

## Golden 881

### Chapter 881 Funerary Objects (Part 3)

"Boss, please don't be angry. He's just a scoundrel who doesn't know how to talk..."

Zhang Daniu kicked his younger brother in the butt, apologized to Zhuang Rui, and then said, "Boss, feel free to ask me anything. As long as we know the answer, we'll tell you..."

"I...I..."

Zhuang Rui was so annoyed by that scoundrel that he almost forgot to ask what he wanted to say. He had initially suspected the two brothers were putting on an act, but now it seemed unlikely; Zhang Erniu was just a bit slow on the uptake.

"Not asking anymore? Then let's look at the things..."

Erniu put the package he was carrying on the table and said, "We're just here to sell things, why ask so many questions?"

"You may dare to sell, but do you expect me to dare to buy?"

Zhuang Rui smiled wryly to himself, thought for a moment, and then said, "Erniu, I'll talk to your brother. You go out to eat; the food delivery will be here soon..."

Zhuang Rui simply couldn't get anything out of Zhang Erniu; with Zhang Erniu interrupting him, Zhuang Rui couldn't get anything out of him either.

"Okay, okay, brother, I'm going out now..."

Upon hearing that there was food to eat, Zhang Erniu's eyes lit up, and he turned and ran outside. In his mind, regardless of whether the goods could be sold or not, just being able to eat such delicious food made the trip worthwhile.

After Erniu left, Zhuang Rui breathed a sigh of relief and looked at Zhang Daniu, asking, "Daniu, can you tell me where these things came from?"

"Is this all the boss is asking about?"

Upon hearing this, Zhang Daniu grinned and said, "Where else could these come from? We dug them up from the ground, of course. Erniu and I dug them all up. Don't worry, they're definitely our own..."

Zhuang Rui was stunned when he heard this. He had prepared himself to hear a story, but he didn't expect Zhang Daniu to admit that it was obtained by tomb raiding. This made it impossible for Zhuang Rui to ask any further questions.

Zhuang Rui paused for a moment, then asked, "Da Niu, where are you from?"

"We're from Mengjin County in Henan Province, which is near Luoyang. But our village is in the mountains, and this is the first time we've ever traveled this far..."

Zhang Daniu didn't know why Zhuang Rui was asking these questions. However, he had a very good impression of this boss and told him everything, including the fact that his parents had given birth to a younger sister last year.

Zhuang Rui now understands that these two brothers are not setting a trap, nor are they putting on a show; they are genuine farmers from Mengjin County, Henan Province.

Da Niu was a little better off, having attended primary school for two years. Er Niu, on the other hand, couldn't even write his own name and was completely illiterate. The two brothers had originally gone out to work, but Er Niu was too straightforward and beat up the contractor, so they went back home to farm.

However, farming doesn't bring in money these days. Seeing that some of their neighbors were robbing tombs, the two brothers followed suit. They were lucky enough to dig up a large tomb that no one had ever touched and found a lot of good stuff.

Other tomb raiders usually have buyers, but these two brothers didn't know anyone. They showed the items to people in their village, but people were only willing to give them a few hundred yuan. So the two brothers decided to go to \*\*\* City to find a buyer, and now... they're sitting in front of Zhuang Rui.

"They've practically told you everything, even your parents, so what else is there for Zhuang Rui to ask?" he said. "Alright, Da Niu, open the package, let me see what's inside..."

"Alright, I just went to an antique shop, and the guy there said they were fake. But there was another shop where an old man told us to come back this afternoon. If you like these things, I'll sell them to you. You're more honest than that old man..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Da Niu happily unfolded the package on the table. He wasn't deliberately showing off how valuable his item was, but rather explaining that he hadn't even gotten a sip of water at another shop, and when the young man there saw his item, he claimed it was fake.

But when it came to Zhuang Rui, he treated them to food and drink, a completely different level of treatment. Farmers are honest and straightforward; when they receive favors from others, they feel uneasy and always think about how to repay them.

"This...this"

Zhuang Rui was stunned when he saw the items that Da Niu took out of the package. He had only sensed them with his spiritual energy, but now that he saw the actual items, he was dumbfounded.

