her collection of porcelain was largely influenced by her brother, Zhang Zongxian.

At Christie's auction of "Zhang Zongxian's Collection of Porcelain" in November 1999, Zhang Yongzhen became a major buyer: she bought a Qing Kangxi rouge-red enamel lotus bowl for HK\$12.12 million and a Qing Qianlong copper-bodied painted enamel peony vase for HK\$50,000.

After the auction, Zhang Zongxian ran into his sister at a restaurant and said, "I know you have money, but you bought too much. It would have been better to leave some for others to buy. People who don't know the situation might think you were helping me prop up the market."

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This auction of Chinese art held by the Paris auction house invited over one hundred Chinese collectors from around the world, but the total number of participants was less than 200.

It's fair to say that if all the Chinese people in the room had left, the auction would have ended inconclusively.

No matter how much the Chinese people enjoy infighting or how disunited they are, after Zhuang Rui's words, they all stood up and followed behind him, using their silent actions to protest against the auction committee.

Even those who didn't want to leave had no choice but to follow the trend. The distance from the auction stage to the door was only a few dozen meters, and behind Zhuang Rui, who was walking at the front, were more than a hundred people.

Flashbulbs went off continuously in the room. This Paris auction of Chinese art had been protested by the Chinese government and had therefore attracted the attention of many media outlets, with many media organizations sending reporters to cover the auction.

Not only were there media from Paris present, but also news media from China. The huge buzz generated after the first item was sold undoubtedly got these journalists incredibly excited, as if they'd been injected with adrenaline.

"Hey buddy, move aside, you're taking up my spot..." A person holding a camera was pushing the person in front of him.

"Sorry, I got here before you..."

The person in front refused to back down at all. This was big news! It would definitely be on the front page of every major newspaper tomorrow. The photos he took from a good spot would surely fetch a good price. Uh, this person was a freelance journalist.

"Excuse me, could you please move aside..."

At this moment, Zhuang Rui, who was walking at the front of the crowd, was blocked by a group of reporters. Countless flashes were going off in front of him, which made Zhuang Rui a little annoyed. He had just been being a bit of a hothead, so why did it attract so much attention?

"Sir, I'm a reporter from The Times of London. May I have the honor of interviewing you?"

"Hey buddy, that's great! Can I get your number? I'll do an exclusive interview with you later..."

"Hello sir, I'm a reporter from CNN. May I ask you a few simple questions?"

"Hello, I'm a reporter from France Soir. May I ask you a few questions about what you just said?"

In an instant, countless microphones and recorders were shoved to Zhuang Rui's mouth. Some reporters who were further away even climbed onto the backs of their colleagues in front of them, creating an extremely chaotic scene.

"Damn, you need to be healthy to be a reporter..."

Zhuang Rui looked at the people in front of him speechlessly. He was also a little at a loss. He originally just wanted to feel good, but he didn't expect to cause such a big commotion. Judging from the trend, the whole world would probably know what happened today before tomorrow.

"Damn it, God, if these things get reported by the reporters, it will be a huge scandal..."

Richard, who had just been bewildered by Zhuang Rui's reaction, suddenly realized what was happening, but there was nothing he could do; the loss of composure was already out of his control.

"Fire George immediately! I don't know what that pig said to that guy?!"

Poor lawyer George, he was just following his boss's instructions, but now he's the unlucky one.

"It's over, this auction is completely ruined..."

Richard, the auction house owner, slumped back onto the sofa, his face ashen. He hadn't expected that the Chinese, who had never been very united, would be so easily swayed by the young man's words. The effect was even better than that of the auctioneer, Jefferson.

Organizing an auction requires a lot of work beforehand. Printing and advertising the items for sale incurs considerable expenses. Richard had high hopes for this auction, having already spent hundreds of thousands of euros in the preliminary stages. Now it seems likely he'll lose everything.

In addition, he also had to compensate the owners of the items that were offered for auction, because he had signed agreements with some of the items that if they couldn't be sold at a certain minimum price, he would have to buy them himself. As a result, Richard's losses were even greater.

"Richard, now is not the time to assign blame. Let's think about how to calm these Chinese people down first."

Sitting next to Richard was Daniel Handy, a partner at the auction house. Although Daniel was also sweating profusely, he managed to offer a constructive suggestion.

