

Golden 671

Chapter 672-673 Bronze Jue

"Fourth Brother, what's wrong with your phone? I can't get through."

Zhuang Rui kept calling Ouyang Jun after leaving the courtyard, but the phone was always switched off. It wasn't until they were almost at Panjiayuan that Ouyang Jun finally turned it on.

"Of course I was busy. Could you turn it on?"

Ouyang Jun replied irritably. He didn't pretend in front of Zhuang Rui; his words immediately revealed what he had been doing.

"Hey, I was just saying your sister-in-law called, and when I told her I was with Xiaobai, she hung up. What happened? You didn't say anything, did you?"

Ouyang Jun was puzzled. Usually, when he said he was with Xiaobai, his wife would never speak to him kindly. But just now, she was speaking softly and gently, asking him to help Zhuang Rui get things done. It was true that he came here to get things done, but what kind of "things" were they?

"What?! You're really with Brother Bai?"

Zhuang Rui was speechless upon hearing this, then continued, "I told my sister-in-law that you went to Brother Bai's place to help me rummage through antiques. Well, you're in charge, Fourth Brother. If you don't bring back a few antiques, I won't be involved in your messy affairs next time..."

"Alright, it's just some old antiques. I'll bring you a few back later..."

Ouyang Jun replied impatiently and hung up the phone. Bai Feng had been asking him for some real estate work these past few days, so asking for some things was easy enough, right? However, Ouyang Jun wouldn't just ask for it directly. He would let Bai Feng donate it himself once the Zhuang Rui Museum opened.

Zhuang Rui shook his head, parked the car in the parking lot, got out, and walked towards his shop.

It was already afternoon, but the bustling crowds at Panjiayuan showed no signs of abating. It had become a scenic spot in Beijing, with people coming not only to hunt for bargains but also to experience the rich cultural atmosphere.

After squeezing along the wall for a long time, Zhuang Rui finally arrived at "Xuanrui Zhai". He was probably the only one in Panjiayuan who owned such a place. Few people who frequented Panjiayuan would recognize him.

"Brother Zhuang, you've arrived..."

The monkey, with its sharp eyes, spotted Zhuang Rui immediately and rushed out to greet him. Da Xiong, on the other hand, was much more composed. He nodded to Zhuang Rui but didn't come over; he continued to attend to customers who wanted to buy things.

As for Zhao Hanxuan, he wasn't in the shop at the moment. Master Ge was busy in the corner carving seals, and the other two shop assistants were also serving customers.

"Monkey, I told you to run around and broaden your horizons, not to rummage through the shop. Don't you know that bronze ware is subject to state control over its trade?"

Zhuang Rui glared at the monkey as soon as he entered the door. Anyone in business would rather avoid trouble. If those bronzes were truly national first-class cultural relics, he would be lucky to get a three-to five-year sentence if he bought them.

Although many private collections in China contain some exquisite bronze artifacts, these are all privately traded. Who has ever seen a bronze artifact classified as a first-class cultural relic auctioned in a Chinese auction house?

In the classification of bronze artifacts before the Han Dynasty, most of them were classified as national first-class cultural relics, which were strictly prohibited from being bought and sold by the public. If you

did not want to hand them over to the state, you could only keep them at home as family heirlooms. The current cultural relics market has not yet opened up the buying and selling of bronze artifacts.

Moreover, according to national regulations, regardless of the grade of the bronze artifact, newly unearthed items are strictly prohibited from being traded. A slight mistake could lead to trouble.

Zhuang Rui knew of such a story: a collector from Hebei once brought several fragments of bronze artifacts to Beijing to attend a course on the restoration of bronze artifacts. During the course, he restored the fragments he had brought.

However, on his way back, he ran into trouble. During a routine check after getting off the train, he was caught, and unable to explain the legal origin of the item, he was unjustly detained for fifteen days.

Zhuang Rui could buy bronze artifacts, but he absolutely couldn't buy them from this shop. If those things were genuine, their origins were definitely not legitimate; they might have just been "unearthed." If anything happened later, he would definitely be investigated.

"Brother Zhuang, I... I brought it here for you to see, but I don't even know if it's real or not..."

The monkey, who had been beaming with excitement, was stunned when he heard Zhuang Rui's words. He stammered and couldn't say a word. He had originally thought he could help Zhuang Rui find some good stuff, but he didn't expect that his flattery would backfire.

Both Monkey and Da Xiong came from humble backgrounds. When they were in the Pengcheng antique market, they made a living by swindling and cheating, so they naturally didn't take national laws seriously.

Putting everything else aside, when these two brothers were in Pengcheng, they once carried a shovel and prepared to dig up a Han Dynasty tomb. If it weren't for the fact that the skill required was too low and they spent several days just helping farmers loosen the soil, they might be in jail right now.

When they arrived at Panjiayuan, Da Xiong was fine, spending his days learning about stationery from Zhao Hanxuan, while the monkey went wild, hanging out with those old hands all day and becoming even more slick.

Fortunately, the monkey still had people it respected. When it saw Zhuang Rui's stern face, it immediately became obedient.

"Monkey, I told you to go outside and chat with those people who set up stalls, not to lure people into the shop. Some things are private transactions. Putting them out in the open is just asking for trouble, understand?"

Zhuang Rui sighed. This monkey seemed clever, but he was still a bit muddle-headed. Zhuang Rui had no choice but to give him a few more pointers.

Sending the monkeys out to learn these tricks was to ensure that when neither he nor Zhao Hanxuan were around, someone in the shop could see through some of the schemes and avoid being "trapped."

Of course, he could accept good things, but he absolutely could not involve "Xuanrui Zhai". Zhuang Rui considered himself a legitimate and honest businessman.

"Brother Zhuang, I understand. If this happens again, I'll call you directly..."

Zhuang Rui has made himself so clear. If the monkey still can't understand, he might as well buy a block of tofu and smash his head against it.

"Hmm, let's meet at a teahouse outside later to look at some things. Go and book a private room..."

Zhuang Rui nodded and didn't say anything more. Since he was here, he should naturally take a look at the items. If they were of dubious origin, he could simply refuse to accept them. Looking at the items wasn't illegal.

"Hey, Brother Zhuang, I'll take care of it..."

The monkey agreed, took his phone, and walked out of "Xuanrui Zhai" to make a call.

"Master Ge, how are you doing? Are you settling in well here?"

When Zhuang Rui entered the shop, Master Ge was busy and he didn't disturb him. Now that he saw Master Ge put down his carving knife, he quickly went up to greet him.

Master Ge took off his reading glasses and replied with a smile, "It's a habit, it's a habit, Xiao Zhuang, it's been a few days since I've seen you..."

Master Ge used to be a street vendor carving seals; he was a pure craftsman, and he was exposed to the elements all the time. Now he sits in his shop with heating and air conditioning, which is a completely different story from before.

"You went abroad for a few days, Master Ge. How's business?"

If an outsider overheard this conversation, they would definitely think that Master Ge was the owner of the shop. What kind of owner is that? He's running his own business, yet he's asking his employees how things are going.

"Sure, why not? Xiao Zhuang, I got this amount last month..."

Master Ge knew that Zhuang Rui didn't care about anything in the shop, and Zhuang Rui probably didn't even know how much money he made last month. So he held out his palm, spread his thumb and forefinger, and waved it in front of Zhuang Rui.

"Eighty thousand?!"

Zhuang Rui was genuinely startled. He had initially agreed that Master Ge would receive a commission of 300 yuan per character. This 50,000 yuan amounted to nearly 300 characters. Assuming each seal had three characters, that meant over 100 people had chosen to have Master Ge manually carve their seals.

"Yes, that's because we're too busy. We still have over 200 people to have seals made, and it'll probably be next month before they're finished..."

Master Ge's face was full of smiles. He never dreamed that he could earn such an income by carving seals.

"That's a good thing, haha, Master Ge, now you know that 500 yuan a word isn't much, right? We earn our money through our skills..."

Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this, feeling somewhat smug. It seemed his initial decision had been correct; the mere gimmick of this master craftsman's hand-carved seals could bring in fifty to sixty thousand yuan in revenue for the shop each month.

"Xiao Zhuang, I think this commission is a bit too high. How about we have the store take 300 and I take 200..."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Master Ge hesitated for a moment, took a deep breath, and spoke out what he had been thinking about for a long time.

Although no one complains about earning more, the sudden increase in monthly income to nearly 100,000 yuan after only being unemployed the previous month was a bit too much, and he couldn't help but feel uneasy.

In addition, Master Ge also knew that he earned more than Zhuang Rui, which meant that the employee made more money than the boss, which made him a little uneasy.

Zhuang Rui smiled and waved his hand, saying, "Master Ge, don't say that anymore. You should still take 300. It's only right that you earn a living with your skills. In fact, the shop has benefited from your success..."

"Master Ge, I told you he wouldn't agree, so you can just do it without worry..."

Before Zhuang Rui finished speaking, Zhao Hanxuan walked into the shop. Master Ge had mentioned to him several times that he wanted to reduce the commission, but Zhao Hanxuan had not agreed. Firstly, it was Zhuang Rui's decision, and he had no right to change it. Secondly, in Zhao Hanxuan's opinion, Zhuang Rui was not short of a few dollars.

Moreover, Master Ge's craftsmanship has indeed brought a lot of business to "Xuanrui Zhai". Many people who like to be cultured buy paper and brushes for writing and painting at "Xuanrui Zhai" after having their seals made here. In the past month or so, the sales of stationery in the store have increased significantly.

Master Ge was an honest man, and after hearing Zhao Hanxuan's words, he still hesitated and said, "This...isn't this inappropriate?"

"There's nothing wrong with that, Master Ge. In a few decades, many people might not even know how to carve seals anymore. If you have time, take Monkey and Da Xiong with you; it'll be a way to pass on this skill..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand to interrupt Master Ge, and then said, "Let's leave it at that, don't mention it again. Old Zhao, where did you go wandering around just now?"

Zhuang Rui's words were not meant as a question. He had never considered Zhao Hanxuan as an employee; it was just a casual question.

"Let's go inside and talk..."

Seeing that there were quite a few customers in the store, Zhao Hanxuan pulled Zhuang Rui into a private room.

"I asked around at a few other shops, and it turns out there's a group of people selling bronze artifacts lately, and judging from their provenance, they seem to be from 'raw burial' sites..."

Zhao Hanxuan and Monkey interacted on different levels. Monkey mostly dealt with the owners of small stalls, while Zhao Hanxuan knew people who had shops in Panjiayuan, so the information he gathered was naturally different.

The "raw burial" he refers to means that bronze artifacts buried underground for a long time undergo qualitative changes due to various chemical reactions, naturally developing layers of rust that form on the surface, resulting in rust colors that are green, red, blue, purple, or a combination of these. This rust is solid and has a natural, varied feel.

Players generally use the term "freshly unearthed" to describe bronze artifacts, meaning that the bronze artifact was unearthed not long ago.

"Old Zhao, are you sure?"

Zhuang Rui pressed for an answer. To be honest, he really didn't trust Zhao Hanxuan's judgment. This guy actually managed to buy a piece of junk made of cast iron coated with copper as if it were a bronze Bodhisattva from the Yongzheng Palace workshop. It was really hard to believe.

"What kind of talk is that?"

Zhao Hanxuan rolled his eyes at Zhuang Rui and said, "I know I don't know much about bronzes, but Old Xu has a good eye. He's seen a few pieces himself, and he's the one who said that..."

The "Old Xu" that Zhao Hanxuan mentioned is an antique shop in Panjiayuan that specializes in replicas of bronze artifacts. Zhuang Rui had met the owner before; he was an expert and wouldn't be fooled by ordinary tricks.