The first thing Da Niu took out was a bronze candlestick that was about 30 centimeters tall.

The entire candlestick is covered with bronze rust and is exquisitely designed. It depicts a woman with her hair tied up, kneeling on one knee, holding a lotus eight-petal tray aloft with both hands. There is a small hole in the tray that connects to the woman's body, which is probably where the lamp wick is inserted.

The candlestick is hollow, and the fuel inside has long since evaporated over the years. However, the exquisite craftsmanship of this candlestick is something Zhuang Rui has never seen among the loot of the Yu family's tomb raiding gang. Putting aside everything else, this bronze candlestick alone can be called a national treasure.

However, to Zhuang Rui's dismay, the bottom of the candlestick was damaged. There should have been a fixed support, but it was gone, obviously broken off by force.

Zhuang Rui asked Da Niu, and sure enough, the candlestick was originally embedded in the wall of the tomb passage, but Er Niu had pulled it off by brute force.

Zhuang Rui examined it closely and found that there were no inscriptions on the bronze candlestick. The green patina on its surface was very thin and seemed to faintly glow with a layer of gold. In academic terms, this is called gilding, which is commonly found in unearthed cultural relics in Shaanxi, Henan and Gansu.

The term "gold plating" does not refer to the fact that the artifact was plated with mercury or gold during its casting. Rather, it refers to the formation of a special oxide layer on bronze artifacts in a specific soil environment, which was also known in the past as "gold plating" or "copper plating".

This phenomenon usually only appears on bronze artifacts that have just been cast and have not yet been used before being buried in the ground. Furthermore, the tomb must be located in an arid, sandy environment and the tomb passage must be tightly sealed and never been robbed in order to produce such exquisite gilded bronze artifacts.

To some theoretical experts, such an object would seem like a fake. It's likely that the antique shop the Zhang brothers just visited was run by a white-necked expert (an expert with theory but lacking practical experience).

The monkey had somehow entered the room. Looking at the bronze candlestick in Zhuang Rui's hand, he said, "Brother Zhuang, I saw this this morning. It should have come from a large tomb, but I'm not sure what kind of tomb it is..."

"These are artifacts unearthed from a dry pit. They are extremely well-preserved and more valuable than some items from water-filled pits. Judging from the shape and style of this candlestick, it is in the Han Dynasty style. A tomb built according to this style belongs to at least a king or nobleman..."

The artifacts mentioned by Zhuang Rui were mostly unearthed in Hunan, Hubei and Zhejiang. They are usually characterized by bright colors and smooth, mirror-like surfaces, either a deep green or a glossy black, as if they had just been pulled out of the water.

After explaining the situation to the monkey, Zhuang Rui looked at the other objects. There were four more bronze candlesticks, all with the same shape, indicating that the tomb passage was quite long.

"Da Niu, when you first took this thing out, was it still painted?" Zhuang Rui asked Zhang Da Niu, holding up a 20-centimeter-tall terracotta figurine.

Zhang Daniu looked astonished and nodded repeatedly, saying, "Yes, boss, how did you know? It looked so beautiful back then, but I don't know what happened, as soon as I took it out, all the color disappeared..."

"Sigh, what a pity, Da Niu, did you manage to clean out everything in the tomb?"

Looking at the terracotta figurines, Zhuang Rui felt a sense of powerlessness. If the glazed terracotta figurines were well-preserved, they could have been preserved in their original state, but now they have all been destroyed.

"Boss, why are you asking this?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Zhang Daniu's face showed a wary expression. Zhuang Rui knew from his expression that there must be something else in the tomb.

"Da Niu, do you know that digging up ancient tombs is illegal?" Zhuang Rui asked tentatively.

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Da Niu waved his hand dismissively and said, "What law is it against? There are graves everywhere in our area. At least several hundred people in a township are digging

them. Some have even built small villas and gotten married by digging graves. Why can others dig but we can't?"

The two brothers, Da Niu and Da Niu, saw that others were robbing graves at night and sleeping during the day, living a very comfortable life and seemingly never running out of money. This made the two brothers feel very unbalanced, so they went up the mountain, found a hidden grave, and dug up these things.

"Don't the police in \*\*\* handle these kinds of things?"

