

Golden 771

Chapter 771 Truth or Falsehood (Part 5)

As Li Dali spoke, a strange expression suddenly appeared on his face, which puzzled Zhuang Rui.

"Mr. Li, what's wrong? It's not that you know this Mr. Xu, is it?"

In Zhuang Rui's mind, although this Xu man owned a ceramics factory, he might not be able to produce Tang tri-color pottery with such high craftsmanship.

It should be noted that although these items are modern replicas, in terms of craftsmanship and artistic value, they are not much inferior to, and may even be superior to, those of the Tang Dynasty more than a thousand years ago. A small business owner should not have such artistic attainments.

"President Zhuang, this... I don't know this Mr. Xu, but, but..."

Li Dali stammered, as if he had something difficult to say.

"Hmm? Mr. Li, please speak frankly..."

Zhuang Rui frowned. The previous behavior of this man surnamed Li did not seem like he was trying to set a trap for him, so why was he acting so uncooperative now?

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, General Manager Li seemed to grit his teeth and said fiercely, "Fine, I'll break the rules this time. But if that person is really trying to fool me with fake stuff, I, Old Li, am not made of clay..."

Li Dali paused for a moment, then said, "President Zhuang, these things were brought over by my friend, and this friend happens to know the owner of that ceramics factory surnamed Xu. I heard about this Xu from him before. Now that you mention it, this matter does seem a bit suspicious..."

According to the rules of the black market, Li Dali cannot reveal his supplier. If he breaks the rules, no one will dare to supply him with antiques in the future. If Zhuang Rui hadn't put a lot of pressure on him, Li Dali would not have revealed this.

"Hehe, Mr. Li, I'm 80% confident that these things are fake. However, your friend might not be able to tell the difference. How about this, could we ask your friend to help this Mr. Xu out?"

As Li Dali said, the suspiciousness of this ceramics factory owner immediately increased dramatically. Previously, the items they saw were all single pieces, making it impossible to trace their origin. But this time, dozens of pieces appeared at once, making things relatively simpler.

To be honest, ever since Zhuang Rui saw this person's work in the grassland black market, he had become very curious about it. Seeing another piece at a folk art appraisal event only fueled his curiosity. Now that he had a clue, Zhuang Rui wanted to meet this person and see just who he was.

"Mr. Zhuang, as the saying goes, 'catch the thief with the stolen goods.' If this thing is fake, we should at least give an explanation, otherwise, it will break the rules..."

Li Dali had a lot to consider. He had known that friend for seven or eight years, and the friend had provided him with many ceramic items for auction. If they fell out over this matter, it would be difficult to meet again in the future.

"Catch the thief and recover the stolen goods?"

Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this. This guy was really funny. What he had done was already somewhat shady, and he still wanted evidence. He immediately said, "Alright, Mr. Li, I'll let you see the stolen goods..."

Zhuang Rui took out his handbag, pulled out his checkbook, wrote out a check for 500,000, and placed it in front of Li Dali.

"President Zhuang, what... what does this mean?" President Li was somewhat puzzled.

"Hehe, Mr. Li, your previous quote for these items was 500,000 each. If I break one and can't find the character 'Xu' inside, consider this compensation as my payment to you..."

If this character is in the document, I hope you can arrange for me to meet this friend surnamed Xu...

Zhuang Rui didn't really have the ability to point out the fake parts of these Tang tri-colored pottery pieces, so after thinking it over, this was the only way he could use.

"this....."

Mr. Li hesitated for a moment. Zhuang Rui spoke with such confidence that he became a little suspicious. If it was really false, would Zhuang Rui suspect that he was setting a trap for him?

"That's settled then, Mr. Li. I know this has nothing to do with you..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand, stood up, and picked up the Tang tri-colored pottery horse. He had chosen this particular horse because the set of eight female figurines was so exquisitely crafted that he couldn't bear to break them.

Seeing that Zhuang Rui was really about to smash the porcelain, Huangfu Yun was also a little excited. He was somewhat of a person in the antique circle, and he had never seen such a way of authenticating the porcelain. He immediately helped Zhuang Rui lift up a piece of the carpet on the ground to reveal the marble floor underneath.

"Smack!"

Without the slightest hesitation, Zhuang Rui caused the tricolor horse in his hand to fall from a great height, instantly shattering it into pieces.

"Here you are, Mr. Li, please take a look..."

Zhuang Rui went straight for the clues, not afraid of arousing suspicion from the people present. As he had already said, this kind of situation had happened before.

"This...this is true, Mr. Zhuang. Please wait a moment, I'll make a call right away..."

Upon seeing the blue simplified Chinese character "许" on the porcelain, Li Dali immediately realized it was genuine. He stood up, took out his phone, and went out of the room to make a call.

"Hey, Mr. Zhuang, you're amazing!"

Huangfu Yun couldn't help but give Zhuang Rui a thumbs up. This was the most unique method of physical object authentication he had ever seen in his life.

Zhuang Rui laughed and said, "Brother Huangfu, nothing in this world is perfect. Even genuine Tang tri-color pottery has flaws. I have a strong gambling streak, but luckily, I won the bet!"

"Damn, to put it bluntly, you're rich. With money comes confidence. No one else would dare to smash it like that. Just hearing the bang is worth 500,000..." Huangfu Yun couldn't help but tease Zhuang Rui when he saw his smug look.

As the two were chatting and laughing, General Manager Li pushed open the door and walked in, saying, "General Manager Zhuang, to be frank, it was my friend's fault. He just admitted that these items are counterfeit, and they were indeed made by that man surnamed Xu. However, regarding the conditions you proposed, my friend needs to consult with the other party first..."

Li Dali was a little embarrassed. Actually, he had been tricked in this matter. Even he didn't know that the goods were fake before. He had to pressure the other party with his words before the other party admitted it.

"Okay, but I'll be quite busy in the next few days, only available on Sundays. If the other party agrees to meet, it would be best to arrange it for the weekend..."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement. He was going to Peking University to report for duty the next day. Although pursuing a master's degree was more demanding, Zhuang Rui wanted to relive his university life and attend some open courses.

"By the way, I'd like to buy this set of eight figurines. They're 100,000 yuan each, so eight hundred thousand for all eight. What do you think, Mr. Li?"

In terms of the firing process of this set of sancai figurines, it would take at least half a month to make one piece. Although it is not a real Tang Dynasty sancai, its craftsmanship and materials are top-notch. Zhuang Rui's price of 100,000 yuan is quite reasonable.

"100,000 yuan per piece? Oh, Mr. Zhuang, this... I can't possibly accept this. How about this, if you really like these items, consider them a gift from me as an apology..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Li Dali's mouth gaped open wide enough to fit an egg. He was now completely convinced by Zhuang Rui, because he had just learned from the phone call that these items were worth 100,000 each and were obtained from that person surnamed Xu.

The man wanted to profit from the price difference, so he approached Li Dali and offered 500,000 yuan per piece. Of course, he offered Li Dali 300,000 yuan per piece, with the remaining 200,000 yuan as commission for the black market.

After Li Dali saw through his scheme, the guy was quite straightforward and said directly, "If you want to continue selling, just give me 100,000 yuan a piece, and I'll get my cost back."

What Li Dali didn't expect was that Zhuang Rui could not only tell that the item was fake, but also accurately estimate the other party's purchase price.

Previously, Li Dali respected Zhuang Rui because of his background, but now, he feels awe for Zhuang Rui's knowledge itself.

"Alright, Mr. Li, I don't want it for free. How about this, I'll take out this 500,000. I wasn't planning on putting it back anyway, so 500,000 will do..."

Zhuang Rui stood up, stuffed the check into Li Dali's hand, and said, "Mr. Li, please don't refuse anymore. Please help me out and let me meet this contemporary master craftsman..."

"Alright, Mr. Zhuang is a straightforward man, so I, Old Li, will take it on. I'll definitely get this done for you, just listen carefully..."

Li Dali knew that Zhuang Rui wasn't short of money, so he put away the check, closed the suitcase himself, and handed it to Zhuang Rui.

"Alright, let's go get some food together..."

All guests are welcome. Zhuang Rui had a good impression of Li Dali. Besides, Li Dali had come all the way from Hebei, so it was only right that he do his duty as a host.

Mr. Li was naturally eager to get closer to Zhuang Rui, and the group walked out of Building No. 1 chatting and laughing.

"Ah...ah..."

Little Golden Feather had been playing outside for a long time without finding Zhuang Rui. Now that it saw Zhuang Rui coming out of the house, it chirped excitedly and grabbed Zhuang Rui's shoulder.

"Hey kid, take it easy, you're grabbing my flesh..."

Zhuang Rui winced in pain, his brows furrowing. The little golden eagle's claws were getting longer and sharper, and even with toe covers, the effect wasn't very good.

Seeing this, Li Dali, who was walking behind, was stunned for a moment. Then, as if he had thought of something, he quickened his pace and caught up with Zhuang Rui, saying, "Mr. Zhuang, there is equipment for falconry. Why don't you get a set?"

Zhuang Rui replied somewhat dejectedly, "Hey, I'd like to look for them, but those old things are long gone..."

"Hey, Mr. Zhuang, I received some pretty good hawk-training tools a few years ago. They were said to have been passed down from the Prince's Mansion back then, and they can't be sold even if I keep them. Why don't I have someone send them over for you to take a look?"

Li Dali did indeed have a set of these items. Just as he said, it had been auctioned on the black market several times, but no one was interested in it.

Chapter 772 Protective Gear (Part 1)

"A tool for training hawks, or an item from the prince's mansion?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment. If these things had survived until now, they would truly be considered antiques.

You should know that the Eight Banners descendants of the Qing Dynasty not only played with falcons, but also cared about face. The things they took out had to be inlaid with gold and silver and be extremely gorgeous. They couldn't bear to lose face if they were anything less than that.

"Yes, back in Tianjin, there was a descendant of a Manchu family whose ancestors had squandered all their wealth, so they passed down the art of raising birds and training hawks. But these days, who can afford to keep hawks? So the guy sold his birds and hawks, and I happened to buy them..."

Li Dali never expected that the gadget he bought casually in the past would actually come in handy today. He had lived for more than forty years and this was truly the first time he had ever seen someone playing with an eagle.

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and said, "Mr. Li, I really need this. Why don't you have someone send it over for me to take a look? If I like it, you can name a price, how about that?"

"Hey, Mr. Zhuang, I was already taking advantage of you earlier, talking about money and stuff, it's just a little trinket, not worth much. I'll have someone bring it to you right away..."

Li Dali immediately took out his phone and dialed. He hadn't handled the Tang Sancai matter very well, but Zhuang Rui had given him 500,000 yuan in the end, which was quite a show of respect. President Li just wanted to give Zhuang Rui something to improve their relationship.

After hanging up the phone, Li Dali looked at Zhuang Rui and said, "Mr. Zhuang, the goods will be delivered in three hours. Why don't you... wait here?"

Li Dali's city is adjacent to Tianjin, and it only takes two or three hours to get to *** by highway. He said three hours, leaving some leeway, since he'd rather deliver it early than late.

"Okay, let's grab something to eat for lunch, then go play golf this afternoon, until your item arrives..."

It's said that this Mr. Li is a very shrewd person. If we ever need anything in the future, it wouldn't be bad to look for it in his black market. Zhuang Rui nodded and agreed.

Ouyang Jun's clubhouse has an 18-hole golf course built to international standards. After lunch, Zhuang Rui and Huangfu Yun took Li Dali to the course.

To be honest, although Zhuang Rui had never played this before, he had good body coordination and after a few shots, he was playing quite well. Huangfu Yun had played golf abroad and his skills were even better than Zhuang Rui's. Only Li Dali had never played this before and was still a beginner.

However, playing ball is just about having a good time and chatting in this environment. Li Dali is very knowledgeable, and he talked about many things that even Zhuang Rui had never heard of, so the atmosphere was quite good.