Zhuang Rui pondered for a moment, then looked up and asked, "Old Zhao, what's your opinion? If it's real, should we buy it?"

Zhao Hanxuan shook his head and said, "Even if it's true, I suggest you don't get involved. I've looked at a few items, and their designs are all from before the Qin and Han dynasties. Boss, you're not short of money, why get involved in this trouble..."

Zhao Hanxuan's concerns were valid. Although many wealthy collectors in China possess bronze artifacts that are prohibited from being traded, they mostly purchase them through overseas auctions or domestic intermediaries, such as the black market for antiques, making it difficult for the police to trace them.

However, the person holding the goods that Zhao Hanxuan saw claimed it was an heirloom, but Zhao Hanxuan could smell the earthy stench emanating from him from a great distance. Zhao Hanxuan was certain that this person was an expert at digging up graves.

"I'm not short of money, but I'm missing something..."

Zhuang Rui smiled wryly upon hearing this. His museum would open in two months at most. Although he now had a batch of porcelain and could exchange a batch of collections with the Guimet Museum in Paris in a few days, and there were quite a few valuable items in Zhuang Rui's collection that could be considered unique, these items were still a bit lacking for a museum with the name "National".

"I'm missing things? I'm missing these things too, but I can't buy and sell them openly, so what's the use of them?"

Zhao Hanxuan was taken aback. He had assumed that Zhuang Rui wanted to see these items because he wanted to resell them.

"It's like this..."

Zhuang Rui's plan to set up a museum was only started in the last few days, and even Ouyang Wan only found out about it yesterday. Of course, Zhao Hanxuan and the others were unaware of it, so Zhuang Rui explained the whole story to them.

Although these bronze artifacts cannot be traded on the market, it is easy to launder their value. As long as they are not items targeted by relevant national departments, Zhuang Rui has plenty of ways to launder them. At most, he would have to trouble Ezkena to sign a donation agreement.

However, Zhuang Rui wouldn't dare to accept an item if it was too obviously "raw" from an ancient burial site, so he decided to examine it first.

"Damn, boss, is what you're saying true?"

Even though Zhao Hanxuan had been in the antique business for two or three decades, he was shocked by what Zhuang Rui said. Beijing wasn't without private museums, but one that was running as smoothly as his was absolutely unique.

Zhuang Rui nodded and said, "Of course it's true. The museum is currently undergoing renovations and the installation of security systems. It should be open in a month or two at most..."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Zhao Hanxuan thought for a moment and said, "Boss, the sale of bronze artifacts isn't anything special in Panjiayuan, but if you've got your eye on something, don't say anything yet. I'll find a middleman to buy it for you; that way it'll be safer..."

Although buying and selling bronzes privately is illegal, the law does not punish the masses. There are many private transactions, and whoever gets caught is just unlucky. Among the bronzes that Zhao Hanxuan bought when he was tricked before, there were some that were "freshly unearthed" items.

While Zhuang Rui was talking to Zhao Hanxuan, Monkey knocked on the door and entered the private room, saying, "Brother Zhuang, Brother Zhao, we've made contact with that person. They said they'd meet at the teahouse in half an hour. Should we go now?"

Zhuang Rui nodded and said, "Okay, Lao Zhao, let's go take a look together if you're free. Hey, Monkey, where does that person live? Is it a half-hour drive?"

"Brother Zhuang, people in this line of work wouldn't tell us where they live, but that guy's been hanging around Panjiayuan a lot lately, he might be here right now..."

The monkey's words made Zhuang Rui chuckle. He realized he had asked a rather blunt question. If those people had told everyone their address, they probably wouldn't have sold anything, but would have ended up in jail.

"Da Xiong, keep an eye on the shop. I'm taking Monkey and Manager Zhao out for a bit..."

Before leaving, Zhuang Rui said goodbye to Da Xiong.

Perhaps it was because he had a girlfriend, but Da Xiong became more mature and steady after coming to Beijing. Zhao Hanxuan was also very satisfied with him, and sometimes he would let Da Xiong handle things like purchasing goods on his own.

"Boss, what's the name of your museum? We could put our Xuanrui Zhai seal on some of the calligraphy and paintings, and maybe even get some credit for it..."

The teahouse was located near the exit of Panjiayuan, not far away, and the group chatted as they walked.

"It's called the China Dingguang Museum, named after the 'Dingguang Sword' I acquired. As for the calligraphy and paintings bearing the Xuanrui Zhai seal, let's just forget about that..."

It was already past five o'clock in the afternoon, and the flow of people in Panjiayuan had decreased considerably. In just a few minutes, the three of them arrived at the entrance of the teahouse.

As Zhuang Rui and his companions entered the teahouse, they did not notice that just as they entered, a pair of eyes lingered on them from around the corner, then looked around and gazed in all directions.

"Hey monkey, these people are so unreliable! What time is it? Why aren't they here yet?"

Zhuang Rui and his friends booked a private room and ordered snacks and tea. They waited forty or fifty minutes, but the person Monkey had arranged still hadn't shown up. Zhuang Rui started to get anxious. He had planned to go home for dinner today, but now it seemed he wouldn't make it again. Qin Xuanbing had just called to ask.

"Brother Zhuang, I'll call again to urge them..."

Monkey took out his phone and dialed. He had already dialed twice already, and the other party said they would arrive soon. Monkey was furious. This was making him lose face in front of Zhuang Rui.

"They're here, Brother Zhuang. I'll go out and bring them in..." Monkey said to Zhuang Rui after hanging up the phone.

"Brother Zhuang, this is Brother Ren. He says he has a few family heirlooms..."

Less than two minutes later, Monkey pushed open the door to the private room. Behind him was a short man, only about 1.5 meters tall. At first glance, Zhuang Rui thought it was a child who had come in.

However, upon closer inspection of the man's eyes and eyebrows, he should be over thirty years old. He is very thin, and as Zhao Hanxuan said, he exudes a muddy smell. Just by looking at his physique, he is definitely a master at digging up graves.

"Brother Ren, this is my boss. Let him take a look at this first..." Monkey introduced Zhuang Rui to the man, but of course, he didn't mention his name or anything.

"It's an old family heirloom. I don't know if it's worth anything. Please take a look first, sir..."

Although he knew no one would believe him, the short man still said it and placed a round cake box on the table.

Upon opening the box, Zhuang Rui saw two bronze wine vessels inside.

The two bronze jue are exactly the same size, both with round bellies. One side has a spout for pouring wine at the front of the mouth, and a pointed part at the back. There is a pillar between the spout and the mouth, a handle on one side of the belly, and three long conical legs for support.

Both bronze jue (wine vessels) are decorated with animal patterns, with floral designs carved in the middle. The craftsmanship is exquisite and intricate. Although the vessels are small, Zhuang Rui could tell at a glance that they were ritual vessels from the Shang and Zhou dynasties.

The ancient jue was used as a wine cup, but it was also used for sacrifices to heaven. The jue was divided into two types: drinking vessels and ritual vessels. The drinking vessels were used by people in daily life, while the ritual vessels were used for sacrifices to heaven. The ritual vessels were much more exquisite and valuable than the drinking vessels.

Zhuang Rui put on gloves, picked up a bronze wine vessel and began to examine it. Unconsciously, the spiritual energy in his eyes traveled around the inside of the bronze vessel, confirming that it was indeed an authentic piece.

After setting down the bronze jue (a type of ancient Chinese wine vessel), Zhuang Rui smiled at the short man and said, "Hehe, this thing shouldn't have been unearthed for more than ten years, right?"

Chapter 674 Trouble (Part 1)

Since bronze artifacts can be categorized as "raw" or "ripened" from their original burial sites, there's naturally also the concept of "ripened" or "ripened" burial sites.

"Cooked pit" refers to bronze artifacts that have been unearthed from "raw pit" and, after a long period of circulation, have undergone natural wear and tear or human cleaning, resulting in a surface texture similar to wax, while the underlying layer still retains the original color of the "raw pit".

Most of the artifacts that have survived to this day have gone from being unearthed to being found in familiar locations, and eventually, there are virtually no traces of their original excavation.

However, many "aged pit" bronzes are produced by chemically cleaning "raw pit" artifacts to remove the original rust color and applying a protective film to prevent further corrosion.

The two bronze jue in front of Zhuang Rui had not undergone artificial rust removal and retained their original color when they were unearthed. There was still some copper rust on the outside of the jue.

However, judging from their luster, they do not appear to have been unearthed recently. Therefore, Zhuang Rui estimates that these two objects are indeed unearthed cultural relics, but the time since their excavation should be more than three years and no more than 10 years.

The short man's eyes lit up for a moment when Zhuang Rui mentioned ten years ago, but he quickly regained his composure, looked up at Zhuang Rui, and said, "I don't know if it was unearthed, but this item is indeed a family heirloom. If this gentleman is interested, he can name a price. If not, I'll take my leave..."

There's a saying among northerners when it comes to drinking: "If the person falls, the frame doesn't; if the frame falls, the momentum doesn't." This short man was just talking to himself. Even though Zhuang Rui could tell the year the object was unearthed, he still stubbornly refused to admit it.

"The item is yours, so please name a price and let's hear it..."

Zhuang Rui smiled. If it were him, he certainly wouldn't admit the age of the artifact's excavation either. He then said, "These two bronze jue (wine vessels) are 'identical,' but since they're yours, you should set the price..."

It was obvious that even if this person hadn't pulled it from an ancient tomb, he was still implicated. Zhuang Rui simply admitted it was a good item; "a good eye" was jargon in the antique world, meaning the object was genuine and of high quality.

"One costs 100,000, two cost 200,000..."

The man surnamed Ren was not talkative and was very cautious. After he sat down, Zhuang Rui poured him a glass of water, but he never picked up the teacup on the table.

"200,000, that's a reasonable price..."

Zhuang Rui pondered upon hearing this. Among the bronze jue (wine vessels) from the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, those from the Zhou dynasty were the most exquisite in craftsmanship and the most expensive. On the black market for antiques, one of them would sell for at least 200,000 RMB. This person's asking price was not expensive.

"This thing hasn't been exposed to the light, has it?"

Zhuang Rui suddenly asked a question, implying that this thing had been targeted by someone.

Less skilled tomb raiders rarely manage to completely empty the tomb of all its burial goods, often leaving behind some items. Based on these remaining items, relevant authorities can deduce the stolen artifacts and their quantity.

The short man shook his head and said, "No, we searched everywhere. These were the only two items left at home. We brought them all with us, so there won't be any problems..."

Zhuang Rui understood what the other party meant. They were saying that he had done a clean job, that there were only two items in the tomb, and that he had taken them all out, so no one would be able to trace him back to them.

Of course, Zhuang Rui didn't believe this. A Shang and Zhou dynasty tomb that could produce bronze ritual vessels must be at least a royal tomb. How could it only contain these two burial items? If what the short man said was true, then their trip would have been in vain.

Zhuang Rui said noncommittally, "I've looked at the items, you can put them away..."

"Put it away" means that the buyer doesn't want it anymore and asks the seller to take the item back. That's the usual way to say "put it away." But if you say "keep it" or "wrap it up," the meaning is completely opposite.

"Hmm? No, then I'll take my leave..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the short man's expression changed. He stood up, quickly and efficiently put the items back into the cake box, and prepared to leave.

If you didn't see this person's face, you would really think he was a primary or middle school student carrying a cake home.

Seeing that the person was about to leave, Zhuang Rui suddenly said, "Wait..."

"What? Is this boss trying to keep his guests here?"

The short man's face turned extremely ugly. He was holding a cake box in his right hand, but his left hand reached behind his waist.

Zhuang Rui waved his hands repeatedly and said, "No, Mr. Ren, you misunderstand. I've taken a liking to this, but I can't afford it now, and I can't have it. Let's find someone to buy it from you at a different time and place. Monkey will contact you then..."