"Yes, yes, Daniel, quickly notify security and ask these Chinese people to go to the conference room to control the situation..."

Upon hearing Daniel's words, Richard jumped up as if waking from a dream. Today's events were like a nightmare for him. He had worked at the auction house for decades and this was the first time he had ever seen such a large-scale walkout by buyers.

After giving instructions over the walkie-talkie, Richard and Daniel hurried downstairs. Expecting Jefferson to control the situation now? That was practically impossible, because poor Jefferson was already shouting himself hoarse on stage, but no one paid him any attention.

...

While the auction house owner was trying to quell the incident, the auction hall was bustling with activity. At least a dozen reporters from various countries surrounded Zhuang Rui, bombarding him with questions in different languages, almost making his head explode.

"Speak less, preferably not a single word..."

Huangfu Yun, who was standing next to Zhuang Rui, was a lawyer. He knew that no matter what Zhuang Rui said, it would be distorted by these reporters, so he quickly reminded Zhuang Rui in his ear.

"I'm sorry, I have no comment..."

Upon hearing Huangfu Yun's words, Zhuang Rui suddenly recalled a line he often saw in movies and blurted it out. However, the reporters were not so easily fooled and continued to chatter on with their microphones.

"Mr. Zhuang, I heard that you serve as a director of the China Jade and Gemstone Association. Does your behavior today represent the official opinion of the Chinese government?"

The reporter from the French Evening News who just asked the question raised a question with ill intentions.

"Oh, I think you're not familiar with the structure of the Jade Association. It's just a non-governmental organization. Also, my actions only represent my personal views..."

Upon hearing the man's words, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but reply, which made Huangfu Yun behind him break out in a cold sweat. Fortunately, Zhuang Rui didn't fall into the man's trap.

"Then why are there so many people following you?" the reporter pressed, relentlessly pursuing the question once Zhuang Rui spoke.

"You should ask them that question. I'm only speaking on my own behalf. Excuse me, but please move aside; you're blocking my way..."

Zhuang Rui answered the man's question expressionlessly and gently pushed him aside, but he still couldn't leave the auction hall.

At this moment, the security guards who had been dumbfounded finally received instructions from the bosses to stop the reporters and try their best to salvage the situation.

The auction house executives knew that if this matter were to become public, it would be a severe blow to their reputation.

Regardless of the reason, if buyers from an entire country or region collectively withdraw from the auction, the fault must lie with the auction house.

And indeed, it was a foolish thing for Jefferson to notify the organizing committee to send a lawyer to warn Zhuang Rui.

Clearly, the auction house didn't take Zhuang Rui seriously at first. They thought that sending a lawyer to warn the young man would surely get them a satisfactory answer, but things didn't go as planned.

At best, this incident hurt the feelings of Chinese buyers; at worst, it shows that France refuses to acknowledge history, which could damage the feelings of the people of both China and France. Richard, the owner of the auction house, cannot bear this responsibility.

"Mr. Zhuang, Mr. Zhuang, please wait a moment. I sincerely apologize for the inappropriate remarks made by some people. I hope we can communicate; this must be a misunderstanding..."

Richard, who had just rushed down from the private room on the second floor, stood in front of Zhuang Rui, covered in sweat. He put on an extremely sincere expression, and even bent down to Zhuang Rui, his back which he had never bent before. There was even a pleading look on his face.

“Mr. Zhuang, I believe what just happened was merely the private action of a few individuals and does not represent the auction house. I think we can sit down and talk. We will definitely compensate you and apologize for the harm caused...”

Daniel's equally respectful attitude surprised many of the auction house employees present. They had never seen two bigwigs appear at the same time to plead with a young man.

Meanwhile, George, the lawyer who was about 10 meters away from Zhuang Rui and the others, had an incredulous expression on his face. He had been authorized to say these things, so how could they have become his private actions now?

“Daniel, you must take responsibility for your words. I am a lawyer hired by your bank, and all my statements have been authorized by you. Let me go, I'm going to sue you...”

"Security, take him out. He doesn't represent our auction house..."

Before George could finish speaking, Daniel immediately signaled to the security guard next to him to pull him out, while George's voice still echoed in everyone's ears.

Who are you two?

Zhuang Rui looked at the two middle-aged men in front of him with some doubt. In Zhuang Rui's eyes, what had just happened was nothing more than a farce of dogs fighting each other.