"Hey, Jin Yu, get down here! You're grabbing everything, are you even letting me play anymore...?"

Zhuang Rui's shot flew out with a pretty good feel, and he was fully expecting to get on base with this shot and then sink it. Just as he looked up to see the arc the ball was drawing in the air, a shadow flew by and the ball disappeared!

"Ouch!"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's voice, Jin Yu flapped its wings and glided towards him. It landed in front of Zhuang Rui with a flap of its wings, holding the golf ball in one of its small paws. It presented the ball to Zhuang Rui as if to show off its achievement, chirping triumphantly.

"Fine, I give up. Forget it, I'm done playing..."

Just now, after Zhuang Rui hit the ball, Bai Shi and Xue Er fought over it and retrieved it. Now the little golden eagle is causing trouble again, leaving Zhuang Rui, who had just gotten the hang of it, both amused and exasperated.

However, Zhuang Rui hadn't really planned to play ball seriously anyway. Seeing the white lion couple having fun with the golden eagle, he smiled broadly.

In Zhuang Rui's courtyard house, the golden eagle flapped its wings and flew from one end of the road to the other. The white lion could only practice its tortoise-like steps. It had its imposing presence, but it was also very suppressed.

Xue'er was especially excited today, running around non-stop. When she felt hot, she even ran into the swimming pool for a bath. The staff at the club knew that Zhuang Rui had brought her, so they didn't dare to stop her and could only fill the pool with water again.

"Should I take over this clubhouse myself?"

A thought suddenly popped into Zhuang Rui's mind: compared to his own courtyard house, this place seemed more suitable for the white lion and golden eagle. Moreover, the surrounding area was all farmland, sparsely populated, allowing the white lion and golden eagle to live more freely.

However, Zhuang Rui couldn't make the decision himself because his mother really liked living in that courtyard house. It was very convenient for her to go out for walks or to the mall, and she could also go dancing in the park when she had nothing to do. If she lived there, it would be too lonely.

Furthermore, Zhuang Rui can't afford this place right now. Ouyang Jun mentioned it once when they were chatting last time: Yang Bo's mother offered 600 million yuan to buy this land and clubhouse, but Ouyang Jun didn't sell it.

Just thinking about how the purchase alone would cost 600 million, and the annual expenses for maintenance and security staff would also be a huge sum, Zhuang Rui only considered it for a moment before abandoning the idea.

"Mr. Zhuang, my people have arrived. I'll go greet them..."

As the group was chatting under the parasol, Mr. Li's phone rang. After saying a few words, he stood up to get something.

"No need, just drive the car in..."

Zhuang Rui shook his head. Someone brings him something, and he's not even allowed to come in? That's not how it works. He waved over a caddy, took his walkie-talkie, and greeted the club manager.

About ten minutes later, a grass-covered electric vehicle drove up.

"Dad, I've brought the things over. They've all been wiped clean..."

The visitor was a young man in his late teens, probably visiting a private club for the first time. Although he tried to appear calm, his furtive glances around revealed shock and envy.

This man is Li Dali's son. The place where the family keeps its treasures is naturally off-limits to outsiders. Zhuang Rui needed the item urgently, so Li Dali had his son drive it over.

"Okay, wait here, we'll go back together tonight..."

Li Dali took the backpack his son handed him, turned to Zhuang Rui, and said, "Mr. Zhuang, this is my son, Li Jun. He's just a kid and doesn't know any better, so don't mind him. Come on, let's see if this stuff works..."

"Hehe, Mr. Li's son is so grown up now. Young man, sit down and rest, have something to drink first..." Upon seeing that it was Li Dali's son, Zhuang Rui quickly greeted him.

Li Dali was very displeased with his son, who was sitting on a bench drinking a beverage. "Your father doesn't have that kind of attitude," he scolded, "Aren't you going to thank Uncle Zhuang?"

"No, please don't, Mr. Li, let's each pay our own. Young man, just call me 'Big Brother,' I'm not that old..."

Upon hearing Li Dali's words, Zhuang Rui quickly waved his hand, saying, "What a joke! I'm afraid it will shorten my lifespan if someone who's not much younger than me calls me 'uncle'."

"Hello, Brother Zhuang..."

Li Dali's son was quite perceptive. Seeing his usually dignified father become rather reserved in front of Zhuang Rui, he immediately followed Zhuang Rui's lead and called him "Big Brother."

"If you're bored, young man, you can go to the club. They have everything: a bar, a bar, and more..."

Zhuang Rui exchanged a few polite words, then took the backpack from Li Dali, pinched his right thumb and forefinger together, put it in his mouth, and let out a loud whistle.

When Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan were little, they would go to the cinema to watch movies. During the film reel transition, the screen would go black for a while, and then the cinema would be filled with deafening whistles.

Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan felt very proud at the time and tried to imitate him. After blowing their cheeks until they were swollen, they finally learned how to do it. However, it wasn't until now that Zhuang Rui could actually use it. The move was indeed very dashing.

"Ya...ga..."

Suddenly, a clear eagle's cry rang out in the sky. Little Golden Feather seemed to be going through puberty, and its voice was becoming more and more like that of an adult golden eagle. With the cry, the little guy flew to the top of Zhuang Rui's head, flapped its wings, and landed on Zhuang Rui's shoulder.

"Wow, that's an eagle! Brother Zhuang, you're so cool, so awesome!"

Li Jun, who was originally thinking about where to go for fun, suddenly stared wide-eyed. This was much more stylish than driving a luxury car with a pretty girl. If he had this, wouldn't all the girls be infatuated with him?

Upon hearing his son's words, Li Dali's face instantly turned bright red. He kicked his son and cursed, "You brat, who the hell taught you to swear? You need a good beating..."

"Alright, Mr. Li, it's just a kid's catchphrase, nothing serious..."

Zhuang Rui almost laughed. "Like father, like son," he thought. "Isn't this what you taught him?" Zhuang Rui didn't have time to appreciate Li Laoda's way of teaching his son. He immediately opened his backpack.

The first thing brought out was a heavy shoulder guard, somewhat like a modern vest, but very short, only covering the two shoulders. The sides were embroidered with various patterns in gold and silver thread, making it very ornate.

On both shoulders, several thick layers of cowhide were inlaid, and you could see claw marks on them.

Signaling Jin Yu to leave his shoulder, Zhuang Rui took off his suit jacket, put his arms into his vest, stood up and tried it on. There were two turquoise buttons at the collar that could fasten the two sides together.

"Jin Yu, come up here..."

Zhuang Rui greeted the little golden eagle that had just flown to the ground. The little guy flapped its wings and landed steadily on Zhuang Rui's shoulder.

"Push harder, push harder..."

Zhuang Rui stroked the little golden eagle's sharp claws, signaling it to scratch harder. The little guy understood Zhuang Rui's meaning, and its two pairs of sharp claws instantly dug into the cowhide.

"Ouch!"

Jin Yu felt that he had a firm grip on it and couldn't help but shout excitedly.

"Not bad, this thing is good, I can't feel it at all. It's just that this kind of thing isn't popular anymore..."

Several layers of thick cowhide completely covered the little golden eagle's toes and claws, but Zhuang Rui was a little disappointed, as he couldn't very well take this thing with him when he went out.

If you go out dressed like this, let alone go to a formal occasion, even if you're just strolling down the street, someone is bound to call a mental hospital.

Chapter 773 Protective Gear (Part Two)

"This thing isn't very practical now, Mr. Zhuang. Take a look at this. It's quite nice, easy to carry around, and easy to store when not in use..."

Li Dali took something, presumably made of leather, out of his bag and handed it to Zhuang Rui.

"Is this an elbow pad?"

Zhuang Rui examined it for a while before he could figure out its purpose, mainly because it was made with such exquisite craftsmanship.

This is a square leather case, about 40 centimeters in length and width. It is decorated with gold plum blossom patterns on both sides. The leather is delicate and tough. A circle of gemstones is inlaid on both sides of the leather, which sparkles with various colors in the sunlight.

On the inside of the holster, one side is made of bristles for adhesion, while the other side is made of fine down. When the two are combined, they can be glued together tightly. The holster can be fixed to the arm according to the thickness of an individual's elbow.

If Zhuang Rui hadn't used his spiritual energy to observe it and noticed the faint white spiritual energy contained within the object, he would have seriously doubted whether it was made using modern technology, because he had only ever seen that kind of technology on some modern items.

"Excellent, truly excellent. I never imagined such craftsmanship existed in the past. The wisdom of the ancients should not be underestimated. Even if people today tried to make this, they couldn't achieve this effect..."

Zhuang Rui nodded repeatedly as he looked at it. It was clearly made of several pieces of leather sewn together. What was most remarkable was that there were no traces of stitching on the leather, and the leather was very soft. He wondered how the ancients had tanned it.

"Mr. Zhuang, this arm guard is made of the finest yak hide and has been tanned using a special method, making it extremely durable. It's over a hundred years old, yet it looks brand new. Would you like to try it on?"

Li Dali explained to Zhuang Rui that since they had decided to give it away, they should make sure that others remembered their kindness.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui pulled open the leather sheath, which looked like a square leather pad with both ends hanging down naturally. Once the bite joints were joined together, it would become a small arm guard.

After Zhuang Rui secured the leather to his left elbow, he lifted his arm to test it. It didn't add much weight and looked quite nice.

"Jin Yu, come up here..."

Zhuang Rui raised his left arm, gesturing for the little guy on his shoulder to fly up.

"Splash..."

The little golden eagle flapped its wings slightly, and Zhuang Rui felt his arm tighten, then sink. The little creature was already standing on his elbow, its head held high, looking around.

"Not bad, this stuff is good..."

Zhuang Rui swung his arm back and forth. The little golden eagle now weighed two or three pounds. It flapped its wings and its claws gripped the arm guard tightly. The arm guard showed no signs of falling off. Although it was an artifact from more than a hundred years ago, it was still quite practical.

"Mr. Zhuang, there are some other small items here, please take a look..."

Back then, what Li Dali collected was a set of equipment for training eagles. However, the Manchu bannermen at that time raised eagles for the sake of face, unlike the hunters on the grasslands in the past who raised eagles for hunting.

Everything they used was extremely luxurious; they used the best craftsmanship and the most expensive items available at the time.

Zhuang Rui weighed the bag in his hand and felt that there weren't many things left inside, so he turned the bag upside down and placed it on the table. A silver chain and two small items rolled out of the bag.

"This chain is unnecessary..."

Zhuang Rui noticed that there was a buckle at each end of the chain, which was obviously used to control the falcon's movements when it wasn't being used. Zhuang Rui treated the little golden eagle like family, so naturally he wouldn't tie it up.

Zhuang Rui picked up another object and examined it, saying, "This is interesting..."

This is a small, round, hollow whistle, about the size of a little finger. It has a flat, slit at one end, presumably for the air vent. There's a very fine snap at each end, and the surface is engraved with delicate patterns.

What's even more remarkable is that the whistle is made of gold. Putting everything else aside, the gold itself could fetch tens of thousands of dollars.

This shows the extravagance and boredom of those spoiled young masters back then. The trinkets worn by their pets were all made of gold, which was consistent with the origins of the Prince's Mansion.

"Don't move, hey, I said stand still, okay, get on my shoulder..."

Zhuang Rui raised his right arm. The little golden eagle didn't feel as comfortable standing on his shoulder, so it flapped its wings back and forth to balance itself. Zhuang Rui scolded the little guy a few times, then laughed at himself. How could he blame the little golden eagle for his unsteady arm?

However, holding up his left arm for a long time is not an easy task. Zhuang Rui felt a little sore and numb after less than five minutes, and had no choice but to let Jin Yu fly back to his shoulder.

After attaching the golden whistle to Little Golden Feather's paw, the little guy seemed a bit unaccustomed to it and retracted its paw slightly. However, at Zhuang Rui's stop, it didn't use its sharp beak to peck at it, but instead lowered its head to examine it curiously.