"Um?"

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the short man thought for a moment and immediately understood the crux of the matter. It turned out that the man opposite him wanted it, but was afraid that he would be implicated if problems arose in the future, so he said these words in a roundabout way.

"Hehe, then thank you, boss..."

After entering the room, the short man smiled for the first time.

"Mr. Ren, is there anything else I'd like to ask? If you're not in a hurry, please sit down and have a cup of tea, and we can chat for a bit more," Zhuang Rui said.

"Okay, is there anything else this boss would like to ask?"

The man hesitated for a moment, then sat back down, but remained oblivious to the freshly replaced cup of hot tea in front of him.

"Good things are never too many. I wonder if Mr. Ren's house might have any other items to find?"

Zhuang Rui saw that the man surnamed Ren was cautious and really wanted to do more business with him. After all, even if he didn't buy these things himself, they would eventually fall into other people's hands. If these bronze artifacts were really clean, it wouldn't hurt to take them.

Even if something goes wrong in the future and it gets traced back to you, at most you'll get a refund and a fine. This has happened before, and that's how it's always been handled. Buyers who have actually been sentenced are usually middlemen who resold the items overseas. I've never heard of any collectors in China who bought the items for their collections being arrested. It's just that dealing with it is a bit more troublesome.

Zhuang Rui has now become somewhat accustomed to the fact that he is a rich man. Although money is not everything, it cannot be denied that in this society, money and power still dominate at times.

"My hometown is in Shaanxi, and my family is quite well-off. I wonder if this boss wants a large, imposing piece, or just some wine or tableware? Once this is over, I'll go home and tidy things up; maybe I'll find something else..."

"Ren" was quite confident in his judgment. He had met Monkey and Zhao Hanxuan before and knew they had a shop in Panjiayuan and were definitely not cops.

After spending some time with Zhuang Rui, he could tell that Zhuang Rui wasn't a government employee, which is why he subtly revealed some of his background to Zhuang Rui in his conversation.

"Is there a powerful artifact? Is it complete? Does it have inscriptions?"

Zhuang Rui was taken aback. The so-called important artifacts referred to bronze tripods, and they had to be bronze tripods of considerable size. These things were very rare. Even tomb raiders had a hard time getting their hands on bronze tripods and usually smashed them to take them away.

For example, the Simuwu Ding, which was unearthed in 1939 in the Wujia Baishu Cemetery in Wuguan Village, Yinxu, is 133 cm high, 110 cm long, and weighs 875 kg. Its shape is very majestic and it is known as the king of ding (tripod cauldrons).

Such objects cannot be measured in monetary terms; they are priceless national treasures, just like the Terracotta Army. A foreign museum once offered the country one hundred million US dollars for each terracotta warrior, but it was rejected without question.

The small man replied, "It's not big, but it's very intact, with inscriptions, from the Shang and Zhou dynasties. It's an old family heirloom; I wouldn't be selling it if I weren't short of money lately..."

"Not many people dare to take on this..."

Zhuang Rui tapped his right index finger unconsciously on the table. Buying small items might not matter if he got caught, but if it really involved national treasures, his uncle might skin him alive before the police even came knocking.

"Let's talk about it later. If the boss is still interested after this is over, we can get in touch again..."

The short man smiled, stood up, and this time truly said goodbye and left.

After the man surnamed Ren left, Zhao Hanxuan said to Zhuang Rui with a worried expression, "Boss, those two bronze jue are fine, but let's forget about the important artifacts..."

Zhao Hanxuan was no novice in the antique business. Although he didn't collect bronzes, he knew that the discovery of every important artifact with an inscription would shock the entire antique and archaeological community.

The tomb from which such important artifacts were unearthed must undoubtedly be a royal tomb. If there are inscriptions on the bronze tripod, it will be even more troublesome. Even if Zhuang Rui buys it and nothing goes wrong, he will not dare to reveal it.

Because such a large tomb, once robbed, will definitely be thoroughly investigated. If Zhuang Rui dares to bring it out, he will be courting death. Don't underestimate the capabilities of the relevant domestic departments.

Such items are usually smuggled overseas and sold to collectors in Hong Kong, Macau, or other places who appreciate Chinese art.

"Old Zhao, this man is no ordinary person. Forget about the important artifacts, I don't even want these two bronze wine vessels anymore..."

Zhuang Rui and Zhao Hanxuan had different ideas. He had personally witnessed tomb raiders and had heard Professor Meng talk about many tomb raiding incidents. He knew that ordinary tomb raiders could not obtain complete bronze tripods.

The fact that this short guy had it could only mean one thing: he was backed by an organized tomb raiding gang. If he were just a lone tomb raider, Zhuang Rui wouldn't care.

But what Zhuang Rui feared most was getting involved with these gangs. These people were all after money, not their lives. Just thinking about what happened in Shaanxi made Zhuang Rui's legs tremble a little.

Zhuang Rui sat there pondering for a long time before finally raising his head and saying, "Monkey, let's put this matter aside for now. There are some things we'd better not touch, or we might get into huge trouble..."

Chapter 674-675 Trouble (Part Two & Three)

Ouyang Wan often taught Zhuang Rui not to rely on his maternal grandfather's power to do illegal things. This situation perfectly illustrates that—it's an abuse of power for personal gain.

Zhuang Rui believed that if he bought this item, even if any problems arose in the future and the police tracked him down, Ouyang Jun would probably be able to help him resolve the situation.

However, Zhuang Rui still gave up the opportunity to buy these two cheap items. He has his own principles, and at least he rarely goes against his mother's words. It's not like the museum can't open without these two things.

Although he wasn't involved in politics, Zhuang Rui often overheard Ouyang Jun gossiping about who was in power and who was out of power. When someone was in power, everyone would come to congratulate them, but if they lost power, even the smallest things would likely be used against them.

"Brother Zhuang, are you sure you don't want it anymore?"

The monkey was somewhat surprised. Just now, Zhuang Rui had said that he should find someone to buy it for him. How could he suddenly decide not to buy it?

Monkey hadn't been wasting his time in Panjiayuan these past few days; he knew a thing or two about the value of these two bronze jue (wine vessels). If someone liked them, they could easily make two or three hundred thousand yuan by reselling them.

"Of course not, I'll avoid dealing with this person in the future..."

Zhuang Rui nodded, and fearing that the monkey wouldn't understand, he continued, "In this grave-digging business, some people are lone wolves who do small jobs. They're released after a year or two at most when they're arrested, and they don't bite people randomly."

But this guy just now had such a heavy weapon. When it was unearthed, it would take five or six people to move it. It must have been a gang crime. If they've committed a crime, they'll have to search every inch of them. Otherwise, they might end up getting themselves into trouble instead of getting the mutton they wanted..."

Putting aside the possibility of being charged with receiving stolen goods, Zhuang Rui knew that anything he bought with money would definitely be confiscated by the state, and he certainly didn't want to risk that.

The monkey, used to being wild, was startled by Zhuang Rui's words and quickly nodded, saying, "I understand, Brother Zhuang, don't worry, I definitely won't associate with that person again..."

"Alright, go back and close the door. It's my treat today. Let's go out for a meal, then find a place to sing karaoke. Hmm, you can bring your family members..."

Zhuang Rui checked the time; it was already 6:30. He figured that by the time he got home, the women would have already finished dinner. He thought he might as well invite the employees of "Xuanrui Zhai" to have dinner together.

"Brother Zhuang, um, are unmarried people considered family members?"

The monkey, standing nearby, asked timidly, "Recently, I've been getting really close to a divorced young woman who lives in that neighborhood. In the words I told Nobita, 'Don't let my skinny appearance fool you, I'm all muscle.'"

"Fine, take it with you. Why are you asking me about this? Monkey, can't you be a little more responsible?" Zhuang Rui laughed and scolded, then walked out of the teahouse first. Old Zhao was in the back settling the bill and getting an invoice; it was all shop expenses anyway.

"Xiao Zhuang, I won't go. My wife's cooking is still the best. You young people go and have some fun..."

When this was mentioned back at the shop, Master Ge shook his head. He said he always got home at seven o'clock sharp every day, and his wife would have dinner ready for him.

Moreover, in the past two months, Master Ge has made a lot of money with his skills, and his son and grandson have become much more attentive, allowing the old man to enjoy the happiness of family life.

"Well, I'm not going either. My son is taking his college entrance exams soon, and I need to go home to take care of him..."

Zhao Hanxuan wasn't interested in eating or drinking; what could be more important than educating the next generation?

Master Ge and Zhao Hanxuan were both unwilling to go, but Monkey Daxiong and two other employees were overjoyed.

Although Monkey and Da Xiong earn a decent income, they lack confidence. They usually just stroll around the neighborhood and have never actually been to any entertainment venues. Their two friends are even worse off; their two or three thousand yuan a month isn't even enough for a night at a bar in Houhai.

"Alright, Da Xiong, take them to eat first, then find a place to sing karaoke or something. Just don't cause any trouble..."

When Zhuang Rui saw that Lao Zhao wasn't going, he didn't want to go either. Anyone would feel a little awkward around the boss, so he took out eight thousand yuan and threw it to Da Xiong.

"Xiao Zhuang, have you eaten yet?"

After picking up Qin Xuanbing and looking at antiques, Zhuang Rui was a bit hungry after a whole afternoon of running around. He went straight to the dining room when he got back to the courtyard

house, only to find Zhang Ma clearing the table. Qin Xuanbing and the others were not there; they must have eaten and gone back to their rooms.

"Aunt Zhang, I haven't eaten yet. I'm actually quite hungry right now..."

Seeing Zhang Ma putting on her apron and heading to the kitchen, Zhuang Rui quickly said, "Hey, Zhang Ma, you don't need to cook anymore. Is there any leftover food? I'll just eat something..."

Aunt Zhang shook her head and said, "That won't do, how can we eat leftovers..."

At Zhuang Rui's house, Ouyang Wan set a rule that everyone would eat the same food, and the leftovers would be reserved for Bai Shi.

Of course, these leftovers were just extra meals for the white lion. As for the white lion's regular meals, they consisted of fresh beef and mutton, which cost several thousand yuan a month.

"No, Aunt Zhang, I ate plenty of leftovers when I was little. We came from a poor family. Don't bother, I can take care of it myself..."

Zhuang Rui invited Zhang Ma and Li Sao over mainly so they could help his mother with some chores and chat in their spare time. He didn't have the habit of ordering the elderly around. He went into the kitchen and saw that there was half a fish and a bowl of fish soup left. He turned on the gas to heat it up, then ladled out a bowl of rice and took it to the dining room to eat.

"You silly child, when it's mealtime, can't you eat out by yourself?"

When Ouyang Wan heard the noise from the kitchen, she came in and saw Zhuang Rui wolfing down his food. She couldn't help but scold her son.

"Hey Mom, we used to eat plenty of leftovers, so what's the big deal..."

Zhuang Rui said nonchalantly, "Back when we were in school, when I and Liu Chuan came home from school, we would rummage through drawers and cupboards to find whatever we could eat."

As the saying goes, "a little dirt won't hurt you," but modern people talk about health all the time, even peeling apples before eating them, yet they have more health problems than anyone else.

"My child, we didn't have the means back then, and I'm so sorry for you two siblings..."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Ouyang Wan also fell into deep thought. She wondered if her decades of striving for excellence had been the right thing to do. For a moment, the only sound in the restaurant was Zhuang Rui finishing his rice and drinking the fish soup.

"Mom, aren't we doing just fine now? If you feel lonely, you can go stay with Grandpa for a few days. If that doesn't work, I'll bring Nannan back, and in a couple of years, he can go to school with Yaya..."

When Zhuang Rui saw his mother, he was reminded of the past and quickly changed the subject. He had been thinking about whether he should find his mother a partner.