Zhuang Rui broke out in a cold sweat as he listened. If there were hundreds of people robbing ancient tombs in just one township, how many people would be doing this in a county or city?

It is important to know that archaeological excavation is a very meticulous task. During the excavation process, not only must the integrity of the ancient tomb be maintained, but even the passageway must not be damaged, because those stone walls are often carved with exquisite murals.

Therefore, the on-site excavation of ancient tombs must be carried out by professionals. However, as Zhang Daniu said, if people are digging up ancient tombs everywhere in a village, Zhuang Rui doesn't know how many tombs will be destroyed.

"The authorities are in charge. If you get arrested, you'll be fined. Erhu, who lives across the street from us, was fined five thousand yuan, which is why we brought him to the authorities to sell..."

Zhang Daniu's words left Zhuang Rui speechless. Damaging a priceless ancient tomb and only being fined five thousand yuan? Such a lack of supervision will only encourage more and more tomb raiders and make the tomb raiding trend more and more rampant.

Zhuang Rui had only heard that tomb raiding was rampant in Henan before, but he never imagined that it would become an industry, with farmers no longer farming and making a living solely from tomb raiding.

These farmers who raid tombs cause far more damage to ancient tombs than professional tomb raiders. Their methods are often more drastic, and they dare to use explosives, axes, and anything else.

The tombs dug up by these farmers were almost like crops ravaged by locusts, barren and lifeless. Even things that couldn't be taken away were smashed and destroyed by many people.

Chapter 882 Jade Beauty

"Boss, there are a few more things in here, do you want to take a look?"

Seeing that Zhuang Rui remained silent, Zhang Daniu felt a pang of unease. He knew that tomb raiding was illegal, and if caught, he would be fined at least three to five thousand yuan—a sum his family certainly didn't have.

"There's more? Look, I want to see..."

Upon hearing Zhang Daniu's words, Zhuang Rui immediately came to his senses. As the saying goes, gold is valued in times of chaos and antiques are valued in times of prosperity. With antiques being so popular now, antique dealers are all setting their sights on rural areas.

These rural people, with their unique advantages and generally low level of education, simply do not understand the damage their unauthorized excavation is causing to these historical relics and treasures.

However, Zhuang Rui was puzzled. The country has always cracked down hard on the crime of stealing and selling cultural relics, so why are some places still able to blatantly steal ancient tombs? Are those local governments just sitting around doing nothing?

In fact, Zhuang Rui didn't know that in Henan Province, especially around Mangshan Mountain, there was a tomb raiding army of no less than 5,000 people in Meng County alone (I won't specify the name here, and I'll change it in the previous chapter to avoid being accused of crossing provincial borders). As the saying goes, the law doesn't punish the masses, and with just a few registered police officers, it's impossible to catch them all.

Moreover, even government officials might rely on this for their livelihood, so even if they are caught red-handed, it's just a matter of paying a fine. If they were to be sentenced, the police station would probably be surrounded by a bunch of old men and women the next day. This has happened before.

These local tomb raiders belong to the lowest rung of this industry. In the beginning, the funerary objects they painstakingly dug up, even if they were in good condition, would only sell for a few hundred yuan, while ordinary ones would sell for only a few dozen yuan.

After the antique craze took off, these people felt they had been taken advantage of, and gradually their family-run tomb raiding activities turned into organized gang activities.

Several close associates joined forces, with a clear division of labor: some were responsible for tomb raiding, others for lookout duty, specifically staking out the police station. Often, the moment the police left, they would receive the information, making the police's work more difficult.

Even if some major cases alarmed the higher-ups and police forces were dispatched to arrest them, it only made them restrain themselves a little. After the heat died down, they continued to dig at night. The task force couldn't stay there all the time, could it?

Therefore, such family-run tomb raiding gangs cannot be eradicated and will continue to exist, like moles, plundering and destroying precious ancient tombs.

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"This...is it a terracotta figurine? Why is it so heavy? Is it solid?"

As the monkey was helping Zhang Daniu unpack another package, it nearly dropped an object when it pulled it out, clearly having misjudged its weight.

"I don't know, this thing is so heavy. If it weren't for my brother's strength, we wouldn't have been able to carry it all the way here..."