"I am Richard, the chairman of this auction house, and this is Daniel. I believe only our words can represent the will of the auction house. Mr. Zhuang, friends, please go to the conference room first. We can give you a satisfactory answer..."

Richard took the microphone that the employee had just handed him and shouted loudly at the crowd in front of him.

Chapter 598 Apology (Part 1)

"I am very sorry, due to some misunderstandings in communication, our auction today will be postponed until the afternoon. I apologize for any inconvenience this may cause. Our auction house will cover everyone's lunch. I am truly sorry..."

Just as Richard was asking Zhuang Rui and the others to go to the conference room for a discussion, Daniel also went up to the auction stage and announced the auction house's decision into the microphone: the morning auction would be suspended.

The buyers from outside China, upon hearing this decision, were helpless, even though they didn't care about the food provided by the organizing committee. After all, the main clientele of this auction was the Chinese, and they were just there for fun. Moreover, among the remaining dozens of people, more than a dozen were skills arranged by the auction house.

"Brother Huangfu, are you going?"

While everyone's attention was drawn to Daniel's words and there was a commotion, Zhuang Rui quietly sought Huangfu Yun's opinion, after all, Huangfu Yun was a professional lawyer.

"Of course we'll go. This auction house is one of the best in the world. Getting them to back down isn't an easy task. Besides, we might even get some unexpected gains..."

Huangfu Yun smiled slyly. Before the auction started, he had tried to coordinate with various parties, but still failed to stop the auction from proceeding. However, he did not expect that Zhuang Rui would unintentionally make things happen. If Huangfu Yun could not maximize his interests in this matter, then he would have been a lawyer for nothing.

"Okay, I'll do as you say. I'll tell you later that you're my lawyer, and you can talk to me about whatever it is..."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement. Although he had only known Huangfu Yun for a short time, the two hit it off immediately, and Zhuang Rui trusted him, so he simply entrusted the matter to Huangfu Yun.

"My legal fees are very high..."

Huangfu Yun replied with a grin, then turned to look at Richard, who looked anxious, and said, "I'm Mr. Zhuang's lawyer. I think we can sit down and talk..."

"Of course, but these people..."

Richard took out a tissue to wipe the sweat from his forehead, pointed to the crowd behind Zhuang Rui, and looked at Huangfu Yun.

"Oh, Mr. Richard, do you think these people were instigated by my boss? No...no, that's not it, it has nothing to do with us..."

Richard was so angry at Huangfu Yun's words that he almost vomited blood. "It's none of your business! If it weren't for that Zhuang guy's words, none of this would have happened at all." Richard seemed to have forgotten that they were the ones who started the trouble.

"Of course...of course it has nothing to do with Mr. Zhuang, but could you please ask Mr. Zhuang to tell everyone to go to the conference room?"

Richard said the above words against his will. He was almost going crazy. How could a perfectly good auction turn into this? Why were these damn rich people so easily instigated by Zhuang Rui?

"This... I really don't know them..."

Zhuang Rui shrugged innocently. "I'm telling the truth. If they listened to me, I wouldn't have let them come to this auction at all."

Richard's face turned red after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. He had already been humble enough, so why was the other party still so persistent?

"Gentlemen, I think we need an explanation for the auction house's actions, but it's not a solution for us to all stay here. Let's go to the conference room..."

Just as Richard was about to bang his head against the wall, a woman's voice rang out, and the bustling crowd quieted down. The speaker was Ms. Zhang.

"Okay, let's hear their explanation..."

"Let's go to the conference room. If the auction house doesn't offer an explanation, I'm withdrawing from this auction..."

"Yeah, I need them to compensate me. My fragile heart has been hurt..."

Zhuang Rui was both amused and exasperated by the conversation coming from the crowd. The guy who spoke last was definitely a Beijing street vendor; if he worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he'd be a real talent.

Zhang Yongzhen holds a high position and prestige in the Chinese art collecting circle. After she spoke, everyone nodded in agreement, and the group left the auction hall and headed to the conference room on the same floor.

"Ms. Zhang, thank you..."

Zhuang Rui slowed down a few steps and expressed his gratitude to Zhang Yongzhen beside him. Although he had done a good job today, if all these people left, the incident would become much bigger and might have to escalate into negotiations between countries.