No matter how filial the children are, they can't satisfy the emotional needs of the elderly. Ouyang Wan is only in her fifties, not very old. Life is generally better now, and she can probably live another thirty years. Zhuang Rui doesn't want his mother to be lonely like this.

However, Zhuang Rui could only think about this in his heart and did not dare to bring it up. When he was studying and working in Zhonghai, some of his uncles and aunts had mentioned these things, wanting to introduce Ouyang Wan to a companion, but she refused them all.

Zhuang Min had mentioned it once, but was scolded by Ouyang Wan. Zhuang Rui thought that if there was a chance in the future, he would ask Zhang Ma and Li Sao to talk to her, which might be more effective.

"Well, next time your brother-in-law comes to Beijing, have him bring Nannan along. It's been a month or so since we've seen her..."

Speaking of her granddaughter, Ouyang Wan really missed her. Last month, Zhuang Min took Nannan back home, and Ouyang Wan felt uneasy for several days. That girl was someone she had raised since she was little.

"It's easy. My brother-in-law will be here the day after tomorrow. I'll have my sister come too. Let's both stay in Beijing for a while..."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement. Zhao Guodong's auto repair shop had basically monopolized the auto repair business around the national highway, and he had hired several skilled mechanics. His two apprentices were also capable of managing their own businesses.

Zhao Guodong is much more relaxed now than before. He rarely crawls under cars with tools anymore, and spends a lot of time in Zhuang Rui's jade processing workshop every day.

"Let's not talk about your sister anymore, Xiao Rui. It's not that I'm criticizing you, but the engagement is already set. When are you going to get the marriage certificate and have a proper ceremony? Xuanbing is a good girl. She's all alone in Beijing, so don't let her suffer any injustice..."

Besides, you're not a child anymore. It's better to have a baby sooner rather than later, while Mom is still quite mobile and can help you take care of the baby..."

Ouyang Wan suddenly changed the subject to Zhuang Rui. After getting to know him over the past few days, Ouyang Wan was very satisfied with this prospective daughter-in-law, who came from a prominent family but was not spoiled.

In Zhuang Rui's grandmother's words, she has a slim waist and a round bottom, and is sure to give birth to several big, fat boys.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui put his arm around his mother's shoulder, laughed, and said, "Mom, don't worry. I've been busy with the museum lately. After the museum opens, I'll be going back to school soon. Before I start graduate school, I'll definitely get married and give you a big, healthy grandson next year..."

Zhuang Rui had indeed considered this matter. After finishing this busy period, he planned to get a marriage certificate with Qin Xuanbing first, and then go to Hainan to take wedding photos. This is a once-in-a-lifetime event, and he couldn't let himself or Qin Xuanbing suffer.

Ouyang Wan tapped her son on the head, laughed, and said, "You're such a grown man, yet you're still so shameless. Can you handle this all by yourself? You should ask Xuanbing's opinion first. I think that child is quite opinionated; maybe he doesn't want to have children so early..."

"Don't worry, Mom. In this family, who's in charge? Your son's word counts..."

Zhuang Rui patted his chest as if to express his determination, but he didn't hear the faint footsteps coming from the restaurant entrance.

After dinner, Ouyang Wan went to the front yard to find Zhang Ma and the others to go dancing in the park. Zhuang Rui returned to the back yard and saw Qin Xuanbing sitting there. He asked curiously, "Xuanbing, why aren't you with your sister-in-law? Didn't you say you'd sleep with her today?"

"My sister-in-law is asleep, so I came back..."

Xu Qing has been particularly sleepy since becoming pregnant, and she sleeps very soundly. However, it's only a little past eight o'clock now, and Qin Xuanbing can't possibly be asleep that early.

"Zhuang Rui, you're the one in charge of our family, but I want to wait three years before having a child. What do you suggest?"

Qin Xuanbing's words startled Zhuang Rui. It turned out that his wife had overheard what he was saying to his mother.

"Well, I'll make the decisions on big things, like when Bush will visit China. As for small things like when to have children, you can decide, okay?"

Zhuang Rui shamelessly moved closer to Qin Xuanbing, and suddenly hugged her around the waist, his large hands roaming over her chest.

"No, no... mmm..."

Just as Qin Xuanbing was about to resist, Zhuang Rui silenced her with a kiss. Her body gradually responded to the touch of Zhuang Rui's seemingly magical hands, and she involuntarily wrapped her arms around his neck.

Zhuang Rui suddenly stopped what he was doing and whispered in Qin Xuanbing's ear, "Baby, do we still want the baby?"

"Yes, yes... Rui, I want it..."

Unable to resist the teasing, Qin Xuanbing had completely forgotten about having a child three years later, and besides, she had only been teasing Zhuang Rui on purpose.

Having been running around these past few days, Zhuang Rui hadn't been intimate with Qin Xuanbing for a long time. He quickly stripped the girl in his arms like a little lamb and carried her to the bathroom.

"I just won't answer your calls, no matter how many times you call. Don't you want to smash your phone in front of you?"

Suddenly, Zhuang Rui's phone rang in his casual pants pocket. This usually annoying music sounded even more annoying to Zhuang Rui this time. He took out his phone and looked at it, but it only made him feel more annoyed.

"What does this girl want from me?"

It turned out that the caller was none other than Officer Miao. Zhuang Rui hadn't contacted Miss Miao for almost two months since their engagement, and he couldn't understand why she wanted to see him.

"Don't hang up! Is there anything you can't say in front of me?"

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to hang up the phone and continue his baby-making endeavor, Qin Xuanbing, who was in his arms, also saw the name on the phone screen. Her voice carried a hint of jealousy.

Even the most generous woman, if she doesn't get nervous when she sees a young woman calling her husband, it means she doesn't love that man at all. Qin Xuanbing's reaction is quite normal.

"Grandma, she and I are completely innocent, Heaven can bear witness..."

Zhuang Rui cried out in protest, but seeing that Qin Xuanbing had already started getting dressed, he couldn't help but smile wryly and say, "What good could the police possibly want from me? Fine, I'll answer them, okay?"

"Hehe, I was just kidding. Why don't you go outside to answer the phone?" Qin Xuanbing suddenly changed her expression and said with a smile.

"No, I'll take it right here. We've done nothing wrong, what's there to be afraid of..."

Zhuang Rui thought to himself, "If I go out to answer the phone, I'm guaranteed not to be able to get into bed tonight. I'm not falling for your tricks..."

"Officer Miao, hello! What brings you here today? You're such a busy chief..."

Zhuang Rui pressed the answer button. Of course, he wouldn't call the other person by their name. If he called out "Feifei," his wife would definitely go back to her parents' home tomorrow.

"Zhuang Rui, if I don't call you, you won't contact me anymore, right?"

Miao Feifei's clear voice came through the receiver, while Miss Qin, who was standing next to him, did not stop Zhuang Rui from making the call, but she stood still and her ears were perked up.

"Oh, Director Miao, you're so busy every day, how could I dare to bother you? It's so late, is there anything I can help you with?"

Zhuang Rui inwardly groaned. Miao Feifei usually didn't speak with such a resentful tone, as if he owed her something. This was just too much.

Moreover, the amplification function of this phone's microphone is damn good. Not to mention Qin Xuanbing standing right next to him, even the white lion loitering outside the door could probably hear it.

How do you know I'm busy every day?

Miao Feifei replied to Zhuang Rui, then said, "I need to see you now. I'm outside your house, so hurry up and come out..."

"Hey... hey, Officer Miao, I'm not home right now. I'm at Brother Bai's villa in Daxing..."

Zhuang Rui could clearly see that Qin Xuanbing's face was getting uglier and uglier as the voice came through the microphone. He didn't know if Miao Feifei was doing it on purpose, but her words always had a hint of ambiguity.

"Being at home is being at home. What's there to hide?"

Qin Xuanbing, standing beside him, gave a cold snort. Although her voice wasn't loud, it reached Zhuang Rui's ears. She seemed unwilling to listen to Zhuang Rui and Miao Feifei flirting anymore. After getting dressed, Qin Xuanbing left.

"Zhuang Rui, I know you're home. What's wrong? Are you afraid to see me?"

It was unclear whether Miao Feifei had heard Qin Xuanbing's words, but her tone made Zhuang Rui want to bang his head against the wall.

"Officer Miao, please get to the point. I'm busy right now, I'll hang up if there's nothing else..."

Zhuang Rui thought that rather than being bullied by both sides, he should focus on comforting his wife. While talking on the phone, Zhuang Rui chased after Qin Xuanbing. If his mother saw Qin Xuanbing being bullied, he would never have a peaceful life again.

"Don't hang up, Zhuang Rui. I need to talk to you, it's work-related..."

Perhaps hearing the sound of Qin Xuanbing's leather shoes leaving, Miao Feifei's tone on the phone suddenly became normal. This change left Zhuang Rui bewildered and extremely angry. If you had spoken like that just now, none of this would have happened.

"Officer Miao, you are a civil servant and a public servant, while I am just an ordinary citizen. What work do I need to discuss with you?"

After Zhuang Rui chased her out of the room, he grabbed Qin Xuanbing, covered the phone's microphone with his hand, and said to her, "Work, work, Officer Miao called me about work..."

"You're not a civil servant from mainland China, what work do you have to discuss with her?"

Seeing Zhuang Rui come out to chase after her meant that she was still very important to him, which pleased Qin Xuanbing. However, she still showed her dissatisfaction on her face and returned to Zhuang Rui what he had just said on the phone.

It's not Qin Xuanbing's fault for being petty. Zhuang Rui was just asking for trouble by being all lovey-dovey with another woman in front of his wife.

However, Zhuang Rui was also wronged. He had said he wouldn't answer the phone, but Qin Xuanbing insisted that he do so. He couldn't just hang up without saying anything after answering, since the other person was his friend.

"How would I know what's going on? Anyway, I won't go out for a while, okay?"

Zhuang Rui looked even more aggrieved than a wronged wife, which made Qin Xuanbing burst out laughing. She said, "Alright, answer the phone and see what's wrong. Could something have gone wrong with the artwork we exchanged abroad?"

"Zhuang Rui, I am now announcing to you on behalf of the police that there is a case of theft of national cultural relics, and we hope you can cooperate..." Qin Xuanbing's voice came clearly from the microphone.

"Officer Miao, citizens have an obligation to cooperate with the police in handling cases, but they also have the right to refuse. I'm sorry, but I can't do this. I can't punch or kick anyone, so how can I cooperate with you..."

Upon hearing that it was about these kinds of things again, Zhuang Rui immediately refused. Having spent a lot of time with Attorney Huangfu lately, Zhuang Rui spoke with a solid basis.

Last time, Zhuang Rui cooperated with Miao Feifei to investigate the case of the theft of an ancient tomb in Hubei. They went to the black market, but later Jin Pangzi found out Miao Feifei's identity. If Zhuang Rui hadn't had a good relationship with him, it probably would have been exposed long ago.

The antique trade has its own rules. Due to national restrictions, many antiques traded privately are high-quality items, so the police are very wary of them. If Zhuang Rui's matter gets out, the black market for antiques in Beijing and surrounding areas will definitely blacklist him.

Once his museum opens, Zhuang Rui will inevitably have to deal with all sorts of people in Beijing's antique world, and he doesn't want to be labeled as a "lackey."

"Zhuang Rui, please be serious. I am speaking to you on behalf of the organization..."

"Hey, Officer Miao, please don't make a big deal out of this. I'm used to being disorganized and undisciplined. You should find some professionals; I'm afraid of trouble!"

In the end, Zhuang Rui really hates trouble, especially when it involves Miao Feifei. Nothing has happened yet, and his fiancée almost ran away from home. If something were to happen, his mother might not even recognize him as her son.