Zhang Daniu didn't care much about these things. In his opinion, these items were neither edible nor drinkable. Although he knew they could be exchanged for money, he didn't understand what these people wanted with them.

So after digging these things up, Zhang Daniu and his brother always stored them in the cellar and never bothered to clean them up. This time when they came to the village, they just picked out a few things from the cellar and brought them over.

"Monkey? What's that?"

The conversation between the two caught Zhuang Rui's attention. He went over and saw that the monkey was struggling to hold a human-shaped terracotta figurine that was thirty or forty centimeters tall. It was covered with yellow mud, making it impossible to see the appearance or gender of the person.

"I don't know, solid terracotta figurines are very rare, this thing is really heavy..."

The monkey answered Zhuang Rui's question, put the things back on the table, and was panting heavily from exhaustion.

"Hmm, it's really not light..."

Zhuang Rui reached out and weighed it. This not-so-large object actually weighed sixty or seventy pounds, about the same size as a rock, which surprised him.

Because solid terracotta figurines are very prone to cracking, since the Qin Dynasty, except for the neck which is solid, the bodies and heads of terracotta figurines have generally been hollow. For example, the Qin terracotta warriors unearthed in the Xi'an area look tall, but they are not actually very heavy.

Of course, solid terracotta figurines have been unearthed in history, but those were fired in sections and then pieced together, making them extremely easy to break when moved, unlike this terracotta figurine which gives people a sense of being a whole.

"Wait a minute... something's not right..."

After Zhuang Rui used his spiritual energy to move around the humanoid object for a while, he suddenly paused, because the spiritual energy he found inside it was actually the faint, cool aura of jade.

"Could it be the Jade Beauty?"

Zhuang Rui turned to the monkey and said, "Go find a washbasin, and also get a scrubbing brush. This thing is a bit strange; it doesn't quite look like a terracotta figurine..."

Four or five minutes later, the monkey found a large plastic basin from somewhere, filled it halfway with water, and brought it in, also holding a pig bristle brush in its hand.

Zhuang Rui's strength far surpassed that of a monkey. He grabbed the object with one hand and placed it directly into the basin. The water in the basin immediately became murky after it came into contact with the mud on the object.

Zhuang Rui took a brush, dipped it in water, and started brushing from the head. In a few strokes, he cleaned off the layer of yellow mud. Before he could take a closer look, the monkey standing next to him exclaimed, "This...this thing isn't a terracotta figurine, it's a jade figure!"

"Jade?"

Zhang Daniu, who was standing to the side, was also stunned for a moment, then his face lit up with joy, and he said, "The boss is really amazing. We really didn't know this thing was jade. It was so heavy to lift..."

Upon hearing that the item was jade, Zhang Daniu excitedly reached for his hands. Even the most ignorant rural people know that jade is valuable. Daniu had already mentally estimated that this thing would sell for at least 1,000... no, at least 2,000.

Zhuang Rui ignored the two of them. As the jade figure was gradually cleaned up, his expression became serious. He took a tape measure from the table and measured it. The jade figure was a full 48 centimeters tall.

The jade figure is carved from a single piece of white jade. Due to its age, a lot of mud has seeped into the figure, and after being washed clean, it turns yellowish all over. The figure is shaped like a woman holding a zither in her arms.

To be precise, the jade figure is holding a pipa. The pipa's head, including the string grooves, tuning pegs, and nut, is exquisitely carved. Judging from the pipa in the jade figure's arms, she must have been a musician.

The jade figure itself is also very well carved. The entire jade figure is covered with fine, hair-like patterns. This is probably the woman who plays the zither. She has a smile on her face, her chin is slightly raised, and she is wearing a long-sleeved robe, making her look lifelike.

In Zhuang Rui's eyes, the carving skills of more than two thousand years ago are still difficult for anyone to match today. Even with machine carving, it is unlikely that such an effect could be achieved. This is definitely the pinnacle of Han Dynasty jade carving!

"Damn it, whose lair did these two guys raid?"

Zhuang Rui was amazed. The discovery of this jade figure indicated that the identity of the tomb's occupant was far higher than he had imagined.