There was another item that looked rather ridiculous: a crown woven from gold and silver threads. Although the workmanship was exquisite, it was really useless. If the little golden eagle were to fly with this thing, who knows who would benefit from it?

Zhuang Rui didn't know that this was a prize made by those idle young masters back then to compare the merits of falcons; it had no practical value.

"Alright, go play by yourself, go find the white lion..."

Zhuang Rui shook his arm, and the little golden eagle spread its wings. Zhuang Rui felt his arm suddenly sink, and the little guy soared into the sky. As the little golden eagle flew up, there was a sharp whistle, which was produced as it cut through the air.

The little creature in the sky seemed startled by the sound. It was obvious that the golden feather paused in mid-air, lowered its head to observe its own body, as if trying to figure out why the thing made a sound.

The scene just now filled Li Dali and his son with envy, especially Li Jun, whose eyes were glued to the little golden feather in the sky, his affection for it evident.

Zhuang Rui was unaware that after leaving him, Li Jun actually spent a lot of money to buy an eagle. However, after being scratched on the face and almost disfigured, Li Jun eventually gave up his dream of training an eagle.

However, Li Jun was always puzzled as to why Zhuang Rui's eagle was so obedient, while the one he bought was wild and difficult to train. Of course, these are all stories for later.

"Mr. Li, I'll take this. Name your price."

After Zhuang Rui took off the shoulder and arm guards, he looked at Li Dali. Although Li Dali said he was going to give them away, these items could be considered antiques and were worth about 30,000 to 50,000 yuan. Zhuang Rui didn't want to owe him a favor.

These days, it's easy to repay debts but hard to repay favors. Many officials who are relatively honest have incurred favors for various reasons and have to use their power to repay them, eventually becoming corrupted and assimilated.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Li Dali feigned anger and said, "President Zhuang, you're underestimating me, Old Li. If you're going to talk about money for such a small thing, aren't you just slapping me in the face? Don't mention it again, or I'll take all this back..."

"Alright, let's not talk about money then. Mr. Li, please accept this. You can come here to hang out whenever you have some free time..."

Zhuang Rui nodded, not mentioning the money again. Instead, he took out one of the two envelopes that the security guard had given him when he brought Li Jun over on the electric scooter and handed it to Li Dali.

This envelope contains a membership card for this establishment. While we were eating earlier, Zhuang Rui gave Li Dali's business card to the club manager and asked him to process it.

After accepting Li Dali's set of eagle-training protective gear, Zhuang Rui also gave him a card, so in the end, Li Dali got the better deal.

It's important to know that although this card only allows access to Building 3, people without connections might spend 500,000 yuan and still not be able to buy this privilege. It's much more expensive than a regular golf club membership card.

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Zhuang..."

Upon seeing the card in the envelope, Li Dali's eyes lit up. This card meant he could access a completely different circle, which would greatly benefit his career.

Zhuang Rui stood up and said, "Alright, I'll need to trouble Mr. Li to contact that friend surnamed 'Xu' and see if we can meet with him as soon as possible..."

Zhuang Rui has an immature idea in mind right now, but he can only make a decision after meeting that person, because if this gets out, the impact will be too bad. If Zhuang Rui goes abroad again then, he will probably be hated by everyone.

"Don't worry, Mr. Zhuang, I'll definitely get this done for you. You'll be very happy..."

Li Dali also uttered a few words of nonsense, then bid farewell to Zhuang Rui. He also had a house in Yunnan, so he didn't need to rush to Hebei. Besides, having just received the card, Mr. Li wanted to see it for himself before going back.

"Brother Huangfu, this is yours. You can get into Building Two. Hmm, the people who frequent Building Two are mostly high-ranking officials in Beijing, or bosses of listed companies. If you don't like that kind of thing, go to Building Three, but the minor celebrities there aren't as good..."

Zhuang Rui grinned mischievously and tossed another envelope to Huangfu Yun. For ordinary people, the allure of female celebrities is still quite strong, and Huangfu Yun is especially known for his womanizing ways. Zhuang Rui was certain that this guy wouldn't be leaving today.

Zhuang Rui originally wanted to get Huangfu Yun a VIP card for Building No. 1, but the club manager told Zhuang Rui that he did not have that authority.

Afterwards, Ouyang Jun personally called Zhuang Rui to explain the situation. He said that to enter Building No. 1, one must have a background like Ouyang Jun's; otherwise, they would not be recognized or accepted by the people there.

Chapter 774 Teacher?

"White Lion, Xue'er, go back. Why are you following me?"

Zhuang Rui, somewhat annoyed, stopped in his tracks, looking at the white lion and snow mastiff following closely behind.

Today was his registration day. Although Zhuang Rui had already had a similar experience when he was in college, and the postgraduate admission process was quite relaxed with several days for registration, Zhuang Rui still got up very early, washed up, and prepared to go to school.

Zhuang Rui applied for a nationally recognized postgraduate program, which is full-time study, just like his previous university life. The first two years are for basic and professional courses, and he can usually complete most of the credits. The third year is used to complete his graduation thesis, internship, and job search.

Of course, Zhuang Rui's purpose in going to school was merely to study and experience life in the ivory tower again. Job hunting was irrelevant to him. If Zhuang Rui really graduated with an archaeology degree and went to work at an archaeological institute, Huangfu Yun and Zhao Hanxuan, who were working for him, would probably quit.

Actually, if Uncle De hadn't said that full-time study would help him build a solid theoretical foundation, Zhuang Rui would have preferred part-time postgraduate studies, so that he could also take care of some business matters.

Perhaps because he had been taking his precious pets out more these past few days, just as Zhuang Rui was about to leave, the white lion and the snow mastiff also came up to him, seemingly wanting to go out for some fresh air as well.

"Ouch!"

A cry of an eagle accompanied by a loud whistle rang out, and the little golden eagle flew over from the front yard. Fortunately, the little guy landed on the white lion's back and didn't ruin Zhuang Rui's clothes.

"Go back, everyone. Jin Yu, you're not going anywhere today. Stay home and behave yourself, or those people in the park will pluck all your feathers off sooner or later..."

Zhuang Rui patted his forehead and gave the little golden eagle a stern talking-to. The little guy was incorrigible, finding pleasure in stealing other people's pet birds. In the nest Zhuang Rui had built for it, one could often find many colorful bird feathers.

"ah....."

The little golden eagle tilted its head, like a disobedient child, and made a soft chirping sound while using its claws to groom the white lion's fur. The white lion had thick skin and long fur, so it wasn't afraid of the little creature landing on it.

"Brother Zhuang, are you going out? Why didn't you call me?"

Just as Zhuang Rui was having a headache over these guys, Peng Fei ran over with a small basin. He had just been feeding Little Golden Feather when the little guy suddenly flew to the backyard, and Peng Fei knew that Zhuang Rui must have come out.

"Okay, stop, stop it all..."

White Lion, take Xue'er back to your room. Golden Feather, you're not going anywhere today. Uh... Peng Fei, go back to your wife. I'm going to school, not on an Amazon rainforest adventure. Is it really necessary?"

Zhuang Rui was getting angry. If he had to bring these guys to school, Peking University would probably turn into a zoo. He estimated that he would definitely become the first student in Peking University's history to be expelled on his first day of school.

Seeing that Zhuang Rui was angry, the white lion cleverly slipped back to its room. Little Golden Feather, trying to act cute, darted around with its eyes, but still obediently followed Peng Fei back to the front yard.

"Why bother going to school? You'd be better off staying home with your wife..."

Peng Fei's low voice drifted out from behind Zhuang Rui, almost causing Zhuang Rui, who had just opened the garage door, to stumble. These days, people's hearts are not what they used to be, and morality is corrupt. This guy is seriously trying to learn something, yet even his family is criticizing him so much.

...

After entering the garage, Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and then drove the black Audi. This car was not flashy and did not attract attention like the Grand Cherokee. Although Zhuang Rui was now a person with some wealth, as far as Peking University was concerned, he was just one of the thousands of candidates every year.

"Wow, so many people!"

When Zhuang Rui drove to the entrance of Peking University, he was stunned. Not only were there buses arriving from the train station and airport, but even cars with *** license plates were completely blocking the entrance.

Parents, their foreheads covered in sweat, were helping their children carry their luggage into the campus, giving them words of concern as they walked.

These must all be candidates from ***. Their slightly immature faces carried an inexplicable sense of superiority. In their minds, everything their parents did was a matter of course.

Zhuang Rui shook his head. Back when he went to university, he was all alone, carrying his bedding roll to Zhonghai University with a thermos in his hand. He was mocked by some unkind upperclassmen, and they almost got into a fight.

"Beep...beep beep..."

Looking at the familiar scene before him, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but recall his school days. However, he hadn't parked his car in the right spot, and the honking of horns behind him woke him up.

Zhuang Rui glanced at the school gate and gave up on the idea of driving his car into the school. There were many Mercedes-Benz and BMW cars blocked at the gate, which meant that without a school pass, outside vehicles were not allowed to enter.

Zhuang Rui drove nearly a kilometer before finding the parking lot, which left him speechless. If he had known it would be like this, he would have been better off taking a taxi.

After wandering around for more than ten minutes, Zhuang Rui slowly walked back to the gate of Peking University. Inside the campus gate, there were two long rows of tables. Zhuang Rui knew that those were upperclassmen helping freshmen register. In that case, Zhuang Rui would start doing this in his second year of university.

Kyoto University admits three to four thousand undergraduate students each year, as well as more than a thousand master's and doctoral students. The application period is only three days, so the first day of

school is the busiest, with students consulting or completing the admission procedures at almost every table.

Zhuang Rui applied for archaeology, which is considered a relatively unpopular major. There was a long queue in front of the table. Graduates from Peking University, no matter how unpopular their major, can still find a good job. Of course, there's the exception of the classmate who wanted to be his own boss and sell pork.

At each registration point, the most popular were the young and beautiful female students. Whenever such a student came forward to complete the procedures, the male students, who were originally very impatient because of their busy schedules, would become unusually patient. Zhuang Rui, whose voice was gentle, got goosebumps.

Zhuang Rui wasn't in a hurry. Since he didn't need to apply for on-campus accommodation, he could wait as long as it was sooner or later. Holding his admission notice, Zhuang Rui found a shady spot near the archaeology department's registration point, lit a cigarette, and waited.

"Excuse me, teacher, how do I get to the School of Economics and Management?"

Before Zhuang Rui had even finished his cigarette, he heard a girl's voice.

Looking up, he saw four or five girls standing in front of him, all carrying simple luggage. They seemed to be from the same province or city. The one who spoke was a very fashionable girl, whose false eyelashes made Zhuang Rui a little dizzy.

"Teacher? Me?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment, then looked down at his plaid shirt and trousers, his gleaming leather shoes, and most importantly, the cigarette he was holding. If you asked him if he was a student, no one would believe it.

Although smoking is not prohibited in universities, prestigious universities like Peking University will always put some pressure on freshmen. No freshman would dare to smoke openly in the admissions

office. In addition, Zhuang Rui is neither too old nor too young, so it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that he is a teaching assistant.

"Fine, I'll take the teacher then..."

Zhuang Rui was slightly annoyed, but didn't explain. He raised his hand and called out to an older student standing about ten meters away, "Hey, you, yes, I'm talking to you, come here for a second..."

"Teacher, did you call me?"

To be honest, Zhuang Rui's demeanor even intimidated the senior students, but the senior students' speech was clearly not as shy as the freshmen's.

Zhuang Rui nodded in a seemingly serious manner and said, "Okay, take these new students to the School of Economics and Management's dormitory..."

"Okay, thank you, teacher..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the senior student beamed with joy, practically offering Zhuang Rui a cigarette from his pocket. After glancing smugly at his classmates, he scurried off with several female students to the dormitory.

Zhuang Rui was both amused and exasperated. It turned out this guy was from the archaeology department. There weren't many girls who came to register, and he was just envious of the other registration points when Zhuang Rui arranged a good job for him.