This auction house has connections to the French government. If such irresponsible historical remarks are made and then widely publicized by the media, the Chinese government will definitely protest. At that point, Zhuang Rui will become even more famous than if he had appeared on CCTV.

If things were to develop to that point, Zhuang Rui's name would definitely be blacklisted in future international auctions. Although Zhuang Rui was not afraid, not being able to participate in international auctions would not be in his own interest. Therefore, Zhang Yongzhen had helped both sides out of the predicament.

"Hehe, I didn't do anything, young man. What you said and did are what many Chinese people want to say and do. Not bad, very good..."

Ms. Zhang laughed. At that moment, she looked nothing like a powerful businesswoman; she looked more like a kind old mother.

"Young man, well done, those words were fucking awesome..."

"Young man, let's exchange business cards. Let's keep in touch when we get back to China..."

"Your surname is Zhuang, right? You're the Mr. Zhuang from the Spring Festival treasure appraisal program, aren't you?"

"Oh, no wonder, this young man is very capable; he's already a jade appraisal expert at such a young age..."

The Chinese buyers surrounding Zhuang Rui now thronged around him and began to talk to him. Under the watchful eyes of those interested, Zhuang Rui's identity also came to light.

To be honest, Zhuang Rui's actions today are exactly what many people want to say but dare not say, and want to do but have no opportunity to do. It can be said that from today onwards, the international collecting community will know the Chinese name Zhuang Rui.

"Let us in. Freedom of speech. We have the right to report on the progress of this matter..."

"Yes, I work for the French Evening News. You have no right to stop me from reporting the news..."

"Oh my God, what did I see? You won't let reporters in..." The speaker was a reporter from the New York Daily News, which always touted itself as a free country.

After the group entered the conference room, the auction house's security guards blocked all the reporters outside. Only Richard and Daniel followed them in, which drew complaints from the reporters

outside. However, the auction house had bought the entire floor and had the right to prohibit reporters from conducting interviews.

After everyone sat down, waiters quickly brought fruit and tea, all arranged by Daniel. If these Chinese collectors really decided to leave, it would be a disaster for their auction house.

The reason Richard and Daniel bowed their heads this time is because there are more and more wealthy people in China now, and the big spending at international auctions is often done by Chinese. It can be said that the purchasing power from China is almost the main force in the current art market.

With this premise in mind, even if Richard and Daniel were unhappy, they wouldn't dare offend these money-grubbers. Who would turn down money?

If they had known Zhuang Rui beforehand, this probably wouldn't have happened. Let others say what they want; why let things get out of control like this?

"Mr. Zhuang, friends, I sincerely apologize for what happened today. It was all a misunderstanding."

I think we should face up to that history from over a hundred years ago, but that's all in the past and shouldn't affect the friendship between our two countries.

Furthermore, it shouldn't affect our artistic exchanges. Art transcends borders and nationalities, friends, don't you agree?

It must be said that Daniel was very eloquent. Although he acknowledged the history from more than a hundred years ago from the beginning, he avoided the main point and steered the conversation to art, making everyone feel that he was being a bit petty by clinging to the French's shortcomings.

"Mr. Daniel, we should be discussing the harm your bank's lawyer caused to my client just now. Can I interpret his remarks as a threat from your bank to Mr. Zhuang?"

Huangfu Yun was used to engaging in verbal battles, and his words immediately steered the conversation toward the events of the day.

Upon hearing Huangfu Yun's words, Daniel waved his hands repeatedly and said, "I assure you, this matter was absolutely not authorized by the auction house, and we had no intention of threatening Mr. Zhuang..."

"Mr. Daniel, I think that your lawyers have not only threatened and warned me, but also given a distorted interpretation of the history that took place between our two countries more than a hundred years ago."

This behavior has not only hurt my personal feelings, but I'm afraid it would be unacceptable to all the Chinese people here. I need a formal, written apology from your bank!

Otherwise, I will not accept it, and I will still withdraw from this auction!!!

Zhuang Rui had originally planned to leave everything to Huangfu Yun, but after hearing Daniel's evasive words, he couldn't help but stand up again.

As the saying goes, "Sell your child to buy a steamer, not to steam buns but to prove yourself." Although Zhuang Rui is not on the right side in terms of timing and location, he has the support of others. Zhuang Rui is determined to prove himself now.

Of course, it would be even better if, after venting one's anger, one could also secure some additional benefits.