"Trouble? You brought this trouble upon yourself, Zhuang Rui. This case is the same one you encountered in Shaanxi, and the person involved has already contacted you, which is why we've contacted you. We hope you can cooperate..."

The voice coming from the microphone startled Zhuang Rui. His experience in Shaanxi was something he would never forget. The white lion saving his master from the brink of death left a shadow in Zhuang Rui's heart.

Zhuang Rui straightened his expression and asked, "Are you talking about the person who came to sell bronzes today, and whether he's connected to the case in Shaanxi?"

Boss Yu confessed that half the reason was due to Zhuang Rui and Bai Shi. If there were still people involved in the case who had not been brought to justice, they might come to retaliate against him. Zhuang Rui really dared not be careless.

Chapter 676 Professional Talents

If that short man surnamed Ren is indeed an accomplice of Boss Yu, then the origin of the bronze tripod he mentioned is quite clear.

While in Shaanxi, the investigators told Zhuang Rui about some details of the case. Yu Laoda and his gang had been active in Hebei, Shandong, Henan, Shaanxi and other places, and countless cultural relics had been lost through their hands.

Furthermore, this tomb-robbing gang existed for a very long time. According to statistics from relevant departments, they looted hundreds of ancient tombs over a period of nearly fifteen years, making them even more ruthless than the official tomb robbers of ancient times. The domestic cultural relics community suffered greatly as a result.

With the strength of Boss Yu and his men, acquiring a few bronze tripods would not be difficult at all. Zhuang Rui had seen photos of the seized cultural relics, most of which were important bronze artifacts and ancient jade used for sacrificial rites, which were priceless.

Moreover, due to their violent looting, many ancient tombs could not be repaired, and their historical dates could not be verified, resulting in many unsolved cases. Professor Meng, who conducts academic research, always had a heartbroken expression when mentioning this matter.

"Officer Miao, since you know that person is involved in a major cultural relics case in Shaanxi, why don't you just arrest him directly? Why are you asking me?"

Having figured out these details, Zhuang Rui still didn't quite understand why Miao Feifei had come to him. They had already caught Yu Laoqi, so there was no need for any so-called catching the thief and seizing the stolen goods. They could have just issued an arrest warrant and arrested him, wouldn't that have solved the problem?

"Zhuang Rui, I think it would be better if we met in person. There are some things that can't be explained over the phone. Don't worry, I'm only calling to discuss the case. If you don't want me to bother you in the future, you can pretend we were never friends..."

Miao Feifei sighed. She knew that Zhuang Rui didn't want to get involved in the case, mainly because he didn't want to have much contact with her. As a woman, Miao Feifei also had her pride. When she said these words, she also drew a clear line between herself and Zhuang Rui.

"Officer Miao, that's not what I meant, I really didn't mean that..."

Zhuang Rui, hearing Miao Feifei's somewhat harsh words, quickly explained that although Miao Feifei was a bit straightforward and intolerant of injustice, she was still a good girl and a good friend.

"Alright, that's enough. If you have time now, I hope you'll cooperate with my work. If you don't have time, I can have a colleague talk to you tomorrow..."

Miao Feifei interrupted Zhuang Rui, her voice sounding somewhat cold in the night.

"Xuanbing, look..."

Zhuang Rui covered the phone's microphone with his hand and looked at Qin Xuanbing.

"What am I looking at? Go ahead, I didn't say anything to you..."

Qin Xuanbing glared at Zhuang Rui with annoyance, then turned and walked towards the room. As she opened the door, she turned back and said, "Rui, I'm going to take a shower first. I'll wait for you to come back..."

Watching Qin Xuanbing enter the room, Zhuang Rui was both amused and exasperated. This woman's heart was truly unfathomable. Couldn't she just talk things out?

"Alright, Officer Miao, I'll be right out..."

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui shook his head, walked out of the courtyard through the front gate, and crossed the quiet alleyway. He saw a police car parked at the intersection.

"Officer Miao, shall we find a place to sit down and talk?"

Zhuang Rui opened the back door of the police car and got in. The driver was Miao Feifei, who looked very dashing in her police uniform, though she looked a little thinner than she had two months ago.

Zhuang Rui is now aware of his identity and realizes that it is inappropriate for him to be flirtatious when talking to women. Therefore, he no longer calls Miao Feifei by her name as before, but instead adds the word "police officer".

"No....."

Miao Feifei glanced at Zhuang Rui in the rearview mirror and said, "Here are the suspect's files and photos. Take a look and identify him..."

As she spoke, Miao Feifei turned around, handed Zhuang Rui a file folder, and turned on the car's interior light. "Take a look. Is the person in the photo the one you met today...?"

"Yu Zhenping, 32 years old, 1.52 meters tall, from Luoyang, Henan Province, is the eighth child in his family. He is known as Yu Laoba (Old Eight Yu). He is the ringleader of a major tomb-robbing gang in Henan and Shaanxi Provinces. He started engaging in tomb-robbing activities at the age of 16 and participated in the excavation of nearly 100 ancient tombs. He escaped during a manhunt in June 2004..."

On a document inside the file folder was a photograph, and beneath it, Yu Ping's life story was clearly written, leaving Zhuang Rui speechless.

He started tomb raiding at the age of 16 and excavated nearly a hundred ancient tombs. He is definitely a master in the tomb raiding world. He is probably comparable to the tomb raider during the Three Kingdoms period. In terms of professional skills, he may not be much better than him.

According to his resume, the ancient tombs excavated by the Yu family tomb raiding group were mostly the work of Yu Laoba in terms of feng shui analysis and tomb location. Even the digging and drilling were mostly done by Yu Laoba, so he was proficient in everything.

After reading the man's resume, Zhuang Rui even felt that such a professional should be recruited into the archaeological team. Putting aside everything else, Yu Laoba's unique sense of ancient tombs was far superior to even Professor Meng's.

Zhuang Rui really felt it was a pity to arrest someone like that and have him shot.

"Well, did you recognize him? Is he the person you saw this afternoon?" Miao Feifei asked when Zhuang Rui remained silent for a long time.

Zhuang Rui didn't answer Miao Feifei's question, but instead asked, "Officer Miao, how did you know I saw this person this afternoon?"

"He is our prime suspect. We are closely monitoring his every move. It's not just you; there are several other people in Panjiayuan who have also been in contact with him..."

Miao Feifei was very nice today, answering all of Zhuang Rui's questions.

"It's him. His appearance is slightly different, but his height is something that can't be changed. Hmm, it must be him..."

Hearing Miao Feifei's words, Zhuang Rui felt relieved and chuckled to himself, "Dude, even if you're handsome, don't mistake everyone for a lovesick fool."

However, Zhuang Rui was still puzzled and asked, "Officer Miao, since you have such detailed intelligence, why don't you just arrest them?"

The crime that Yu Laoba committed was not illegal trading of cultural relics at all, but the crime of excavating ancient tombs. With the evidence you have, you can sentence him to death..."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Miao Feifei nodded and said, "It's easy to arrest Yu Zhenping and convict him, but we want to use Yu Ping as a lead to uncover the criminal group in Hong Kong that receives stolen goods."

Moreover, according to Yu Zhenping's cousin, Yu Laoqi, they still had nearly a thousand antiques that they couldn't sell, all of which remained in the country. The location of their hiding place was known only to Yu Zhenping and the already deceased ringleader, Yu Ku..."

After Yu Laoqi was caught in Shaanxi, he witnessed the power of the national police. That guy was very disloyal and spilled everything he knew.

However, Yu Zhenjiang, also known as Yu Laoqi, was the mastermind of the Yu family's tomb raiding group, but his status was not very high. Otherwise, why would he be assigned the job of keeping watch while others went down into the tomb to retrieve items?

In addition, Boss Yu is cold-hearted and extremely selfish. He personally controls many things, and even his own brothers don't know much about them. Only Yu Zhenping, who has been by Boss Yu's side for many years, knows the most.

According to Yu Laoqi, Yu Zhenping seemed to have suffered some kind of shock when he was sixteen or seventeen years old, which made him very extreme and stubborn. If he didn't want to talk, you couldn't get him to open his mouth no matter what you did.

For this reason, coupled with the desire to uncover an international tomb raiding and resale syndicate, the police did not make a hasty arrest, fearing that Yu Laoba would become reckless and prevent these stolen precious cultural relics from ever seeing the light of day again.

However, judging from the current situation, after nearly a year of lying low, Yu Laoba did not go to the Hong Kong supplier to sell the stolen goods. Instead, he risked coming to *** to sell the stolen goods. It is likely that he did not have the contact information of the Hong Kong supplier. Therefore, the main reason for not arresting him now is to try to find out where the stolen cultural relics are hidden.

Police psychologists analyzed that Yu Laoba was taking advantage of people's belief that the more dangerous a place is, the safer it is, to come to Panjiayuan to sell stolen goods. However, he did not expect that from the first day he entered Panjiayuan, he was being watched by the relevant authorities, who issued a notice for assistance in the investigation and confirmed his identity.

The major tomb raiding case involving five provinces—Hebei, Shandong, Henan, Shaanxi, and Hubei—was personally supervised by the Ministry of Public Security. Now that the main culprit has surfaced, the Ministry has immediately assembled a special task force, and Miss Miao is a member of this task force.

"This...this could fill a whole book..."

After listening to Miao Feifei's words, Zhuang Rui breathed a long sigh of relief. It turns out that sometimes solving a case is not difficult; the difficult part is how to recover the losses.

Of course, those items that were lost overseas from the Yu family's tomb-robbing group are probably gone forever, and may already be in the private room of some foreign tycoon.

"Officer Miao, how can I help you with this?"

Upon hearing that only Yu Laoba remained in the Yu family's tomb-raiding gang, Zhuang Rui's courage immediately grew. No matter how ruthless Yu Laoba was, he was still just one person, and with his small stature, he wouldn't suffer any losses even if he went head-to-head with him.

Besides, even if Miao Feifei asked him to be the bait, she had already made it clear to Yu Laoba that she wouldn't show up during the transaction, and even if there was danger, it wouldn't concern her much. Of course, Zhuang Rui wouldn't let Monkey go either; it would be best if the police arranged someone.

"This matter is somewhat dangerous. Based on the information we have, Yu Zhenping may very well be carrying a gun..."

Miao Feifei's words made Zhuang Rui immediately shrink back. Why didn't you say you had a gun earlier?

Chapter 677 Cooperation

"Isn't the country supposed to ban guns? How come these people have bombs and guns? Don't they care about the lives of us ordinary people?"

Zhuang Rui grumbled to Miao Feifei, but he knew in his heart that getting a gun at the China-Myanmar and China-Vietnam border was incredibly easy; a pistol could be bought for a few hundred yuan, complete with several magazines and bullets.

With a population of over a billion, how can you just control them? Miao Feifei glanced at Zhuang Rui with frustration and said, "The country even prohibits the sale of bronze artifacts, but some people still ignore it."

"Hey, Officer Miao, I'm a law-abiding citizen. The bronze artifact I received was originally just a piece of scrap metal. I had no idea what level of cultural relic it was. Ignorance is no excuse..."

Zhuang Rui knew that Miao Feifei was referring to his possession of the Dingguang Sword, so he quickly explained that if the police really got involved and took the sword away, he wouldn't have anything to say.

"Alright, I don't have time for your stuff. Just tell me, are you going to help this time or not? If you're not willing, I'll find someone else..."

According to the information Miao Feifei had, Zhuang Rui was not the only person Pan Jiayuan and Yu Zhenping had contacted. Miao Feifei didn't know why she came to find Zhuang Rui first; perhaps she wanted to see him?