There were so many students registering today that the better majors were extremely busy. Zhuang Rui stood under the tree for a while, and four or five groups of people came to ask for directions. Zhuang Rui had no idea where the dormitories of Peking University were, so he put on his teacher's airs and directed the students from the other registration points to go out.

About half an hour later, Zhuang Rui saw that there was no one at the registration point for the archaeology major, so he went over and handed his admission notice to the person registering.

"You...you're not a teacher?"

Zhuang Rui had been standing there for a while, and the students all thought he was a teacher in charge of discipline. They had all been behaving themselves and hadn't dared to whistle at the girls passing by. But now that they saw Zhuang Rui's admission notice, they were dumbfounded.

"I didn't say I was a teacher, so what?"

Zhuang Rui laughed when he heard this. There were quite a few people in the antique business who called him teacher, but none of them were his students.

"No...it's nothing..."

The student in charge of registration saw that Zhuang Rui was applying for graduate school and knew that this guy was a seasoned veteran, so he quickly completed the enrollment procedures.

"What was the teacher doing here just now?"

When the older student who had initially gone to see the female classmate off returned, he happened to see Zhuang Rui leaving.

"What a load of rubbish, he's just a graduate student..." someone nearby said dismissively.

"Damn, that's a great idea! Didn't you see all those beautiful girls asking for directions? Tomorrow when I'm not busy, I'll stand there and pretend to be a teacher..."

Zhuang Rui was unaware that the few cigarettes he smoked under the tree caused the next day to be filled with students at Peking University, smoking cigarettes and trying to appear mature. Of course, these unlucky guys were eventually invited to the administration office.

Chapter 775 Junior Brother

"How embarrassing! How could I get lost?"

Zhuang Rui stood on the Peking University campus, looking utterly dejected. He had thought himself a seasoned pro, confident he could find Professor Meng's office at the Archaeological Institute by following the signs, but after wandering around for a while, he was completely disoriented.

Zhuang Rui asked a few students for directions, but as soon as they realized he wasn't a teacher, they weren't very helpful in giving him directions. Plus, many of the teaching buildings looked pretty much the same, which led Zhuang Rui to get lost on the Peking University campus on his first day of school.

Actually, there's nothing shameful about it. Peking University's campus covers nearly 6,000 acres, spanning three square kilometers, and has 234 research institutes, 126 research centers, and 5 national-level engineering research centers. It's practically a small city. Not to mention Zhuang Rui, who's new here, even many teachers don't know how to navigate the campus.

Left with no other option, Zhuang Rui called Professor Meng. After Professor Meng found out where he was, he sent one of his students to pick him up.

"Are you Zhuang Rui?"

A clear female voice rang out from behind Zhuang Rui. Turning around, Zhuang Rui's eyes lit up.

This is a woman in her mid-twenties. The reason I don't call her a girl is because, in terms of both her clothes and appearance, she doesn't resemble a student at all. Her curvaceous figure and delicate face clearly indicate that she is a mature woman.

Especially her black stockings and short professional skirt that barely covered her knees were incredibly alluring. If this girl were a teacher, I guarantee that countless students would have small mirrors placed on their feet.

The woman wore black-rimmed glasses, which, while obscuring her beautiful face, added an intellectual charm. Zhuang Rui, who was used to seeing heavily made-up beauties, felt a sense of coolness.

"I am Zhuang Rui, and you are?"

If Professor Meng hadn't said on the phone that his student was coming to pick him up, Zhuang Rui would definitely have thought that the woman in front of him was a teacher from Peking University. What student would dare to wear such a short skirt?

"My name is Kan Yuhan. Professor Meng asked me to pick you up. Let's go..."

The girl didn't say much. After introducing herself, she turned and led the way. Her shapely buttocks, encased in her professional skirt, exuded endless sexiness and allure.

"Damn, isn't it said that there are no beautiful girls in the archaeology department?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment before following her. In terms of looks, this girl was far inferior to Qin Xuanbing, but the sexiness that emanated from her very bones was something that even the famous star Xu was slightly inferior to.

Zhuang Rui followed the beautiful woman for about 10 minutes until they arrived at a small building with a sign that read "Archaeological Research Institute." Several cars were parked in front of the institute.

The woman didn't speak to Zhuang Rui the whole way, and didn't seem to care about introducing the Peking University campus to her junior. Zhuang Rui didn't mind, and kept memorizing the route as he walked. He couldn't very well ask someone to pick him up next time, could he?

However, Zhuang Rui also plans to apply for a vehicle access pass for Peking University, since it takes nearly half an hour just to walk from the gate to here.

"Damn, is this a paleoanthropology institute or an archaeology institute?"

As soon as Zhuang Rui entered the research institute, he was startled because there were two half-skulls next to the gate. The white bones on them were slightly yellowed, and the two empty eye sockets were silently looking at Zhuang Rui.

"Hehe, the teacher said that archaeology requires practical application. People without courage simply cannot conduct field excavations. These two things were placed here by the teacher on purpose..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui startled, Kan Yuhan, who was walking ahead and usually stern, said with a hint of schadenfreude, "When I first entered here, I was just as startled. Seeing Zhuang Rui's disheveled appearance, Kan Yuhan couldn't help but laugh."

"It's not like we're digging up graves or excavating tombs. Working in the middle of the night? We archaeological excavations are done in broad daylight. Is it really necessary to do this? We might as well go to a graveyard to test our courage..."

Zhuang Rui muttered to himself that he had heard Monkey mention before that he and Da Xiong had actually gone to the graveyard to keep watch in order to test their courage, but they were so frightened by the will-o'-the-wisps in the chaotic graveyard before midnight that they ran away in a panic.

The so-called will-o'-the-wisp is actually phosphorus fire, because human bones contain phosphorus. When phosphorus reacts with water or alkali, it produces phosphine, a gas that can spontaneously combust. It is lightweight and moves with the wind, and walking will cause it to move behind you.

Because people did not know the cause of will-o'-the-wisps, they only knew that these flames often appeared in places where there were dead people, and that they appeared and disappeared intermittently. Therefore, they called these mysterious flames "will-o'-the-wisps" and considered them an ominous sign, a phenomenon caused by ghosts.

"Just don't be afraid when you go to the excavation site in the future..." Kan Yuhan glanced at Zhuang Rui and didn't say anything more.

Zhuang Rui smiled and didn't say anything. His gaze shifted to the research institute's main hall. He had seen dead people before and handled so many antiques, all of which had been handled by dead people. When it came to mental fortitude, Zhuang Rui was confident that he was no less capable.

After shifting his attention to the research institute, Zhuang Rui discovered that many shelves were filled with bamboo slips, ancient books and silks, bronze and ceramic fragments, and every item, even those

as small as a fingernail, was labeled with a number, indicating that they were all topics that Professor Meng was researching.

Following Kan Yuhan to an office with the door open, Kan Yuhan did not go in directly, but knocked on the door twice.

Zhuang Rui glanced into the office. Besides Professor Meng, there were three other men sitting there. Two of them were a little younger than him, about the same age as Kan Yuhan, while the third was a few years older than him.

The three of them sat respectfully on the office sofa, while Professor Meng seemed to be reading documents and only looked towards the door when he heard the knock.

Upon seeing Zhuang Rui enter, Professor Meng looked up from a pile of documents on his desk. To the surprise of the men and women in the office, their advisor actually left his desk and came to greet Zhuang Rui.

"Xiao Zhuang, why haven't you come to see me in so long? My girl still talks about you all the time..."

Professor Meng's next words left the group speechless with astonishment. After all, Professor Meng was the head of the Archaeological Institute of Peking University, and had compiled and excavated countless major archaeological discoveries. He was undoubtedly a leading figure in the domestic archaeological community.

Moreover, Professor Meng has a very eccentric temperament and rarely shows kindness to people. Although these students have learned a lot from him, compared with other mentors, Professor Meng gives them a somewhat cold and unapproachable feeling.

However, Professor Meng has a high reputation in the field. As long as his students go out to work in various provinces, they can at least become deputy directors of research institutes. After a few years of experience, they all become key members of the provincial archaeological research institutes.

So even though Professor Meng has a bit of a strange temper, they can tolerate it. You know, although the archaeological department is a low-level department, it still receives a lot of funding every year. It's easy to enrich one or two people.

Seeing their teacher, who always only talked about academics and not about feelings, actually stand up to greet a student, the students thought they were seeing things and rubbed their eyes in disbelief.

"Teacher Meng, I've been so busy lately that I haven't had time to listen to your teachings. But things are mostly settled now, so I can finally focus on learning from you. Oh, by the way, Uncle De asked me to give you his regards..."

Contrary to the feelings of the other people in the office, Zhuang Rui thought the old man was quite cute. A while ago, he went to his Xuanrui Studio to ask for a seal and repeatedly told Zhao Hanxuan not to tell him.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Kan Yuhan and the others all showed expressions of "I see" on their faces. They had thought Zhuang Rui was someone special, but it turned out he was introduced by their teacher's friend.

"It's nothing. I saw what you did a while ago. It was good, beneficial to the country and the people. I was just thinking of making time to visit you again..."

Professor Meng's words threw the other people in the room into a state of confusion. It didn't sound like he'd gotten in through connections. What was this young man doing? Getting a professor to come and visit him? Wasn't that a bit too impressive?

What the others didn't know was that, although Professor Meng was certainly qualified to be Zhuang Rui's teacher in terms of archaeology, everyone has their own area of expertise. When it came to appreciating antiques, Professor Meng would probably be Zhuang Rui's student.

After spending time with Zhuang Rui several times, Professor Meng greatly admired Zhuang Rui's expertise in antique appraisal and often sought his advice. Therefore, although the two are now teacher and student, Professor Meng secretly regards Zhuang Rui as a close friend despite their age difference.

As for Professor Meng's suggestion to visit Zhuang Rui, he actually meant to visit Zhuang Rui's museum, not to pay a visit as Kan Yuhan and the others had imagined.

"Hehe, doing my best in small ways is nothing to brag about, teacher. The scholarship you're pursuing is truly beneficial to the country and its people..."

Zhuang Rui modestly acknowledged that Professor Meng was referring to his exchange of Picasso works with foreign museums. In the eyes of the older generation, foreign artworks naturally lacked the cultural depth of our country's antiques.

"Ha ha....."

Professor Meng smiled happily upon hearing this, took Zhuang Rui's hand, and said to the people standing to the side, "His name is Zhuang Rui. He's my master's student this year, and also the last master's student I'll be supervising. You senior students should take good care of him..."

"Yes, teacher, we will take care of Junior Brother Zhuang..." Zhuang Rui was quite shocked by the unanimous words of those people.

Apart from the person who looked to be around thirty years old and was older than him, the others in the room were obviously inexperienced in society, yet they had all become his senior brothers and sisters and had to take care of him.

Chapter 776 Inviting Guests

"Alright, lunch is on the teacher's treat, consider it a welcome-back dinner for Xiao Zhuang, you all come along..."

To be honest, Professor Meng really doesn't know how to handle people. The moment he said that, it made it seem like the others were all benefiting from Zhuang Rui's fame.

Although Zhuang Rui's senior brothers and sisters didn't say anything, their expressions were already quite unpleasant. Zhuang Rui knew that the old man was very direct, but he didn't expect him to be so lacking in social skills. He couldn't help but smile bitterly to himself.

Peking University has a canteen specifically for faculty and staff, which also has private rooms. The chef's skills are almost as good as those outside. However, there is no wine, so the atmosphere is not lively. After the meal, Zhuang Rui followed Professor Meng back to the research institute.

The forgetful teacher forgot to introduce Zhuang Rui to the names of his senior classmates, but given Zhuang Rui's worldliness, getting information out of a few people was no problem. By the end of the meal, he had found out all the details.