As soon as Zhuang Rui spoke, enthusiastic applause erupted in the room. Which of these wealthy Chinese hadn't attended three or five auctions? But this one was the most exhilarating for them.

Chapter 599 Apology (Part 2)

"Apologize! Demand an apology from them..."

"Yes, it must be in writing, otherwise we will withdraw from this auction..."

"They must admit their mistakes, face history squarely, and demand compensation..."

It's said that the Chinese are second to none when it comes to kicking someone when they're down. Immediately after Zhuang Rui finished speaking, some people started jeering. These men in their forties and fifties, their blood boiled by Zhuang Rui's words, began expressing their opinions in English.

Richard and Daniel exchanged bewildered glances. They hadn't expected Zhuang Rui's words to stir up the crowd again. At that moment, they wished they could strangle Zhuang Rui, this scourge. But the most pressing matter now was how to appease these indignant Chinese people.

Unable to communicate with Richard in front of everyone, Daniel exchanged a glance with him and then said loudly, "Mr. Zhuang, ladies and gentlemen, friends, your demands are reasonable. I need to discuss this with the chairman. Please have a seat, everyone. I will give you an answer shortly..."

"No problem, please make yourselves at home..."

Zhuang Rui gestured for them to proceed. At that moment, he seemed to be the spokesperson for the more than one hundred Chinese people in the conference room. He did it smoothly, and others felt that it was only natural.

After Daniel and Richard left, Huangfu Yun patted Zhuang Rui heavily on the shoulder and said jokingly, "Brother, I've been a lawyer for nothing. You dismissed those two with just a few words. If you were to get a law license, I'd be begging for food..."

"Brother Huangfu, you flatter me. I really owe you all a debt of gratitude for today's matter. Thank you all very much..."

Zhuang Rui stood up and bowed to the crowd around him. This was a common practice in the antique trade, and Zhuang Rui's gesture pleased some of the more petty people, who had been used as scapegoats for nothing.

"Don't mention it, young people have energy, those words are well said..."

"Yes, young people these days don't know anything about these things. They probably haven't even heard of the Old Summer Palace..."

"That's right, my son only knows how to play with cars and video games. He's over 20 years old and has no ambition whatsoever..."

"Who isn't? My daughter is always buying luxury goods, she's so young and already knows how to dress up..."

As soon as Zhuang Rui finished speaking, a murmur arose from the crowd. However, some of the comments were absurd, making Zhuang Rui almost laugh out loud. "The family with a son and the daughter would make a perfect couple, wouldn't they?"

"Xiao Zhuang, what kind of business do you do in the country?"

An elderly man in his sixties sitting next to Zhuang Rui suddenly spoke up and asked a question.

"Zhuang Rui, this is General Manager Liu. He runs a large non-ferrous metals business in China..."
Huangfu Yun introduced Zhuang Rui to him.

Zhuang Rui quickly stood up, greeted him, and said, "Mr. Liu, I do some jade business. I run an antique shop in Panjiayuan. Hehe, I can't compare to you seniors. It's just a small business to make a living..."

"Heh, a small business? I doubt it. A small business can come to an auction in Paris? The younger generation is truly formidable..."

Mr. Liu smiled and shook his head, somewhat dismissive of Zhuang Rui's words. He thought, "Which of these people sitting here today doesn't have a net worth of hundreds of millions? Anyone with less than a hundred million wouldn't have the confidence to sit here."

"Yes, young man, don't be modest. Look at us, we've worked hard all our lives, and at this age, you guys are still very young and energetic. Not bad, not bad at all..."

Zhuang Rui was considered relatively unfamiliar and mysterious by those present. Once the conversation started, a large group of people quickly gathered around him, engaging in a lively discussion.

However, some acquaintances sat nearby and chatted. What happened this time was quite rare, which provided them with a lot of topics to talk about.

"Huh? I remember hearing someone say that in the last year or so, a master of jade gambling has emerged, known as the Jade King of the North, also named Zhuang Rui. Little Zhuang, is that you?"

Among the wealthy Chinese present were some jade enthusiasts. Although they didn't gamble on stones, they had heard of Zhuang Rui's reputation and immediately inquired about him.

"Hehe, you flatter me. I dare not call myself the King of Jade. I've only gambled on jade a few times..."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement. These things were all out in the open, and anyone with the will could find out; there was nothing to hide.