"No help. Safety first. To be honest, I don't really trust you police. Even snipers can miss. Last time in Shaanxi, it was Bai Shi who saved me. Hey, don't take offense, I'm just telling the truth..."

Zhuang Rui shook his head like a rattle drum. As the saying goes, a wise man does not stand under a dangerous wall. Zhuang Rui is now a successful man, so there is no need for him to take that risk. Most importantly, there would be no benefit in taking the risk.

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Miao Feifei said, "Then it's up to you. I originally heard you were going to open a museum, and I was thinking of helping you apply for some of the artifacts involved in the case after it was solved. Since you don't want to, then forget it. Get out of the car, I'm going back..."

"Wait... what did you say? Stolen goods can be given to private individuals?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned when he heard Miao Feifei's words. He had only ever heard of private individuals donating things to the country. Why did the country give items to private individuals?

"It's not for private individuals. It's for exhibition purposes only, after an agreement is signed with your museum. You have no right to sell or donate it, understand?"

If Zhuang Rui still doesn't understand what she's saying, then he's a fool. This kind of treatment is usually only available at the National Museum. He never expected that, according to Miao Feifei, he could also enjoy this treatment.

Although there are now three or four hundred private museums in China, most of them are struggling to survive due to limitations in scale, identity, and laws and regulations.

To put it bluntly, which some people may not like to hear, the attitude of Chinese people towards art is quite different from that of foreigners. Foreign collectors often donate their collections, which are often extremely valuable, to private or national museums. This is a very common practice abroad.

However, such things are rare in China. Although they do happen, there are only a handful of people who do them. Most people keep them secret and hide their treasures in their own collection rooms.

Of course, in China, the collections of private museums are all privately owned. However, when the time is right, many private museums abroad choose to socialize their assets by converting personal assets into social assets, establishing a board of directors, or using a foundation as a trustee.

This method can alleviate personal pressure, but the consequence is that what was originally one's own belongings becomes shared property. I doubt that many people in China who open private museums have the courage to do this.

Putting aside what others might say, Zhuang Rui would definitely not donate them. Otherwise, why would he even open a museum? He could just send his personal belongings to the Palace Museum and that would be the end of it.

National museums receive government funding and have their collections replenished by archaeological finds, so they naturally face little pressure. However, private museums do not enjoy these benefits. We have never heard of any collector donating money or artifacts to a private museum; they can only grit their teeth and struggle to survive.

People who collect things aren't necessarily rich. Many of them might be struggling financially, unable to afford rent or food, but the things they own could be worth millions. It's like having a golden rice bowl but begging for food.

The same applies to those who run private museums. They are often described as "rich but penniless," simply because they are unwilling to sell their collections.

Since he had decided to set up his own museum, Zhuang Rui had learned about these things beforehand. In China, almost all private museums that rely on ticket revenue are operating at a loss.

If we're talking about museums that are profitable and successful, then Mr. Ma Weidu's Guanfu Museum is probably the only one. However, the Guanfu Museum's model is something that is difficult for ordinary people to replicate.

Given Mr. Ma Weidu's reputation, he is undoubtedly the number one collector in China. He has used his social influence, integrity, and cultural background to gather many talents in the collecting world and form a membership system.

Mr. Ma himself can help with appraisal. When collectors can't find good items, they can communicate with each other among members. Nowadays, many collectors can't find good items and often encounter fakes. Some want to sell but can't find buyers.

Therefore, while operating his own museum, Ma Weidu also provides services to collectors. This creates a win-win situation, essentially turning the museum into a big party. To participate, one must pay a membership fee, which allows access to many services for a small amount of money.

This has led many collectors in Beijing and across the country to become members of the Guanfu Museum. Considering the sheer number of collectors in China, supporting a museum would be an easy task.

Zhuang Rui had considered this operating model before, but then he thought that although he was somewhat famous, he was just a novice in the art collecting circle, far inferior to Mr. Ma's reputation and connections accumulated over more than 20 years. It would be almost impossible for him to follow this model.

However, Zhuang Rui is rich, so even if the ticket sales are a bit of a loss, he can still afford to play. Therefore, he doesn't think much about the financial aspect. But a museum must have exhibits and collections, which is what Zhuang Rui values most right now.

It's fair to say that Miao Feifei's promise to donate a batch of cultural relics to him really touched Zhuang Rui, hitting his weak spot. He's not short of money, but he's short of quality items.

Some things can't be bought with money. Bill Gates is rich, right? But no matter how much money he has, he can't buy a single terracotta warrior from the burial pits in Xi'an.

To be honest, the reason Zhuang Rui agreed to meet Yu Zhenping earlier was because he had too few antiques and wanted to collect more. He had just seen information that thousands of precious cultural relics had been hidden by Yu Zhenping and Yu Laoda, and Zhuang Rui was immediately tempted.

Of course, to obtain these items, Zhuang Rui must first help the police solve the case and uncover the hidden antiques; otherwise, it's all just a mirage, something you can see but can't touch.

"Officer Miao, please tell me how you want me to cooperate..."

To be honest, although Yu Laoba might have a gun, Zhuang Rui wasn't really afraid of him because Yu Zhenping looked too harmless and wasn't even as tall as an average elementary school student, which made Zhuang Rui feel no fear.

If you were dealing with someone like Boss Yu, let alone donating a few antiques for Zhuang Rui to exhibit, even giving Zhuang Rui the Palace Museum... well, that's something to consider.

"First, we'll buy those two antiques from Yu Zhenping, but the price must be negotiated down, and the transaction must be in cash. After the deal is completed, we'll arrange for someone to stage a scene to steal Yu Zhenping's money."

In this way, Yu Zhenping won't have much money left. He'll definitely continue selling antiques, and that'll give us an opportunity..."

After hearing Miao Feifei's words, Zhuang Rui thought about it for a moment and understood.

It turns out that the police were afraid that Yu Zhenping would become wealthy and then hide away like he had done before. This was a case that the Ministry of Public Security was supervising within a limited time, and the police didn't have that much time to waste on Yu Zhenping.

"And then?" Zhuang Rui asked.

"If you don't have any money, Yu Zhenping will definitely try to trade with you again. When that happens, ask to buy some large antiques, and he can only take you to the place where the antiques are hidden. You don't need to worry about the rest..."

According to the analysis of the special task force, Yu Zhenping is probably in dire financial straits, which has forced him to sell antiques. If the money is stolen or lost after a successful transaction, Yu Zhenping will definitely take the risk and sell the cultural relics again.

Judging from the fact that Yu Zhenping has not contacted any acquaintances since his escape, he must be a very suspicious and cautious person. Given the size of the bronze artifact, he would not have asked someone to move it, but would have taken Zhuang Rui to the hiding place to inspect the goods. In this way, the police had the opportunity to catch him red-handed.

After letting Zhuang Rui process her words for a moment, Miao Feifei continued, "The key point is that you need to gain Yu Zhenping's trust so that he will contact you again for the next deal..."

"Officer Miao, it wasn't difficult for me to gain his trust, but his money was stolen right after the transaction. He might start to suspect me..."

Zhuang Rui suddenly remembered a problem: he had just given Yu Zhenping the money, and the next day Yu Zhenping was robbed. Who knows, that guy might just come knocking on his door with a gun.

Miao Feifei laughed after hearing Zhuang Rui's words and said, "You don't need to worry about that. You don't necessarily have to rob him to make him penniless..."

Chapter 678 Yu Zhenping (Part 1)

"Monkey, find a middleman to buy those two bronze wine vessels, but the price has to be low, aim for 50,000 each..."

Zhuang Rui sat in a booth called "Xuanrui Zhai" in Panjiayuan and summoned the monkey who was busy outside.

I already discussed it with Miao Feifei yesterday. I'll pay for those two cultural relics first. If the police handle things well and Yu Zhenping comes back to me to sell the antiques, then everything will proceed according to plan.

However, if the police mess things up and fail to make Yu Zhenping lose all his money, then the two bronze jue (wine vessels) will belong to Zhuang Rui. It cannot be considered as purchasing stolen goods. This is a small benefit that Zhuang Rui managed to secure for himself yesterday after much persuasion.

"Brother Zhuang, didn't you say you weren't going to buy it?"

The monkey was puzzled. Zhuang Rui had described the consequences so seriously yesterday, so why did he decide to buy it again after just one night?

"Just buy it when I tell you to. Why ask so many questions? If you can negotiate the price down to 50,000 each, just buy it. He'll probably ask for cash. You need to find someone you can trust..."

The most troublesome part of the plan for Zhuang Rui was finding a middleman. It wasn't that Zhuang Rui couldn't find one; people like Fatty Jin could do it. They had also dealt in black market antiques before. However, this matter was somewhat dangerous, and it had to be kept secret from others beforehand. After thinking about it, Zhuang Rui decided to let Monkey find one.

As the saying goes, "The most righteous are often from humble backgrounds." Monkey, who frequented Panjiayuan, was clever and generous, and made quite a few friends. Of course, whether they were just drinking buddies or true brothers who would go to great lengths for each other was another matter entirely.

Monkey patted his small, bony chest so hard it made a loud noise, and said, "Brother Zhuang, don't worry, I, Monkey, have a bit of a reputation in Panjiayuan now. Getting someone to handle this is absolutely no problem. But I'm afraid... we won't be able to negotiate the price down..."

How do you know it won't work if you haven't tried?

Zhuang Rui waved his hand and said, "Two bronze jue (wine vessels), 100,000 yuan. Tell that person that if they want to sell, the transaction can be completed immediately; if not, ask them to choose someone else. However, you can make one thing clear: if there are any other important artifacts, I will offer a higher price to buy them, and we can discuss the details then..."

Not selling? If they don't sell, those two bronze wine vessels won't sell in this location in Beijing. Just last night, after Zhuang Rui agreed to cooperate with the police, all the buyers who had contacted Yu Zhenping were visited by the police one by one.

Of course, the police didn't ask them to refuse Yu Zhenping, as that would alert the suspects. If seven or eight people refused at the same time, Yu Zhenping would definitely become suspicious. The police simply asked these people to lower the price to below 50,000, forcing Yu Zhenping to sell to Zhuang Rui.

"Oh, right, give the middleman 10,000 yuan afterwards..."

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment, then added, "The middleman must be absolutely reliable. The money must be handed over to the other party. After the deal is finalized, come find me, and I'll give you the bank card..."

"Alright, Brother Zhuang, don't worry. If I, Monkey, can't even handle something this simple, I'd be too ashamed to follow you around..."

After arriving in Beijing, Da Xiong became more and more mature, and his position in the store gradually became more important, while the monkey became a dispensable character. After all, those antiques and jewelry all have prices marked, so who wouldn't sell them?

As a result, Monkey has been under a lot of psychological pressure lately. With such a high monthly salary, he would feel embarrassed to stay if he didn't help Zhuang Rui with something.

"Alright, stop talking and get this over with. There will be plenty of things for you to do later..."

Zhuang Rui chuckled and patted Monkey on the shoulder. The museum was about to open, and he was short-handed. Monkey had a good tongue and could work as a guide at the museum, but he didn't know if Monkey would be willing.

Zhuang Rui has been incredibly busy lately. He had planned to visit the construction site of the museum when he returned to China, but this matter has held him back. Furthermore, they haven't even found a security team for the museum yet. This morning, Zhuang Rui instructed Hao Long to find some retired veterans to help out.

As for Peng Fei, Zhuang Rui didn't even ask him. In his unit, the lowest rank was second lieutenant, and there were basically no retired soldiers. Even if they got older, they would go to ordinary units to serve as instructors, and it was impossible for them to work in a local museum.

Panjiayuan, located near the East Third Ring Road, is always bustling, which has also boosted the surrounding area. The area itself is in a good location, and with the Panjiayuan Antique Market driving the economy, the consumption is not much worse than in the city center.