The older one is Ren Chunqiang, a doctoral student under Professor Meng. The other two are Jiang Yi and Wu Zhao, who, like Kan Yuhan, are all doctoral students under Professor Meng.

After learning about the degrees several people were pursuing, Zhuang Rui finally understood the meaning behind Professor Meng's statement that he did not recruit master's students.

As for the two undergraduates Zhuang Rui met last year, they have already graduated. Although they planned to pursue master's degrees, Professor Meng was unwilling to supervise master's students anymore, so the two had to leave Beijing to find work.

Back at the research institute, Professor Meng summoned several students to his office and said, "Xiao Zhuang, your foundation in traditional Chinese culture is quite solid, but having spent so much time in the antique business, you've been exposed to mostly unofficial histories..."

However, in archaeology, we must be rigorous and reconstruct the true history; we can't just guess. So, you should take more foundational courses later on, and you can also audit some ancient Chinese history classes to solidify your foundation..."

"I understand, teacher..."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement. He chose this major primarily to learn more theoretical knowledge; the identity of his advisor wasn't particularly important to him. He didn't need his advisor to use their influence to help students publish articles or secure government jobs.

"Well, I'll be leading a project with Xiao Ren, Jiang Yi, and the other two recently. If you have any questions, you can ask Xiao Kan, or you can call me..."

Professor Meng thought for a moment, then added, "You should learn more about ancient writing systems, like bronze inscriptions, which you absolutely must master. It will be very helpful in identifying unearthed artifacts. Xiao Kan is quite knowledgeable in this area; you should consult her more often..."

"Okay, teacher, I will. If there's nothing else, I'll go get my books and timetable..."

Zhuang Rui agreed. After completing his master's and postdoctoral studies, he would basically be working on research projects with his professors. However, Zhuang Rui didn't want to get involved in excavation work so soon. He wanted to familiarize himself with campus life and learn more theoretical knowledge first.

"Okay, let Xiao Kan go with you. You're not familiar with this area, you don't want to get lost again..."

Professor Meng laughed upon hearing this. His favoritism towards Zhuang Rui made the other students quite jealous. They were doctoral students, with much brighter prospects than Zhuang Rui, a master's student. The teacher was really showing favoritism.

Zhuang Rui and Kan Yuhan both agreed, said goodbye to Professor Meng, and then led Zhuang Rui out of the office to pick up Zhuang Rui's course schedule and books from the academic affairs office.

"Yuhan, Xiaozhuang, wait a minute..."

Just as Zhuang Rui stepped out of the research institute, his nominal senior brother Jiang Yi rushed out from behind and said, "Little Zhuang, we're fellow students now. I'll treat you to dinner tonight. We can't drink with the teacher. Yuhan, you should come too..."

"Evening? Alright, let me treat you all..."

Zhuang Rui frowned slightly. He'd eaten at countless restaurants, big and small, in this city, but none of them tasted as good as his mother's cooking. Plus, his wife was pregnant. If it weren't for Jiang Yi's sincere invitation, Zhuang Rui really wouldn't have wanted to go.

To be honest, apart from the more composed Ren Chunqiang, Zhuang Rui didn't have much affection for these senior brothers and sisters. He was a few years older than them, and Zhuang Rui really couldn't bring himself to call them senior brothers.

What disgusted Zhuang Rui even more was that Jiang Yi kept calling himself "senior brother" in front of him, and he didn't know where Jiang Yi got his sense of superiority from. Was it because he was a master's student and they were doctoral students?

"Of course it's my treat, Yuhan, you absolutely have to come too..."

When Jiang Yi saw that Zhuang Rui had agreed, he turned his gaze to Kan Yuhan. This made Zhuang Rui feel that it seemed that Jiang Yi really wanted to invite Kan Yuhan, and that he was just accompanying her.

It seems these senior students have been deeply influenced by their teacher and don't know how to behave. They just want to use this opportunity to invite the beautiful girl to dinner, but they shouldn't have made it so obvious.

"Okay, but I don't drink, and you guys shouldn't drink too much either..."

Kan Yuhan glanced at Zhuang Rui and agreed. She was also a little curious. Zhuang Rui was just a master's student, so why did the teacher value him so much? It seemed that the teacher was grooming him as a close disciple.

It's worth noting that Ren Chunqiang, as Professor Meng's most capable doctoral assistant, never received a lavish meal from his teacher; at most, he was given a boxed lunch at the excavation site.

However, Professor Meng is quite generous with the rewards for research results. He never deducts from the students' due share and often gives them a lot out of his own pocket.

To give an example, if a national-level scientific research project is completed and approved by the state, each student who serves as an assistant can eventually receive more than 100,000 yuan, while Professor Meng sometimes receives even less than the students.

This is so much better than those mentors who are all smiles and concern for their students in ordinary times, but only give them a 100 yuan subsidy every day when it comes to actual work, essentially treating them as laborers.

Professor Meng's actions earned him the genuine respect of his students, who no longer took his usual indifference to heart.

Professor Meng is strict in his teaching and rarely praises his students. Today, Zhuang Rui arrived and before he even finished a day of classes, he was already being looked at differently by his supervisor, which made some of the doctoral students feel unconvinced.

"Okay, okay, Xiao Zhuang, here's my phone number. Be sure to call me at 5:30, okay? See you at the school gate..."

Seeing that Kan Yuhan had agreed, Jiang Yi immediately beamed, handed Zhuang Rui a business card, and turned to go back to the research institute.

"Teacher... Xiao Kan, does Professor Meng always get together with students whenever he has new ones?"

Zhuang Rui couldn't bring himself to call this girl, who was younger than him, "senior sister," but in the end, he followed Professor Meng's example and called her "Xiao Kan."

Kan Yuhan glanced at Zhuang Rui with a slight surprise, but did not object to the title. As the saying goes, there is no end to learning, and those who are accomplished are teachers. If she hadn't shown any skills, why should others call her "senior sister"?

After thinking for a moment, Kan Yuhan said, "We're all from out of town, and it's fate that we can become your students. Besides, there's a lot of academic exchange in archaeology, and we'll keep in touch often in the future. This mutual support will be very beneficial for everyone's work..."

"Oh, I see..."

Zhuang Rui nodded, finally understanding. It turned out this was about building connections.

Because archaeology is a relatively niche field, archaeological departments in various regions are usually run by professionals. Having classmates all over the country can indeed be a great help in the work.

Logically, someone with a PhD should have a broader perspective, but archaeology is different. If you want to do something else, there's absolutely nothing in common with it; you're stuck in this field. So, maintaining good relationships with classmates is essential.

After collecting the books and course schedule, Kan Yuhan left Zhuang Rui at the museum and departed. She also had a research project to complete and hadn't had a moment's rest during the summer vacation, so she had even less time to spend with Zhuang Rui now.

Zhuang Rui was also happy to have some free time. After making a phone call home, he started reading the stack of books he had just received. There were many professional books, but also some on chemistry and history. Before he knew it, several hours had passed.

"Oh dear, it's almost six o'clock..."

Zhuang Rui glanced at his watch and suddenly remembered that the agreed time was 5:30. He quickly packed up his books, left the library, and took out his phone to dial the number Jiang Yi had left.

"Xiao Zhuang, didn't we agree to meet at 5:30? We don't have your phone, and we've been waiting at the school gate for ages..."

After the call connected, Jiang Yi heard Zhuang Rui's voice and immediately started complaining.

"Hey, I'm so sorry, I was reading in the library and lost track of time. Please wait a moment, I'll be right out. Um, it's on me today, as an apology..."

Zhuang Rui was on the phone while rushing towards the gate of Peking University. By the time he arrived at the school gate, it was already past six o'clock.

"Xiao Zhuang, get in the car, Xiao Jiang has booked a place..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui running out of the school covered in sweat, Jiang Yi snorted but didn't say anything. Ren Chunqiang smiled and waved for Zhuang Rui to get into his car.

Zhuang Rui glanced at them and saw that each of them owned a car, but the best one was Ren Chunqiang's Honda, which was worth about 270,000 to 280,000 yuan. As for the other three people's cars, they were all ordinary models worth more than 100,000 yuan.

Zhuang Rui had a good impression of Ren Chunqiang, but he didn't want to have to drive back home after dinner. He said, "Senior Brother Ren, just tell me where it is. My car is parked over there. I'll go there myself in a bit. I know the area well..."

When Ren Chunqiang heard that Zhuang Rui had a car, he said, "That's fine too. Come to Zuixianlou in the west of the city as soon as possible..."

Chapter 777 Aura

Although Zhuang Rui wouldn't call himself a gourmet, he's certainly a foodie. Whenever he's in ***, he often drags him around the streets and alleys of Yue Jing's place, and they've certainly sampled quite a few signature northern dishes.

However, like all major cities, *** offers more than just Northern cuisine. You can find delicacies from all eight major Chinese cuisines, and thanks to modern transportation, even the ingredients are air-freighted, ensuring their authenticity.

Zuixianlou is a Hunan restaurant. Zhuang Rui had brought Qin Xuanbing there before and still fondly remembered their Dong'an chicken, braised shark fin, and soup tripe. However, Hunan cuisine is quite spicy, and Qin Xuanbing couldn't eat too much, so Zhuang Rui didn't come back after that.

Zuixianlou has a large parking lot, which is a major factor in the success of a restaurant. No matter how good the food is, if there is no parking lot, the business will not be very good. Conversely, even if the food is average, if there are plenty of parking spaces, the business will generally not be too bad.

Although the restaurant is named "Lou" (楼), it is actually just a row of single-story buildings. The lobby has tables, and there are private rooms in the back. The rooms are exquisitely decorated and very popular. If you arrive late, you usually can't get a room.

"Brother Ren, why aren't you going in?"

As soon as Zhuang Rui entered the restaurant, he saw Ren Chunqiang and the other three standing at the bill-paying area. Jiang Yi was talking to a man who looked like a manager, and none of them looked too happy.

Ren Chunqiang glanced at Zhuang Rui and whispered, "Xiao Zhuang, we're a little late. The private rooms are all taken. Business is good right now, and we won't be able to find a room for a while..."

Zhuang Rui, the senior disciple, was quite kind and didn't say much, only offering an explanation to Zhuang Rui.

The reason we're late today is because of Zhuang Rui. Jiang Yi booked a time of 6 o'clock, but we left school after 6 o'clock, and now it's almost 7 o'clock, so it's understandable that the restaurant didn't reserve a private room.

"Manager Zhang, we're only a little late, and there aren't any private rooms left. That's really unfair! We're regular customers, could you please arrange another private room for us..."

Jiang Yi is from Hunan and loves Hunan cuisine. He's been a regular customer since this restaurant opened and is quite familiar with the manager.

Actually, if it were just Zhuang Rui, it wouldn't matter if they ate in the main hall. But today, Kan Yuhan has been invited, and the lack of a private room makes Dr. Jiang feel particularly embarrassed.

“Little Jiang, it’s not that I don’t want to help, but... well, as you can see, the main hall is almost full, and the private rooms have been booked for ages. I even reserved the Yuelu Hall for 6:30, but you didn’t arrive until 7:00. There’s really no other way. How about we eat in the main hall tonight? I’ll bring you a couple of dishes later...”

Every restaurant manager is a shrewd and diplomatic person. Actually, Jiang Yi hadn't arrived by 6:05, and the private room had already been given up. However, Manager Zhang was very polite and gave him plenty of face, leaving Jiang Yi speechless and embarrassed to change restaurants.

"Where we eat doesn't matter," Zhuang Rui said, seeing an empty table nearby. "Let's eat in the lobby. Manager, one serving each of Dong'an Chicken, Goldfish Playing with Lotus, Yongzhou Blood Duck, Steamed Assorted Cured Meats, Sister, Ningxiang Spicy Snake, and Yueyang Ginger Spicy Snake..."

Oh, and bring an extra serving of braised shark fin soup. I never get tired of it. Hmm, and two bottles of Moutai, Miss Kan. Would you prefer alcohol or soft drinks?