"Old Wang, what happened? Tell me..."

Most of the people in the room were unaware of these things, so they immediately grabbed the person who had spoken earlier and began to ask him questions.

After that person reported Zhuang Rui's achievements in gambling on stones over the past year, the way these people looked at Zhuang Rui became somewhat different.

Although they didn't know that Zhuang Rui's maternal grandfather was Old Master Ouyang, they subconsciously thought that Zhuang Rui must have gotten here at such a young age because of his family elders. However, after hearing what Old Wang said, everyone realized that Zhuang Rui's hundreds of millions in assets were all earned by himself!

The richer a person is, the more they admire those who can make even more money than them, regardless of age or seniority. Suddenly, when people spoke to Zhuang Rui, they started calling him "teacher."

Of course, Zhuang Rui deserves this title. Although the people in the room have more money than him, there aren't many who are truly experts in antiques.

Many of the people present started collecting antiques after their businesses grew and they wanted to pursue some refined hobbies. Some even treated antiques as an investment.

In short, among more than a hundred business owners, only three or five are truly capable of distinguishing genuine antiques from fakes.

"By the way, Huangfu, I received your call earlier. You had some thoughts on this auction. Now that there are Chinese people here, both from China and abroad, why don't you share them here..."

Ms. Zhang suddenly said to Huangfuyun that she was also saddened by the loss of cultural relics in China, but given her current status, it was not appropriate for her to make certain remarks in public.

"Me? I didn't bring this up; it was Brother Zhuang's idea..."

After being called out by Zhang Yongzhen, Huangfu Yun was stunned for a moment, then immediately pushed Zhuang Rui forward. He could also see that although Zhuang Rui was usually quiet, he was really no match for him when it came to the ability to persuade people.

"Hmm? Xiao Zhuang, is this your opinion? Come on, tell me..."

Zhang Yongzhen would never call Zhuang Rui "Teacher," and Zhuang Rui wouldn't deserve the title either. Zhuang Rui comes from a family of collectors that has been passed down for three generations, while Zhang Yongzhen's own background is far inferior.

"Okay, then I'll tell you..."

Zhuang Rui didn't stand on ceremony. He released Qin Xuanbing's hand, which he had been holding, and stood up.

"Everyone, I'm a junior in terms of age, and I haven't been collecting for very long either. I wouldn't normally be qualified to speak here, but since Ms. Zhang has called on me, I'll just say a few words..."

Zhuang Rui's words drew the attention of everyone who was chatting to him.

"I studied under Uncle De from Zhonghai. When I first entered the industry, the sentence I heard most often was that all the finest Chinese antiques were overseas. I don't need to explain why, everyone knows it."

More than a hundred years ago, the country was weak, and many artifacts left by our ancestors were lost overseas. We cannot be held responsible for these losses, but we have a responsibility to bring these national treasures back home!

This is also the main reason why everyone can gather here today. With great power comes great responsibility. I suspect that Ms. Zhang and Mr. Liu are attending this auction with this mindset in mind.

Zhuang Rui's words made Ms. Zhang and General Manager Liu nod slightly. They had come to Paris to attend the auction after seeing several rare items in the auction catalog. Just as Zhuang Rui said, they wanted to bring the national treasures back to China.

"I can barely accept buying back our country's antiques at the appropriate price, but some foreign auction houses collude with the owners to deliberately inflate the market price of Chinese artworks."

Many bronze artifacts and national first-class protected cultural relics that cannot be traded domestically are smuggled abroad by these international speculators and then sold to you all at high prices.

Personally, I feel that this behavior is an act of economic plunder after aggression by force. Although those of you present are wealthy and may not care about ten or twenty million, this behavior deserves condemnation!

Another point I want to make is that items we acquire at high prices overseas may not be worth as much in China. Those interested in collecting and investing should choose more reasonable price points; otherwise, it might turn out to be a failed investment...

Zhuang Rui's resounding words caused everyone to fall into deep thought. They had pondered similar questions before, but no one had ever explained them so clearly, getting straight to the heart of the matter.

Nobody's money comes from thin air. Collectors like Ms. Zhang, who genuinely want to buy back cultural relics lost overseas, needless to say, are also starting to weigh the pros and cons for those who want to speculate and invest.

"Xiao Zhuang, but if we don't bid, we won't be able to get these items..." someone in the room raised an opinion.