Not far from Panjiayuan, there is a residential community. Unlike the surrounding high-rise residential buildings, this community consists entirely of seven-story buildings without elevators. Most of the residents here are old Beijingers.

Most of the residents in this community are former residents of traditional courtyard houses who were relocated due to demolition. Some of them received several apartments after the demolition, but they didn't sell them. Instead, they renovated them slightly and rented them out, and the rent is quite high. A typical two-bedroom apartment can cost several thousand yuan to rent.

Most of the people who can afford to rent these houses are white-collar workers. Every morning and evening, fashionable women and men in suits are busy going in and out of the community.

However, many people are unaware that another group of people live in this community, and their numbers exceed those of white-collar workers. This is the basement population of Beijing.

Since the 1980s, Beijing has built a large number of underground civil defense projects in conjunction with above-ground buildings. Some of these have been converted into storage rooms, but most of them remain idle.

Due to a lack of dedicated funds for maintenance and a lack of dedicated personnel for management, many underground civil defense projects are accumulating garbage and gradually falling into disrepair.

In order to change the dirty and chaotic state of underground civil defense projects, in the 1990s, the Beijing government proposed the policy of "promoting management through use and maintaining the underground facilities by using the facilities," encouraging people to use civil defense projects and charging a certain usage fee.

After the policy was implemented, the tenants at the time began to use the civil defense projects to open underground hotels, but the number was not large.

However, by the late 1990s, with the influx of a large number of migrants, the situation had changed dramatically. By 2004, Beijing had reached a peak in renting out civil defense facilities. According to statistics, the number of people living in basements in Beijing had reached nearly one million.

This kind of basement is completely different from the basement where Wang Qiming, played by Jiang Wen, first went to New York in the TV series "A Native of Beijing in New York". It is usually only three to five square meters in size, and after putting a bed down, it becomes difficult to even turn around.

Even a basement like this costs around three or four hundred yuan a month to rent. Most of the people living here are migrant workers who toil during the day, doing the most menial jobs and earning the meager wages. At night, they return to the ground and curl up in a space the size of a matchbox, waiting for dawn.

Because of the low room rates, management is naturally lagging behind. Unlike hotels and inns where you have to show your ID to check in, landlords don't care as long as you can afford the rent. As a result, it's a mixed bag and extremely chaotic place.

The people who live here used to be quite well-educated. Many celebrities, such as Sun Nan and Xu Wei, came from basements when they were working in Beijing. However, in recent years, basements have lost their reputation.

We often see news reports of naked women dying in basements. Without a doubt, it's because the prostitutes brought clients home for business, or the price wasn't agreed upon, or they encountered someone who tried to rob them after taking advantage of them. In short, basements have slowly become places of crime.

Most people would find these basements damp, decaying, cramped, stuffy, and dark, but for Yu Zhenping, they brought a sense of relief after suppressing his emotions for more than half a year.

Compared to the sunlight outside, Yu Zhenping prefers to stay in such a damp, stagnant, cramped, and dark place.

Isn't it just like a tomb?

Having lived for 32 years, half of which he has spent underground, Yu Zhenping is very adapted to this environment. If he could, he would like to live in such a place for the rest of his life, as the darkness makes him feel very safe.

However, Yu Zhenping is in a very bad mood right now. The reason is simple: several antique dealers he has contacted recently have all expressed interest in his two items, but they are offering very low prices. One dealer is even willing to offer only 5,000 yuan for each item, or 10,000 yuan for both.

Yu Zhenping knew that these people could tell that his items were of dubious origin, which was why they were lowering the prices. While Yu Zhenping was angry about this, he felt more helpless, because he was now almost at his wit's end.

After escaping from Shaanxi, Yu Zhenping was penniless. His bank accounts were in the hands of his boss, Yu Laoda. He dared not go home or go to crowded places.

Yu Zhenping walked along the railway for four days. When he was hungry, he would steal food from the homes of scavengers by the railway and drink water from valve repair shops when he was thirsty. Finally, he arrived in Zhengzhou, Henan, where Yu Laoda had set up three places to stay.

The cultural relics they had unearthed over the years but had not sold were all hidden in these three places. However, to Yu Zhenping's despair, he only found six hundred yuan from the three places.

Although Yu Zhenping was short, what could he do with 600 yuan? So Yu Zhenping took a bronze candlestick, used the 600 yuan for travel expenses, went to Hebei, and sold the bronze candlestick for 20,000 yuan. However, during the transaction, he was spotted by the police.

Yu Zhenping threw down the candlestick, grabbed the money, and, taking advantage of his small size, managed to hide and escape in great danger.

However, what made Yu Zhenping so angry afterward was that of the 20,000 yuan he had risked his life to get back, 15,000 yuan of it was actually counterfeit.

Chapter 679 Yu Zhenping (Part Two)

Boss Yu was as cunning as a fox and extremely suspicious. Although the core members of this tomb raiding gang were all family members, Boss Yu still divided their work into detailed divisions, with each person responsible for their own tasks, and strictly forbade them from questioning each other's responsibilities.

As for the money, it was naturally in the hands of Boss Yu. Boss Yu was responsible for facilitating communication with Hong Kong. After he was shot and killed in a standoff with the police in Guangdong, only Boss Yu knew about this line of communication.

After Yu Laoda impulsively self-destructed in Shaanxi, all contact with Hong Kong was completely severed.

Yu Zhenping was in charge of finding and excavating tombs. As for the location of these antiques, he only found out after Yu Laoliu was killed. Because of his short stature, Yu Zhenping had always disliked interacting with people, so he didn't know anyone in the antique circle.

The reason he went to an antique market in a city in Hebei to trade items was to avoid arousing suspicion about his hiding place in Zhengzhou. However, to Yu Zhenping's surprise, trouble still broke out.

Risking his life to sell antiques, Yu Zhenping only managed to get five thousand yuan, along with a pile of worthless counterfeit money. This nearly drove him crazy. Upon reflection, he sensed something was amiss; this was likely a setup by the other party.

Even if he understood, what good would it do? Would he run back and kill all those people? If Yu Laoba had that much guts, he wouldn't be hiding at home like a rat crossing the street all day. He would probably have already smuggled a few valuable antiques out of the country.

After this incident, Yu Zhenping knew he wasn't a businessman, and anyone who saw him like that would probably want to rip him off. Plus, he saw the wanted poster for him during his trip. After returning to Zhengzhou, Yu Zhenping went into hiding and dared not make any rash moves again.

Although Yu Laoba was small in stature, he ate quite a lot. And while the housing was free, utilities still had to be paid, right? A mere five thousand yuan was simply not enough. After seven or eight months, Yu Zhenping was almost out of money.

The room full of antiques was indeed valuable, but they couldn't fill an empty stomach. Yu Zhenping was truly sitting on a gold mine and almost starved to death.

With only 400 yuan left, Yu Zhenping climbed onto a coal train and arrived in Beijing, where he spent 280 yuan to rent a basement room with only one bed and a total area of no more than four square meters.

What might be an unbearable place for others, Yu Zhenping found quite comfortable. If it weren't for the wooden partition separating the opposite room from the occasional moaning sounds coming from the bedroom at night, Yu Zhenping would have wanted to stay there forever.

However, his purpose in coming to Beijing this time was to sell those two bronze artifacts. Yu Zhenping had already planned to sell the two items for 200,000 yuan, then return to Zhengzhou to hide for three to five years, and then find a way to go abroad after things calmed down.

Yu Zhenping knew that, given the crimes he had committed over the years, if he were caught, although he wouldn't necessarily get a beating on the head, he would be locked up behind bars for the rest of his life, singing "Tears Behind Bars."

Plans are subject to change. The two bronze wine vessels that Yu Zhenping thought were worth at least 500,000 yuan were unexpectedly offered lower and lower prices by everyone in Beijing. The highest bidder was the young man he had met yesterday.

After receiving the call from that monkey, Yu Zhenping stayed in bed in the basement for a whole day, and finally decided to sell. Circumstances were beyond his control. If he didn't sell, he wouldn't even have enough for his living expenses, let alone phone bills. How could he survive without money?

...

"Brother Zhuang, that guy surnamed Ren agreed. Two items for 100,000 yuan. Hey, you're really a genius..."

After receiving the call from "Ren Mouren," Monkey immediately dialed Zhuang Rui's number. As far as Monkey knew, several people in Panjiayuan had their eyes on that item, but he didn't expect Zhuang Rui to be so ruthless in negotiating the price, and even then, they were willing to sell.

"Okay, I understand. Wait a minute, I'll find somewhere else to talk..."

Zhuang Rui is currently at home with his mother, wife, and the famous celebrity Xu, playing mahjong. However, Zhuang Rui's luck is really bad; in a game that costs only one yuan, he's lost almost 100 yuan, both from giving away points and others winning by themselves.

After apologizing to his mother and inviting Peng Fei, who had been watching from the sidelines, to the table, Zhuang Rui took his phone and walked out of the private room, saying, "Monkey, when is the transaction? Does the other party want a card or cash?"

"Brother Zhuang, that guy surnamed Ren said he'd call me tomorrow morning. He wants cash and insists on going to the bank with us to withdraw the money..."

The monkey was a little confused. Direct bank transfer was so convenient. Little did he know that Yu Zhenping didn't have a bank account at all. All the money was in the hands of Boss Yu. Besides, even if he did, Yu Zhenping wouldn't dare to use it, as he might attract the attention of the police.

As for going to the bank to withdraw the money, Yu Zhenping was afraid that the money would be counterfeit again. Having been cheated once, he didn't want to be fooled again. He couldn't possibly see the money withdrawn from the bank counter with his own eyes still being fake, could he?

"Okay, no problem. I'll go to Panjiayuan first thing tomorrow morning and give you the card. You can find someone to take him to withdraw the money. Remember, you're just the middleman; someone else is buying something..."

Although there are some things you can pretend you don't know, that's still illegal. Of course, even if Zhuang Rui were to shout all over the street that he was doing something bad, the police wouldn't arrest him. They would most likely just call him and send him to a mental hospital.

But since they'd already started this charade, they had to keep going. For the sake of the big prize later, Zhuang Rui wasn't worried about the hassle, since it wasn't him who was actually making the deal.

"Don't worry, Brother Zhuang, I'll definitely get this done for you..." Monkey patted his chest on the other end of the phone.

"Brother Zhuang, this is Brother Niu, a friend I met in Panjiayuan. He's a really good guy, a very loyal buddy..."

When Zhuang Rui arrived at Panjiayuan early the next morning, there was a new face in his shop. As soon as he entered the shop, Monkey busied himself introducing him.

"What 'Brother Niu'? Boss Zhuang can just call him 'Old Niu'..."

"Old Niu, this matter has really troubled you..."

Zhuang Rui sized up Lao Niu. He was in his thirties, chubby, and his skin was slightly dark, probably from years of setting up a stall in Panjiayuan. He looked like a kind and honest man. Of course, these days, if you judge a book by its cover, you might end up being taken advantage of and still helping the seller count the money.

The man waved his hand, interrupting Zhuang Rui, and said, "I usually get along well with Monkey, this little thing is nothing, Mr. Zhuang, you're too kind..."

In Panjiayuan, you can't do business without a keen eye. Lao Niu could tell that Zhuang Rui's shop alone meant he was at least a multi-millionaire. If you build a good relationship with someone like that, even a little bit of something he gets from someone else will be enough to feed you for years.

"Alright, then you have to take this old ox too. Not taking it would be disrespecting your little brother..."

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he took out a wad of RMB from his bag, handed it to Lao Niu, and said, "Just a little something..."

"Thank you very much, Boss Zhuang..."

Old Niu wasn't pretentious at all; he simply reached out and took it. In their line of work, there were bound to be some risks, so taking the money was perfectly reasonable.