Zhuang Rui had delayed everyone's mealtime today. He had originally planned to treat them to this meal, but seeing that Jiang Yi was still trying to haggle with the manager, he became a little impatient and simply ordered both food and drinks for them.

Kan Yuhan was getting annoyed at this stop; being stared at by everyone was making her uncomfortable. She said, "I'll just have a drink. You guys should drink less too; you still have to drive back..."

"Alright, let's do it this way then. Please take your seats, senior brothers and sisters..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand at the manager and said, "Do you have any 1982 Moutai?"

"1982 Moutai? No, that kind of Moutai is very rare..."

Manager Zhang was taken aback by Zhuang Rui's words. He knew that 1982 Moutai was over twenty years old and rarely seen on the market; it was usually a collector's item, costing at least 30,000 yuan.

"Oh, then let's get two bottles of 1995 Moutai, I don't like the new Moutai..."

Zhuang Rui wasn't showing off; he mainly didn't know the price of 1982 Moutai. However, Ouyang Jun had taken five or six bottles last time, and they tasted good. After drinking new Moutai, he always felt the taste was off, so he casually asked.

"Sir, we do have 1995 Moutai, but it's a bit pricey..."

Manager Zhang didn't look down on Zhuang Rui, but this had to be agreed upon beforehand. Otherwise, if the wine cost more than the food after the meal, and the other party didn't honor the bill, wouldn't that cause trouble?

"How much?" Zhuang Rui asked casually. He wasn't the type to put on a show of wealth; even if he had a lot of money, he wouldn't let himself be ripped off.

Manager Zhang thought for a moment and said, "A bottle of 1995 Moutai is 2,300 yuan. If you want two bottles, I'll give you a discount, 4,500 yuan..."

"Okay, let's start with two bottles. We can ask for more if we need more later..."

Zhuang Rui nodded and casually dismissed Manager Zhang, a perfectly natural thing in his eyes, but it left several of his doctoral fellow students dumbfounded.

To say that this person has an aura, or that his delicate body trembles and he exudes an aura of dominance, is pure nonsense. If you let someone who has never seen the president of the country and doesn't even know what the president of the country is meet with him alone, he definitely won't feel any aura. He'll just be a well-maintained old man.

The so-called aura is mainly manifested in one's speech. When people interact and converse, the confidence that is naturally revealed and can infect the other person is called aura.

Zhuang Rui's casual way of ordering food and drinks just now, in the eyes of his fellow doctoral students, gave off a certain air of authority.

At least in the conversation between Zhuang Rui and the manager, the east wind definitely prevailed over the west wind. Manager Zhang always acted very humble, while Zhuang Rui was natural, as if it were the way it should be.

After they sat down, Ren Chunqiang said to Zhuang Rui, "Xiao Zhuang, we'll be spending a lot of time together in the future, no need to be so extravagant. A bottle costs several thousand yuan, that's too expensive. Although none of you are married, you don't have jobs either, so it's better to be frugal..."

Ren Chunqiang meant well. From what his mentor had said earlier, he could tell that Zhuang Rui seemed to be running a small business. However, judging from Zhuang Rui's young age and the fact that he didn't have the habits of those spoiled brats, his business probably wasn't very big. The fact that he spent several thousand on a single meal made Ren Chunqiang feel rather embarrassed.

Of Professor Meng's doctoral students, only Ren Chunqiang got married and bought a house in *** last year. Although he had been pursuing his master's and doctoral degrees with his teacher and had worked on research projects for four or five years and had saved some money, he had invested all of it in a house. Therefore, he was quite frugal with his money and felt a little insecure in front of his junior classmates.

"Senior Brother Ren, you're mistaken. I'm a married woman, and in a few months, I'll be pregnant with twins, a boy and a girl..."

The moment this was mentioned, Zhuang Rui's face lit up with joy. Regardless of how well he knew the others, he happily shared his son and daughter with them.

"Oh? Congratulations then, Xiao Zhuang. But life in *** is stressful, so you should still be careful with your money..."

The group was taken aback. Although it's not unusual for undergraduates to get married these days, and many people work after marriage and then pursue a master's degree, it's rare for them to study full-time. Most people work while studying, which reduces the pressure.

"Hehe, this little bit of money is nothing. I was late today, so this meal is on me as an apology..."

Zhuang Rui laughed. This senior brother Ren was quite interesting, with the demeanor of a senior brother. However, Zhuang Rui rarely paid for meals when he ate out, so it didn't matter if he occasionally spent tens of thousands of yuan on a meal.

"An apology is fine, but Xiao Zhuang, you still need to develop the habit of being punctual. Teachers don't like people who aren't punctual. If you keep doing this, we won't be able to speak up for you..."

"Besides, some professors at Kyoto University have really strange tempers. If you're late for class, you can forget about getting your credits. Xiao Zhuang, you'd better be more careful in the future..."

No sooner had Zhuang Rui finished speaking than Jiang Yi's voice rang out, his words laced with a lecturing tone. Jiang Yi had been on tenterhooks the whole time, and the reason he hadn't dared to speak was because he was afraid that if he picked up the conversation, he would have to pay for the meal.

You should know that although following Professor Meng, one can do two or three projects a year and earn one or two hundred thousand yuan, Jiang Yi has only been pursuing his doctorate for a little over a year, and that little bit of money has already been used to buy a car to save face.

Jiang Yi only had 10,000 to 20,000 yuan left and no other income. He only had a few hundred yuan for living expenses each month. Dr. Jiang was reluctant to spend 5,000 to 6,000 yuan on a single meal. So Dr. Jiang only became lively after Zhuang Rui offered to treat him.

However, his words were rather tactless, causing Zhuang Rui to frown slightly.

Ren Chunqiang called himself Xiao Zhuang because he was older than Zhuang Rui, but Jiang Yi was at least two years younger than Zhuang Rui. His old-fashioned way of calling himself Xiao Zhuang made Zhuang Rui very uncomfortable.

One should not be arrogant, but one cannot lack integrity. Besides, Zhuang Rui's words have been of the highest quality for the past two years, and there is an unspoken confidence in his speech. With this frown, the atmosphere at the table suddenly became somewhat dull.

"Hehe, gentlemen, I'm pursuing a master's degree under Professor Meng simply to learn some basic theoretical knowledge. Whether I get a diploma or not isn't that important to me..."

Zhuang Rui realized that his tense expression had created an awkward silence, so he quickly smiled and explained, "I've been working for so many years, why should I argue with a student who hasn't even graduated yet?"

Chapter 778 Director Xie (Part 1)

"Xiao Zhuang, you can't say that. Having a good job is still very important these days. Our mentor has a very high reputation in the archaeology field in China. Even if he just introduces you to a big museum, that's much better than doing small business..."

Just because someone has a high IQ doesn't necessarily mean they have a high EQ. Zhuang Rui's words were already quite straightforward, but Dr. Jiang still didn't understand and, relying on his seniority, gave Zhuang Rui a few more lectures.

After graduating with a degree in archaeology, there are generally two career paths. The first is naturally to work in an archaeological department that matches your major. However, since there is a lot of overlap with museum studies, working in a museum is also a viable option.

With a doctorate, as long as your relevant major is decent and you have some connections, it's not impossible to get a job at a large museum.

You know, these days, no matter what industry you're in, some people are getting rich quick and others are starving, and museums are no exception.

For example, the Palace Museum earns tens of millions of yuan a day just from ticket sales, and hundreds of millions a year. If you could become a minor leader there, life would be incredibly comfortable.

However, those little-known local museums may only earn a few hundred or a few thousand yuan a day from ticket sales. These are government-funded institutions with little to no profit, where people can only earn a fixed salary.

Jiang Yi's plan is to stay at ***. Even if he can't get into those big museums, he wants to stay at the university and work in the archaeological institute. You know, the institute has a lot of funding every year, and the bonuses for each completed project are very generous.

However, the institute has a limited number of openings, and Ren Chunqiang has basically secured a position as a lecturer at Peking University. He will definitely stay at the institute after graduating this year. There is only one opening left, and only a few people will be competing for it.

Jiang Yi had inquired and learned that Wu Zhao had a good job before pursuing his doctorate and would return to his original unit after graduation. As for Kan Yuhan, she was a *** person, posing a significant threat to him. However, Jiang Yi was currently pursuing Kan Yuhan, and if he succeeded, it would be a win-win situation, not something for outsiders.

However, Zhuang Rui's arrival today, and Professor Meng and Kan Yuhan's attitude towards Zhuang Rui, made Dr. Jiang feel a sense of threat. Hearing Zhuang Rui say that he got married just now, he finally got rid of the label of love rival. However, because of the matter of staying at the school, there is still a thorn in Jiang Yi's heart.

Another point is that scholars tend to belittle each other. Jiang Yi earned his doctorate, which means he has spent his entire life in school from elementary school to now, and everything has gone smoothly for him.

Jiang Yi originally thought that he would be valued by his supervisor after entering the research institute, but he did not expect that Zhuang Rui, a master's student, would be treated by Professor Meng with several times better treatment than him. This made Dr. Jiang jealous.

However, little did Jiang Yi know that after Zhuang Rui resigned from the pawnshop, he had no intention of working for someone else for the rest of his life. He was too lazy to manage his own business and wanted Zhuang Rui to make money for others.

Moreover, Zhuang Rui and Professor Meng's relationship is not just that of teacher and student; there is also a sense of friendship between them despite their age difference. Professor Meng often relies on Zhuang Rui to appraise some items for him. So, how can Professor Meng keep a straight face?

“I didn't go to school to find a job, and I already have a job now...”

Zhuang Rui didn't want to argue with a student, so he gave a nonchalant reply. Just then, the waiter came to serve the food, and Zhuang Rui quickly said, "Come on, everyone, eat up. Consider this my apology to you all. Please take care of me in the future. This Peking University is just too big; I get disoriented as soon as I enter..."

Zhuang Rui's words made everyone laugh. Since there was no conflict of interest with him, Jiang Yi's words were no longer so harsh, and the atmosphere at the table became very pleasant. After a few drinks, the relationship immediately became warm.

However, Zhuang Rui mostly toasted Ren Chunqiang and Wu Zhao, because they had just exchanged ages. Ren Chunqiang was the oldest at 31, Zhuang Rui was 27 and second, followed by Jiang Yi and Kan Yuhan, with Wu Zhao being the youngest.

Despite being the youngest, Wu Zhao is very adept at handling situations. After learning that Zhuang Rui was older than him, he started calling him "Brother Zhuang" all the time. Kan Yuhan also stopped calling him "Little Zhuang" and started calling him by his name directly. Only Jiang Yi wasn't quite in tune with the situation and kept calling him "Little Zhuang," unwilling to let go of his sense of superiority as a doctoral student.

Zhuang Rui was too lazy to associate with such self-important people, and kept raising his glass to Wu Zhao and Ren Chunqiang. Both of them were from the north and had a good capacity for alcohol. In no time, they had finished two bottles of Moutai.

"Bring two more bottles of Moutai, and um, the 1995 vintage too..."

Zhuang Rui was quite happy with his drink today. He majored in archaeology, mainly because he wanted to combine practice with theory and look at the development and inheritance of Chinese antiques from different perspectives.

During his conversation with Ren Chunqiang and others, Zhuang Rui learned a lot about the knowledge of using archaeological expertise to identify unearthed cultural relics, and some of the theories were ones he had never encountered before. This greatly interested Zhuang Rui, and after finishing two bottles of wine, he immediately asked the waiter to bring more.

"Xiao Zhuang, that's enough. If you drink any more, you won't be able to leave. This car won't be able to move..."

Dr. Ren offered Zhuang Rui some advice. Actually, he was fine with alcohol, but he was worried about the cost of the drinks for Zhuang Rui. If they had two more bottles of 1995 Moutai, the cost of the drinks alone would be close to 10,000 yuan, and the whole meal would cost more than 10,000 yuan.