Zhuang Rui nodded and said, "Yes, these international speculators have taken advantage of everyone's patriotism to drive up the prices of antiques that were not originally that valuable."

I personally admire your initial intentions, but I do not agree with this behavior. It will lead to inflated prices for Chinese antiques on the international market, which is not beneficial to the long-term development of the collecting industry..."

After Zhuang Rui finished speaking, the conference room fell silent. The logic behind Zhuang Rui's words was very simple, and everyone understood it, but few people thought about the issue.

Chapter 600 Apology (Part 2)

While it's not entirely accurate to measure a person's success by the amount of money they have, those who can build a large enterprise certainly have their own ideas about analyzing and judging things. Everyone present understood and had considered the principles Zhuang Rui was talking about.

However, when it comes to actually doing it, many people can't help but pursue the items they like, and for them, price is not the primary factor to consider. As a result, they often fall into other people's traps and buy items that are not worth the price.

Just like the Tang tri-color pottery in China, which was all the rage in the late 1980s and early 1990s and was heavily hyped by some foreign people with ulterior motives, some patriots and speculators also bought it. But now, the value of those Tang tri-color pottery pieces has greatly decreased, and many people who invested in them have lost everything.

Therefore, after Zhuang Rui said this, both those who genuinely wanted the national treasure to return and those who wanted to invest and make money began to seriously consider whether their behavior of helping international speculators to fuel the fire was correct.

“Xiao Zhuang, as you know, the antique market is a seller's market right now. Those who have goods hold the power. We either don't buy, or we can only follow their rules. If we can't break this constraint, the situation won't improve...”

Mr. Liu, who runs a non-ferrous metals business, shared his thoughts with Zhuang Rui after a moment of contemplation; these thoughts were shared by most people in the room.

These precious Chinese antiques are in the hands of a few people abroad, and when and at what price they are sold is entirely up to them.

"Mr. Liu, this matter... isn't actually unsolvable..."

Zhuang Rui pondered for a moment before speaking: "Due to the unique nature of antiques, it is indeed a seller's market. However, the audience for antiques from China is very limited. I believe that apart from everyone here, only some people in Japan and Britain collect Chinese art..."

Many people in the room lit up involuntarily upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words.

"Therefore, as long as we unite and take action to resist the speculative activities of state-owned speculators, they will not gain any advantage..."

"Xiao Zhuang, this... is easier said than done..."

General Manager Liu sighed. This matter is easier said than done. Everyone has their own perspective, and their ways of looking at things and their behaviors are not the same.

These people are all extremely successful in their respective fields, and none of them are willing to concede to the others. Where there are people, there is a social hierarchy, and where there is a social hierarchy, there is conflict.

Among the people in the room, there were many small cliques. Some had good relationships with each other, while others had bad relationships. Those who had bad relationships would sometimes even raise the price at the auction just to spite others, making themselves a laughing stock for outsiders.

Therefore, Zhuang Rui's mention of "unity" is basically impossible. It would be a miracle if they could even refrain from maliciously inflating prices against each other.

Zhuang Rui nodded and said, "It's not easy, but whether it's for investment or collection, I'd like to ask everyone here, don't you all want to buy your favorite collectibles at the lowest possible price?"

"Nonsense, nobody's money grows on trees, of course the cheaper the better..."

"Yes, but the auction house loses a lot of money. They'll hire shills to drive up the price, and sometimes even if we know that, we have to bite the bullet and keep bidding..."

"Yeah, last time I bid on a piece of Ming Dynasty blue and white porcelain, I could have gotten it for around 500,000 euros, but I ended up spending over 1.5 million. I don't know if it was worth it..."

As soon as Zhuang Rui finished speaking, murmurs arose from the crowd. They weren't unaware of the shady dealings at auction houses, but sometimes, when push comes to shove, they were forced into it, forced to do it anyway.

"Gentlemen, have you ever considered what would happen if we didn't engage in malicious bidding and ignored the auction house's price increases?"

Zhuang Rui's words startled everyone. Since the situation he described was highly unlikely, they hadn't considered the question before.

"If everyone can do this, I can guarantee that not only will many people be able to bid on their desired items, but auction houses will also not dare to maliciously inflate prices..."

As everyone knows, auction houses also bear risks when raising prices. If no one bids, they have to pay for the auctioned items themselves. They might be able to afford one or two items.