Because they were waiting for Yu Zhenping's call, Zhuang Rui invited Lao Niu to sit down in a private room and have some tea. At 11:30 a.m., Monkey's phone suddenly rang.

"Hey, Mr. Ren, my friend and I have been waiting for your call. Name your place, and after we finish the deal, we'll treat you to dinner..."

The monkey has honed his skills; he speaks eloquently and persuasively, making Zhuang Rui nod in approval. He figured that if the monkey received some professional training, he could easily become a guide at his museum.

"No need, let's just each get what we need. After you leave Panjiayuan, turn right and walk straight for fifty meters. We'll meet there, okay?"

Yu Zhenping was still carrying a cake box. Opposite him was an elementary school. It was dismissal time, and groups of students were coming out of the school. The school gate was crowded with parents who had come to pick them up, creating a chaotic scene.

The clothes Yu Zhenping was wearing today were stolen from a family living on the first floor last night. In addition, he was wearing a sun hat that is very common in Beijing. Unless you stare at Yu Zhenping's face closely, you would not be able to tell his age at all.

"Mr. Ren, where are you? I'm right here, in this mess, and I can't see you anywhere..."

Unbeknownst to the monkey and the bull, just twenty or thirty meters away, Yu Zhenping was looking around, checking if anyone was following the monkey.

Yu Zhenping was already being quite cautious, but little did he know that the police were right behind him, and at least five or six of the students' parents were members of the special task force.

"Walk another fifteen meters forward, there's an ATM on the left side of the road. Just withdraw money from there..."

Yu Zhenping had already scouted out this area. It would be chaotic after school at noon, and even if the other side brought people or police, he was confident he could escape.

Upon hearing Yu Zhenping's words, the monkey became somewhat dissatisfied and grumbled, "Hey Boss Ren, you should at least show your face..."

"Young man, you'll see me after you withdraw the money..."

After Yu Zhenping finished speaking, he immediately hung up the phone and slowly moved towards the ATM. His eyes peered out from under his sun hat, scanning the area. If anything seemed amiss, he would immediately disappear into the crowd of students.

"Hello, hello? Mr. Ren? What... what kind of person is this..."

Monkey called out several times, but all he heard from the phone was a busy signal. Helpless, he could only drag Old Niu to the ATM to withdraw money. There were bank cameras on both sides of the ATM, so Old Niu was naturally in charge of withdrawing the money.

Chapter 680 The King of Thieves (Part 1)

"Hey, Mr. Ren, this ATM only allows withdrawals of 30,000 yuan per day, so there's no way to withdraw 100,000..."

After operating the ATM for a while, Lao Niu reluctantly stopped. He withdrew 30,000 yuan, reaching the limit. Monkey quickly called Yu Zhenping again.

"Then you can go to the bank and withdraw the money. I'll wait for you at the entrance..."

Yu Zhenping saw clearly what Monkey and Da Niu were doing. He also knew that the two of them came with empty hands, so they probably wouldn't try to fool him with counterfeit money like last time.

However, Yu Zhenping will not follow him into the bank, because he knows that there are surveillance cameras inside, and he doesn't want to leave any trace.

"Alright, Mr. Ren, where are you?"

More than 10 minutes later, Monkey and Da Niu walked out of the bank. In Da Niu's hand, there was a plastic bag with "People's Bank of China" written on it, and 100,000 yuan was inside. Da Niu was very careful and put the plastic bag in front of his chest with both hands.

"I'm behind you..." Yu Zhenping's voice rang out behind the two monkeys.

"Damn, Mr. Ren, don't be so scary. They're just two little gadgets, why are you being so cautious?"

The monkey was startled by Yu Zhenping's words. How could this guy appear and disappear so mysteriously? He turned around and stared for a long time before recognizing the boy in the school uniform and sun hat as none other than "Boss Ren".

"Boss Ren, this is Boss Niu. The money is all here. Where are your goods?"

Monkey patted the plastic bag on Da Niu's chest, then looked at the cake box in Yu Zhenping's hand. There were many cases of switching things in the antique business. If he paid for two fakes, he would have no face to see Zhuang Rui again.

"The item is here, you can take a look first..."

Upon seeing the pink RMB notes peeking out from the slightly ajar bag belonging to Boss Niu, Yu Zhenping felt reassured. They had been carrying several stacks of money when they went in; it couldn't be fake.

"Brother Niu, can you cover me up?"

The monkey, carrying a cake box, came to the school wall, opened the box, and took out a bronze wine vessel to examine it.

"Boss Niu, the goods are correct, you can give him the money now..."

Before coming, Zhuang Rui had told Monkey about two minor flaws on the bronze jue, so Monkey recognized it at a glance. It was indeed the same two bronze jue he had seen yesterday. He then gave Old Niu a wink, signaling him to hand over the money.

Seeing "Boss Ren" reach into the plastic bag to count money, the monkey didn't pay any attention. After he finished counting, the monkey held out his hand and said, "Boss Ren, if you ever get any good stuff in the future, please take care of me..."

"Definitely, definitely..."

With the money in hand, Yu Zhenping felt much relieved. He reached out and shook hands with Monkey, but his mind was already thinking about how to make his hideout even more secure once he got back.

As for the matter of trading the bronze tripod, Yu Zhenping had never even considered it. He simply couldn't carry it or transport it out. If he wanted to sell it, he would have to let the other party come to his door to see the goods, but there were more than just one or two items there.

In addition, the bronze cauldron is too conspicuous and would easily attract the attention of the police, so Yu Zhenping would never use those heavy weapons unless absolutely necessary.

After the transaction was completed, Yu Zhenping greeted Monkey and Da Niu, then slipped into the crowd of students who had not yet completely dispersed, disappearing into the throng in an instant.

Monkey and Da Niu, who were turning back towards Panjiayuan, were unaware that Yu Zhenping had been following them all along. It wasn't until the two entered "Xuanrui Zhai" that Yu Zhenping breathed a sigh of relief, stuffed the bag of money into his school uniform, and squeezed his way towards the exit with the bustling crowd of Panjiayuan.

Yu Zhenping had already planned it all out. Once he got the money, he would immediately take a taxi to the Beijing West Railway Freight Station, find a freight train bound for Henan, and climb aboard. He was now extremely nervous and dared not travel by car or train.

Back at Xuanrui Studio, Monkey proudly held up the cake box high, saying to Zhuang Rui, "Brother Zhuang, I brought the things back. Take a look, are these the two items...?"

"Let me see..."

Zhuang Rui took the cake box, opened it, and took out two bronze wine cups. After examining them carefully, he said, "It's done, Brother Da Niu. Thank you so much this time. Monkey, I'll treat Da Niu to dinner tonight. You can go wherever you want. Keep the receipt to reimburse the shop..."

"Hey, thanks, Brother Zhuang..."

"Thank you, Boss Zhuang. If you ever need anything in the future, just let me know. There's nothing in Panjiayuan that I, Da Niu, can't handle..."

Da Niu was quite happy. He wandered around for more than half an hour, and not only did he have an extra 10,000 yuan in his pocket, but he also met Zhuang Rui, a big boss. He knew that he and Zhuang Rui were not on the same level, so after exchanging a few pleasantries, he said goodbye.

After the monkey escorted Da Niu out, Zhuang Rui went to the inner room and put the two bronze wine vessels into the shop's safe. These things weren't really his yet, and the police might take them back at any time. Zhuang Rui didn't want to bring the police home.

“Officer Miao, things have been handled as you instructed. I won’t concern myself with the rest. If anything goes wrong and he gets away, these two bronze wine vessels will be mine...”

After putting away the bronze jue, Zhuang Rui slowly made a phone call to Miao Feifei.

"Alright, the police are handling the case, you don't need to worry about it..." Miao Feifei hung up the phone curtly.

"Damn, what kind of attitude is this? Why didn't you say this when you were begging me?"

Zhuang Rui cursed at his phone in annoyance. Wasn't this a classic case of crossing the river and then burning the bridge?

Panjiayuan is a place that attracts tourists from home and abroad. From the time it opens in the morning until it closes at night, there are always a lot of people. Yu Zhenping, who is used to walking close to the wall, can't do that now because the area near the wall is full of stalls.

After squeezing through the crowd for three to five minutes, Yu Zhenping arrived at the exit of Panjiayuan. There were not so many people there anymore, and his vigilance lessened a little. He loosened his arms that were crossed over his chest.

However, just as Yu Zhenping was about to pass by the signboard of Panjiayuan, an old man walked towards him. Whether he was tripped or not, he lost his footing and bumped into Yu Zhenping.

"Grandpa, please be careful when you walk..."

Despite his short stature, Yu Zhenping is a physically demanding worker who digs up graves and is quite skilled with his hands. He is very agile and quick. When he saw the old man bumping into him, he took a step to the side, tilted his body, and used his right hand to push and lift the old man up.

However, the old man rushed forward too fast and couldn't stop. His face bumped into Yu Zhenping's chest, but since Yu Zhenping had already supported him, the impact wasn't very strong.

"Um?"

Yu Zhenping held onto the old man's left hand, but what startled him was that the old man's left hand was cleanly severed from the wrist, as if it had been cut off by a sharp blade.

Although he was used to seeing dead people, Yu Zhenping was still startled by the bare wrist. Something seemed to come to mind, but he couldn't remember it at all.

"Young man, I'm so sorry, I'm really so sorry, I'm getting old, my hands and feet don't obey me anymore..."

The old man kept apologizing to Yu Zhenping, but he didn't stop walking. After he steadied himself, he squeezed into the crowd at Panjiayuan, as if he had something urgent to attend to.

"money?!"

From the moment the elderly man knocked down Yu Zhenping to the moment he was helped away, the entire process took only about ten seconds. During that time, Yu Zhenping was stunned for no more than three seconds.

But in those three seconds, Yu Zhenping discovered that someone had slashed a long gash in the zipper of his school uniform with a blade, and the bag containing 100,000 yuan that he had been carrying in front of his chest had vanished.

"Damn it, that's a cunning old thief..."

Yu Zhenping, being a seasoned veteran, quickly realized what was going on.

Now he realized that when he saw that bald hand, something seemed to have occurred to him. Generally speaking, there are only two types of people whose severed hands or feet are relatively neat: one is a work injury, and the other is intentional.

Such intentional injuries to hands and feet are considered "work-related injuries" in certain circles because they are indeed severed while "working." These people are thieves.

If you ask who the common people hate the most, without a doubt, it's thieves. Nowadays, thieves usually commit crimes in groups, so let's not even talk about that. But more than ten years ago, most thieves were lone wolves. After being caught committing a crime, they would definitely get a good beating first and then be sent to the police station.

In earlier times, when the legal system was less developed, many people would resort to vigilante justice when catching thieves. Many retired thieves and petty criminals today often have items missing from their possessions or belongings, which are remnants of those times.

As for the old man Yu Zhenping helped up, it goes without saying that his severed hand was accidentally cut off, and his money was undoubtedly stolen by that old thief.

To be able to silently tear through one's clothes in just a few seconds after a collision, and steal a bag of money in the blink of an eye without being noticed, this old man's skill is so exceptional that calling him a master thief is absolutely no exaggeration.

Yu Zhenping didn't have time to investigate whether the old man was a notorious thief who had stolen 100,000 yuan, which was tantamount to taking half his life.

Yu Zhenping put his hands in his pockets, grabbed the gun handle, and plunged into the crowd at Panjiayuan. Even a clay figure has some temper, let alone Yu Laoba, who once dominated the tomb raiding world.

Yu Zhenping secretly vowed that when he saw the old man, he would definitely cripple his other hand.

"I'll fuck you!"

More than an hour later, Yu Zhenping emerged from the crowd, looking dejected.