"Hey, Brother Ren, even if we don't drink now, we can't drive. Let's take a taxi home today and come back to pick it up tomorrow..."

Zhuang Rui hadn't drunk with friends his age for more than half a year. Everyone else had a job, and he was the only one with nothing to do. It was rare to meet someone he could chat with today, so he naturally wanted to drink to his heart's content.

Hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Ren Chunqiang didn't try to persuade him any further, but asked curiously, "Little Zhuang, what kind of business are you doing out there? It seems like you're doing quite well..."

Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this and replied, "Hehe, I'm just an antique dealer. I opened a shop in Panjiayuan, selling things like the Four Treasures of the Study. It's not much of a business. Well, I'm back in school now..."

Zhuang Rui didn't want to talk about the museum. In ***, besides relatives and employees, there weren't many people he could talk to like Ren Chunqiang and Wu Zhao. Zhuang Rui didn't want his status to become an obstacle to communication between them.

Jiang Yi, who had been flirting with Kan Yuhua ever since they started drinking, suddenly said after hearing Zhuang Rui's words, "That's right, Xiao Zhuang, your choice is right. Although there was a saying years ago that selling tea eggs was better than being a professor, you still can't get by without culture. If you want to be at the forefront of society, you have to keep enriching yourself..."

Zhuang Rui could still understand what Dr. Jiang was saying, and he didn't find Dr. Jiang's address of "Little Zhuang" so offensive anymore. However, what Dr. Jiang said next made not only Zhuang Rui frown again, but also Dr. Ren and the others look at Jiang Yi with a different expression.

"Xiao Zhuang, take you for example. You're the owner of an antique shop now. I know a bit about this antique business; it's a very deep and murky place. If you don't keep improving yourself, you might make a mistake one time and lose everything..."

Everyone present was an adult, and they could naturally distinguish between well-intentioned advice and gloating. Everyone could see that when Jiang Yi said those words, he had an expression that said, "You'll be like this sooner or later."

"Heh, the person in this world who can fool me hasn't been born yet..."

Zhuang Rui's expression remained unchanged, but his words sounded arrogant to everyone. Without explaining, he raised his glass and said, "Come on, Xiao Wu, Brother Ren, let's have another drink. These days, there are just too many people who think too highly of themselves..."

Zhuang Rui is alright in other aspects, but when it comes to appreciating antiques, no one in the antique circle dares to say that their level is higher than Zhuang Rui's. Even those seniors in their sixties and seventies wouldn't dare to make such a boast.

"You...you..."

Dr. Jiang was so embarrassed by Zhuang Rui's veiled insult that her face turned red. She looked like she was about to get angry but was also worried about being laughed at in this situation. She looked like a wronged little wife, feeling very aggrieved.

"Ah? Come on, Xiao Jiang, have a drink, have a drink..."

Dr. Ren knew that Jiang Yi was a bit petty, so he immediately tried to smooth things over, saying, "Xiao Zhuang, what Xiao Jiang said makes sense. Better safe than sorry, haha..."

Zhuang Rui finished his drink and said with a smile, "Thank you, Brother Ren, I know..."

People talk differently. The same sentence can make someone feel comfortable or furious in a different way. Ren Chunqiang's years of experience in society are far beyond what Jiang Yi, a novice PhD, can compare to.

Seeing that Zhuang Rui and Jiang Yi didn't argue, Ren Chunqiang felt relieved. After drinking a glass of wine, he looked up and saw a familiar face. He quickly stood up and greeted him, "Director Xie, you're eating here too..."

Ren Chunqiang's actions drew the attention of Zhuang Rui and the others. This man was about forty years old, slightly overweight, and was unpacking a pack of Zhonghua cigarettes he had just taken from the counter. He was also scolding a waiter next to him, saying that there was no one left in the private room and that he had to come and get the cigarettes himself.

"You are... Oh, you must be Dr. Ren? Professor Meng's student, hello, hello..."

After a moment's hesitation, Director Xie recognized Ren Chunqiang, walked over and shook hands with Dr. Ren, his attitude somewhat lukewarm.

"Director Xie, hello, I'm Xiao Jiang. I met you before with my teacher..."

Not knowing who this Director Xie was, Jiang Yi, Wu Zhao, Kan Yuhuan, and the others all stood up. Zhuang Rui didn't recognize the person and hadn't originally planned to get up, but seeing that everyone else had stood up to greet him, he stood up out of politeness as well.

"Oh, I remember, Dr. Jiang is here too. Please come and give us guidance more often in the future..."

Director Xie was spouting meaningless words when he glanced around at everyone at the table. When he saw Zhuang Rui, he suddenly paused.

Chapter 779 I'll do it, you can do as you please

Director Xie is the director of the General Affairs Department of the Museum Administration Bureau under the Ministry of Culture. Although the official rank isn't high, the responsibilities are significant. Whenever there's an application for a private museum or a personnel transfer at a national museum, the initial report always ends up on his desk.

As the saying goes, "It's easier to see the King of Hell than to deal with his underlings," which perfectly describes Director Xie. Although he is only a division-level cadre, he can still cause serious trouble in Beijing, but in the national museum system, Director Xie is a figure with extensive connections and influence.

Ren Chunqiang and others got to know Director Xie because last year, Professor Meng had a national-level scientific research project that required the cooperation of the Museum Department. That's how the two sides met. However, Director Xie only made an appearance at the celebration party after the project ended; the work was all done by his subordinates.

Ren Chunqiang and the others all knew that Director Xie was difficult to talk to. Jiang Yi had even privately asked him for help, but he was rebuffed and was not even allowed to enter the other's home.

"Yes, yes, I'm Xiao Jiang. Director Xie, you still remember me? I must offer you a toast..."

Dr. Ren's job placement was decided last year. Informing Director Xie was merely a matter of politeness. However, Jiang Yi and the others were different. They knew that with just a word from Director Xie, they could choose any job they wanted in museums across the country.

It's important to know that archaeology students usually return to work at archaeological institutes in their respective provinces. Although the conditions and benefits are good, it's still incomparable to staying in *** city.

Therefore, when Jiang Yi saw Director Xie, his face was filled with surprise and joy, a stark contrast to the arrogant expression he had when speaking to Zhuang Rui earlier.

"Alright, since we've met several doctors, let's have a drink..."

Upon hearing Jiang Yi's words, Director Xie hesitated for a moment before turning his gaze away from Zhuang Rui and nodding in agreement.

Jiang Yi was overjoyed at the sight and quickly gave up his chair, ran to an empty table next to him, moved a chair, and sat down next to Director Xie.

"Director Xie, let me toast you. I'll drink it all, please feel free to drink as you like..."

Seeing that Director Xie, who is usually difficult to talk to, was giving him such face today, Dr. Jiang quickly poured him some wine, changed to a large glass for himself, filled it to the brim, and downed it in one gulp.

"Damn it, using my buddy's liquor to do a favor..."

Zhuang Rui was a little annoyed. Just now, when Ren Chunqiang asked this kid to drink, Jiang Yi was still holding back, saying he had to drive later. Now he's a completely different person. Judging from his attitude, even two more bottles of Moutai wouldn't be enough.

"Hmm, Little Jiang has a good alcohol tolerance..."

Director Xie nodded, touched the cup to his lips, and seemed a little absent-minded.

What others might not know, Director Xie was filled with doubt and uncertainty at that moment. Was that young man really the big boss of Dingguang Museum?

From the application to the approval of Dingguang Museum, Director Xie only acted as an assistant; the rest was handled by his superiors. However, this did not prevent him from obtaining certain information: Dingguang Museum was a private museum that the ministry was focusing on supporting.

The situation in Beijing was complex, and Director Xie didn't pay much attention to it at the time. No matter what, the Museum Administration Bureau was just a department-level unit, and the city had plenty of power capable of controlling them.

Director Xie, thinking he could avoid trouble if he couldn't afford to offend them, naturally gave the green light to all the procedures for the Dingguang Museum. He had no choice but to give the green light; if the documents were sent over a little late, he would be reprimanded by the bureau chief.

When the Dingguang Museum opened, Director Xie was invited to attend the opening ceremony. Initially, he was somewhat displeased that the person who received him was only a deputy curator. However, when Minister Ouyang personally attended the opening ceremony, Director Xie realized that this museum was far more complex than he had imagined. 000000.0000

It's worth noting that even for the opening of a national-level museum, it's customary for the deputy head of the ministry to attend the opening ceremony. This is just a private museum, yet it has alarmed the head of the ministry, so you can imagine its background.

Later, Director Xie made some inquiries and learned that Zhuang Rui was the nephew of a high-ranking minister. So after the museum opened, Director Xie made several trips to the Dingguang Museum, hoping to get to know Zhuang Rui, but unfortunately, he never met him.

On the opening day, Zhuang Rui was extremely busy and naturally had no time to deal with a minor bureaucrat. However, Director Xie had memorized Zhuang Rui's appearance. Just now, upon seeing him, he felt that he looked familiar. He only remembered him after sitting down, but Director Xie was still not sure.

It's no wonder Director Xie was blind. Zhuang Rui was wearing a suit and tie that day, and even styled his hair. Now he's just wearing a plain white shirt and trousers, and he's gotten a bit tanned from being in *** for a while. He looks very different from when the museum opened.

...

After Jiang Yijing finished his drink, Ren Chunqiang and the others also stood up to toast Director Xie. Even Kan Yuhan drank a small cup of baijiu. Being able to build a good relationship with this powerful director would be of great benefit to their future employment.

These days, even PhDs have a hard time finding jobs. It's not just domestic PhDs; overseas returnees are flocking back to China in droves. And frankly speaking, most people who get a PhD come from families without money or connections.

People from wealthy families can start their own businesses after getting a bachelor's degree. If their parents are insightful, they might go abroad to get a degree. If they have connections, they would have

entered government agencies long ago. As for academic qualifications, there is adult education available now.

So people like Jiang Yi, Wu Zhao, and Kan Yuhan, who are considered the pride of heaven by others, are actually struggling to find jobs because of their low educational background. That's why they are working so hard to get a better future.

To be honest, whenever Director Xie is with these privileged individuals, he feels an indescribable sense of superiority. He's just a high school graduate who later obtained his associate's and bachelor's degrees. You masters and doctors still have to be subservient to him, don't you?

"Xiao Zhuang, aren't you going to offer Director Xie a toast?"

After the round of drinks was finished, only Zhuang Rui remained at the table, sitting there casually, eating shark fin soup that looked like vermicelli, showing no intention of toasting Director Xie.

Jiang Yi had just drunk about three ounces of baijiu, and now that he was feeling the effects, he couldn't help but say, "Xiao Zhuang, you're just a master's student now. Even we PhD graduates have to take orders from Director Xie. Don't be so disrespectful. Hurry up and toast Director Xie..."

Zhuang Rui frowned upon hearing this, raised his head and glanced at Jiang Yi with some annoyance. "I'm older than you, and you're far less experienced. So what if you have a higher degree? How dare you lecture me?"

"Director Xie, right? Please sit down and have something to eat. Hmm, make yourself at home, no need to fuss..."

Zhuang Rui didn't want to embarrass Jiang Yi in front of outsiders, since Jiang Yi was Professor Meng's student after all. He raised his glass to Director Xie, then put it down and started eating again.

Zhuang Rui didn't like dealing with these petty bureaucrats. If it weren't for the fact that Ren Chunqiang and others respected Director Xie, he wouldn't have bothered to say a word.

"Xiao Zhuang, you..."

When Jiang Yi saw Zhuang Rui's attitude, he was furious. He had gone to great lengths to get Director Xie to sit down, and now he was just making things difficult for himself.

Although Ren Chunqiang and the others didn't say anything, they also felt that Zhuang Rui was being a bit presumptuous. After all, the other party was older and held a higher position than Zhuang Rui, so wasn't this extremely impolite?