However, if the number of times and quantities increase, these auction houses probably won't dare to do it anymore. In that case, we can buy what we like fairly and justly..."

What Zhuang Rui is talking about is not only a method used in international auction houses, but also in domestic antique shops. In industry terms, this is called "going all out." The bid exceeds the auction house's ability to pay, which can also be described as "breaking the bank" and leaving them with no way to make a profit!

"Actually, nobody hates money. Everyone can draw lots beforehand. Even if no one bids at this auction, the next one can let those who didn't get a turn bid. This way, everyone can buy the best items at the lowest price. It's better than arguing until you're red in the face every time and then giving money away to foreigners, right?"

Zhuang Rui's "together" refers to certain groups discussing things before bidding, while "drawing lots" means arranging the order of bidding by drawing lots to determine who will bid.

"However, most of us who came to participate in this auction were acting independently and hadn't communicated beforehand, so drawing lots is obviously not a viable method..."

However, we can do it another way: whoever bids first gets to bid, and no one else can try to compete. Also, it should be agreed beforehand that if shills from the auction house drive up the price, the first bidder must withdraw immediately. We can't tolerate that kind of behavior..."

Zhuang Rui's thinking was very clear. Standing at the front of the conference room, he analyzed the pros and cons one by one, and the audience nodded in agreement.

"Xiao Zhuang, what if someone is quick enough to snatch the paddle every time? My reflexes aren't as good as yours, young people..."

Mr. Liu's words made everyone laugh, but what he said was also true. If, as Zhuang Rui said, the first person made a bid and the others could not bid, some people would suffer losses.

"Hehe, Mr. Liu, that's easy. I heard that this special auction will last for five days and will feature over a hundred antiques from China. We can agree that everyone is only allowed to bid once. That way, everyone can get at least one item. It's much better than fighting tooth and nail and making a fool of ourselves, right?"

"That's true..." Mr. Liu nodded and remained silent.

When the audience first heard Zhuang Rui's words, they felt it was a bit unbelievable. However, upon closer examination, they realized that this method was indeed quite good. Many people might have their eyes on the same item, so it would be a matter of who bids the fastest. Moreover, the person who bids first cannot bid again, which means that others have another chance.

After pondering for a while, Ms. Zhang stood up and said, "How about... we try what Xiao Zhuang said today? Let's have a vote. If everyone agrees, we'll try this method. We can't always let the auction house lead us by the nose, can we?"

"Ms. Zhang is right, I agree..."

"I agree. Let's not let foreigners swindle all our money. As long as we unite, we have nothing to fear..."

"A show of hands, I agree..."

After a brief discussion, many people raised their hands, and some who had been observing reluctantly also raised their hands, seeing that they could not defy the public's anger.

Of course, some of these people disagree, but they are all influential figures in their respective fields. Now that they have agreed, they will definitely follow the rules. In this circle, the consequence of not following the rules is being kicked out.

After reaching this simple agreement, everyone suddenly felt much closer to each other. People who used to ignore each other were now able to sit down and chat together.

The whole thing took only about 10 minutes. Just when the atmosphere in the meeting room was perfectly harmonious, the door was pushed open, and Richard and Daniel walked in, followed by George, the lawyer who had been shouting that he would sue the auction house.

"Mr. Zhuang, the matter has been clarified. It was our auction house's lawyer, George, who misunderstood your words. Therefore, in order to protect the auction house's interests, he took inappropriate actions towards you. George has realized his mistake and has come to apologize to you now..."

As soon as Richard finished speaking, George walked to Zhuang Rui's side, bowed deeply, and said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Zhuang, I don't understand Chinese very well and misunderstood what you meant. I take back what I said earlier and offer my sincerest apologies for any harm caused!"

"Damn it, this kid is just a scapegoat..."

Zhuang Rui looked at George speechlessly, wanting to let the matter drop without making a big deal out of it, but he would have to see if George would agree.

Zhuang Rui did not accept George's apology, but instead looked at Richard and said, "Mr. Richard, may I ask you a question?"

Richard nodded and said, "Of course..."

"I would like to know, as your bank's lawyer, do Mr. George's words represent your bank's position? If so, I hope that the person who should apologize to me is you, not George..."

Richard's expression changed drastically upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words. Although the situation had spiraled out of control, he had never considered that he should bow his head and apologize.