Actually, this is also a matter of human psychology. If Director Xie had said that greeting to Zhuang Rui, it would have been perfectly natural. On the contrary, it would have been seen as disrespectful.

But those people present didn't seem to realize why Zhuang Rui should respect the other person. He wasn't Zhuang Rui's guest; they were only saying hello out of consideration for a few classmates.

"Excuse me, are you Zhuang Rui, Teacher Zhuang?"

Just as Jiang Yi was pointing at Zhuang Rui, about to teach him some principles of conduct, he suddenly heard Director Xie's voice.

"Zhuang...Zhuang, still...Teacher?"

Several big question marks popped into everyone's heads, and Jiang Yi even swallowed back the words that were already on the tip of his tongue.

The PhDs were all quite old and very knowledgeable. They knew that in society, "teacher" was a respectful title, generally referring to someone worthy of learning from in a certain field. Originally, it referred to older and more experienced scholars. As for the term "teacher" used in schools, that came later.

However, after drinking with Zhuang Rui for a long time, none of them saw anything about him that was worth learning. The words "old and experienced" did not apply to Zhuang Rui at all. So when they heard what Director Xie said, they were all astonished and opened their mouths wide.

"I'm Zhuang Rui. I don't deserve to be called a teacher. Director Xie, just call me Xiao Zhuang..."

Zhuang Rui was a little puzzled. He only had a reputation in the antique circle and had no connection with the government official in front of him. How could the official know him?

"You deserve it, you deserve it. Professor Zhuang's scholarship and character in the field are widely recognized. I even went to your museum to learn a while ago, but I didn't get to meet you..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's admission, Director Xie was overjoyed. He immediately changed to a different glass, poured it a full three or four ounces of liquor, and said, "Professor Zhuang, if there's an opportunity in the future, please come to our department to guide our work. If there's anything we haven't done well enough, please point it out..."

This drink is my toast to you. I'll drink it all, please feel free to drink as you like..."

Director Xie's words left Jiang Yi and the others completely dumbfounded. The words Jiang Yi had just spoken to Director Xie were now being used verbatim on Zhuang Rui, with such a respectful attitude that it was as if Zhuang Rui was forty years old and Director Xie was just a kid.

Chapter 780 Director Xie (Part Two)

"Director Xie, you're too kind. I'll have it too..."

Zhuang Rui wasn't some naive young boy. As the saying goes, one doesn't hit a smiling face. If someone was so respectful, it would be foolish of him to be arrogant. So he downed his drink in one gulp.

When Director Xie saw that Zhuang Rui was giving him face, he couldn't help but show his delight. After downing a glass of wine, he coughed a few times, then generously emptied the glass by turning it upside down to show that he had finished drinking.

Director Xie's action left the people around him even more confused. Someone like Director Xie would only do such a thing in front of his own superiors, right?

Seeing that Director Xie was drinking quite heartily, Zhuang Rui asked, "May I ask where Director Xie works?"

Actually, it was a bit impolite to ask such a question, but Zhuang Rui was also a little tipsy at the moment and spoke rather casually. Besides, there weren't that many rules at the dinner table.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Director Xie quickly took out his business card and handed it to Zhuang Rui with both hands, saying, "Professor Zhuang, this is my business card. Please come visit me sometime. I personally have a fondness for antiques, and I hope you can appraise them for me in the future..."

Given Zhuang Rui's status, Director Xie should actually address him as General Manager Zhuang. However, since he considers himself part of the antique circle, calling him "teacher" would make their relationship seem closer.

However, the fact that a man in his forties was calling a young man in his twenties "teacher" made the others look at each other awkwardly.

"Museum Administration Bureau, Director of the Administrative Affairs Department..."

Let alone someone in their forties calling themselves "teacher," even someone in their sixties has called Zhuang Rui "teacher." Zhuang Rui didn't dwell on the form of address. Instead, emboldened by the alcohol, he read out the title on the business card, muttering to himself, "Museum Department, I feel like I've heard that before?"

"Hehe, I was also there when your museum opened..." Director Xie reminded Zhuang Rui from the side.

"Oh, Director Xie, you're such a respected official! Don't forget our museum if you ever get any benefits in the future..."

Upon hearing Director Xie's words, Zhuang Rui sobered up a bit. However, although he addressed the official as "parent official," his tone lacked respect. In Zhuang Rui's mind, these officials were good at taking bribes and demanding favors, but not so good at handling serious matters.

The conversation between Zhuang Rui and Director Xie left the onlookers completely bewildered. Although the PhDs were highly intelligent, they couldn't make sense of the relationship between the two.

From what Director Xie said, it was clear that Zhuang Rui owned a museum, and Director Xie had even gone to congratulate him on its opening. However, this was precisely what puzzled the group.

Logically speaking, Zhuang Rui's museum should only be a private museum, which falls under the jurisdiction of Director Xie. If Zhuang Rui is the owner, how could he possibly know Director Xie, who approves museums?

Furthermore, even if Zhuang Rui didn't know Director Xie and it was his subordinate who handled the procedures, now that they've met, it should be Zhuang Rui who's trying to curry favor with Director Xie, not Director Xie who's eagerly offering Zhuang Rui a drink.

The local official is more powerful than the county magistrate. Isn't Zhuang Rui afraid that Director Xie will make things difficult for him in his future work?

Director Xie hadn't really taken the other PhDs seriously, but upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, he quickly replied, "Don't worry, Professor Zhuang, if needed, I can arrange some exchanges of collections, temporarily lending some of the museum's finest pieces to your museum for display..."

The exchange of collections between museums is a normal thing, but those are all official exchanges. The kind of work that Director Xie mentioned still requires people with certain influence to get things done.

"That would be great, but Director Xie, I won't get involved in this matter. I'll have Director Huangfu talk to you when you're free..."

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui began to take the chubby Director Xie more seriously. He put the business card into his handbag. Someone was eager to help him solve a problem; he couldn't very well turn them away, could he?

Zhuang Rui's museum has ample space and funding, but it lacks some collections. If some items could be transferred from other museums, the other exhibition halls could be opened sooner.

"Alright, I have some social engagements to attend to, so I won't bother you any longer, Professor Zhuang. I'll visit you again another time to seek your guidance..."

Director Xie was such a perceptive person. Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, he immediately stood up to take his leave. As soon as he stood up, Dr. Ren and the others also stood up to see him off.

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"Professor Zhuang... what exactly do you do?"

After Director Xie left, Wu Zhao finally couldn't hold back any longer and, emboldened by alcohol, asked Zhuang Rui a question. However, he had originally called Zhuang "Brother Zhuang," but now he addressed him as "Teacher Zhuang."

After Wu Zhao spoke, the table fell silent. Dr. Ren and the others pricked up their ears, wanting to hear Zhuang Rui's explanation. Even Kan Yuhan blinked her big eyes, curiously observing Zhuang Rui.

Jiang Yi's expression was the most complex at this moment. Regardless of Zhuang Rui's background, one thing was certain: he was someone Jiang Yi absolutely could not afford to offend. Thinking about the sarcastic words he had just used against Zhuang Rui, Jiang Yi wished he could disappear into a crack in the ground.

Moreover, judging from how Director Xie fawned over Zhuang Rui, if Zhuang Rui could say a word for him, getting a job at the Palace Museum wouldn't be a problem. Jiang Yi lowered his head, regretting his actions and secretly trying to figure out how to make amends.

However, being a cultured person, Jiang Yi was too proud to speak to Zhuang Rui right away, so he could only listen carefully to find out who Zhuang Rui was.

"Wu Zhao, don't get me into trouble! Please don't call me that. I'm a few years older than you. Just call me Brother Zhuang..."

Zhuang Rui gave a wry smile. He was going to Peking University to study, not to become a teacher. If Professor Meng heard this, he would definitely make fun of him.

"Okay, Brother Zhuang, why is Director Xie so respectful to you? What kind of business are you in?" Wu Zhao blurted out all his questions.

"Hey, didn't I just say that I have a shop in Panjiayuan and a private museum near the Third Ring Road..."

Zhuang Rui originally returned to school to make friends with some classmates like Wei Ge from his university days. He didn't want to talk about his grades or wealth. But today, by chance, he ran into someone who knew him. Zhuang Rui didn't want to lie to them, so he just told them directly.

As for why Director Xie was so respectful to him, Zhuang Rui didn't explain, but he knew in his heart that it must be because of his uncle. Even outsiders knew that his museum's approval procedures were not in accordance with regulations, let alone Director Xie and his staff.

Actually, Director Xie's attempt to curry favor with Zhuang Rui wasn't about getting Zhuang Rui to do him any favors. He just wanted Zhuang Rui to occasionally remember his name when talking about work at the museum. If Zhuang Rui could casually mention it in front of certain people, Director Xie would be incredibly grateful.

In the officialdom, to get promoted, you don't actually need to have great abilities. The first thing is to choose the right side, and the second is to make the leader remember you and have an impression of you. If there is an opportunity for promotion in the future, the leader will usually promote the person he has an impression of from among the candidates. Of course, that impression must be a good one.

"A private museum, near the Third Ring Road?"

Dr. Ren thought for a moment and said, "I remember now, a few months ago, you attended the opening ceremony of a museum. Could it be yours, Xiao Zhuang?"

To be fair, Ren Chunqiang had a pretty good mindset. He was content with what he had and didn't ask anything of Zhuang Rui, so he addressed him as before, which made Zhuang Rui feel comfortable.

Zhuang Rui originally returned to school with the intention of rekindling his past campus memories. He really couldn't stand it if his classmates addressed him with such formal language.

"Yes, that's the museum. It's only been open a few months, and the collection is still small. Brother Ren, you can go and give us some pointers sometime. Come on, let's not talk about work today, let's have a drink..."

Zhuang Rui picked up his wine glass. This time, not only Jiang Yi raised his glass to clink glasses with Zhuang Rui, but Kan Yuhan, who had only drunk one glass of wine that night, also poured herself a glass of baijiu and clinked glasses with Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui's attitude remained unchanged; he didn't do anything to Jiang Yi. Given his current status, he wouldn't bother with Jiang Yi; doing so would be beneath him.

With Kan Yuhan joining them, the atmosphere became even more lively as they drank. However, Zhuang Rui couldn't find the feeling he had when chatting with Ren Chunqiang and Wu Zhao at the beginning. Dr. Ren was fine, but Wu Zhao's flattery of Zhuang Rui was quite obvious.

Jiang Yi knew he had gone a bit too far earlier, so he didn't try to curry favor with Zhuang Rui. In addition, Zhuang Rui was still lukewarm towards him. Dr. Jiang felt depressed, so he just lowered his head and drank. Before long, he was so drunk that he slumped on the table, which saved him from embarrassment.

The two bottles of Moutai were quickly finished, and Zhuang Rui lost interest in drinking any more. He waved to the waiter to pay the bill.

"Sir, someone has already paid for your table's bill..."

Zhuang Rui was taken aback for a moment upon hearing this, but he immediately thought of Director Xie and couldn't help but shake his head with a wry smile. "I've never experienced the legendary *** consumption before."

The group had all drunk quite a bit today and were all too drunk to drive. Dr. Ren took the already intoxicated Jiang Yi back to school, while Wu Zhao was responsible for taking Kan Yuhan. Zhuang Rui hailed a taxi, told the driver the destination, and then left alone.

"Huh? Who's calling now?"

After getting off the bus at the entrance of the alleyway leading to the courtyard house, Zhuang Rui paid the fare, and his phone rang immediately after he stepped out of the car.

"Hello, is this Mr. Zhuang? This is Lao Li..."

A vaguely familiar voice came through the phone, but Zhuang Rui, having had some drinks, was a bit confused and couldn't help but ask, "Old Li? Which Old Li?"

"President Zhuang, I'm Lao Li from Hebei. We met just yesterday..."

Li Dali was a little annoyed. He had rushed to tell Zhuang Rui about the good deed he had done, but he hadn't expected that Zhuang Rui had already forgotten about him.