It is important to know that ancient burial practices were governed by strict etiquette, especially for court officials. There were specific rules regarding what items to be buried with them based on their status. Even if you were very wealthy, you would not dare to bury too many items that violated the rules if you did not have a high social standing. Otherwise, not only would your grave be dug up, but your descendants would also suffer.

In ancient times, especially during the Qin and Han dynasties, jade was an extremely important ritual object for worshipping Heaven. Ordinary officials would not have been able to possess such a large piece of jade to carve into a burial object. Therefore, the owner of this jade figure might have been an emperor.

"Boss, how much do you think this thing is worth? Is it worth 5,000 yuan?"

As Zhuang Rui was examining the beautiful woman, Zhang Daniu couldn't hold back any longer and walked up to Zhuang Rui, asking a question.

"5000 yuan?"

Zhuang Rui gave a bitter smile, feeling a pang of sorrow for the ancient emperors. The tombs and burial goods they built with the full resources of the nation were, in Zhang Daniu's words, only worth five thousand yuan.

"Da Niu, let me ask you a question honestly. Tell me the truth, did you find anything inside the coffin in that tomb?"

Generally, Han Dynasty imperial tombs are very likely to yield jade burial suits with gold or silver threads. Zhuang Rui could tell from this jade figure that the scale of this emperor was probably no less than that of the Mancheng Han Tomb, where a jade burial suit with gold threads was once unearthed.

"A coffin? That big stone coffin?"

Seeing Zhuang Rui's serious question, Zhang Daniu thought for a moment and then said, "There is a large stone coffin inside. Erniu tried to chop it open with an axe but couldn't. I was afraid that what was inside would rise from the dead, so I didn't let Erniu open it. I really don't know what's inside..."

Rural people are quite superstitious, and the two brothers, Da Niu and Da Niu, were not professional tomb raiders. They still believed in ghosts and gods, so in the end, they didn't dare to open the coffin in the eerie tomb.

Zhang Daniu was unaware that ancient tombs contained the most treasures, which were also the easiest to carry and the most valuable. Experienced tomb raiders would first clean the coffin after going down into the tomb, and they would not even let go of the jade plugs that blocked the nine orifices in the bones.

Zhuang Rui breathed a sigh of relief upon hearing this. If Zhang Daniu and his companion had tampered with the coffin, the loss would have been irreparable. Given their nature, they would have surely cut the gold thread on the jade burial suit and taken the clothes from the body.

"Da Niu, I have something to tell you. Don't be happy or scared yet..."

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment. This tomb involved something too astonishing, both publicly and privately. He dared not hide it any longer, so he continued, "Do you want to know how much this jade figure is worth?"

"Yes, I do!" Zhang Daniu nodded repeatedly.

Zhuang Rui nodded and said, "Okay, then I'll tell you, it's worth at least five million, and even ten million would be worth it outside of China!"

"Five million...ten thousand?!"

Zhang Daniu didn't react for a moment. He held up his five fingers on his right hand and looked at them. Then he held up his left hand. After a long while, he managed to utter the word "wan" with great difficulty.

#### Chapter 883 Donation

The GDP and so-called per capita income mentioned by the government, in a sense, have little to do with farmers. For a family like Da Niu, farming at home, their annual income is only a few thousand yuan.

Even though the two brothers went out to work some time ago, they only earned a little over a thousand yuan a month on construction sites. After deducting the cost of food, they were left with only seven or eight hundred yuan. After working for half a year, they still hadn't saved ten thousand yuan.

So let alone five million, Da Niu had never even seen fifty thousand yuan in his entire life. He was genuinely shocked by the number Zhuang Rui mentioned and waved his hands repeatedly, saying, "I don't need that much, fifty thousand is fine..."

Da Niu wasn't unwilling to accept the five million, but he wasn't stupid either. He knew that if the other party said that, there was no way they would give them the money. So Da Niu became a little nervous, turning his head to look around, almost as if he was about to rush out the door.

"Da Niu, don't be afraid. To tell you the truth, if I really gave you the money, it would harm you..."

Zhuang Rui poured Da Niu a glass of water and then said, "Do you know that the things you dug up are national treasures, the nation's treasures? Just for these items, you could be sentenced to death..."

Zhuang Rui wasn't trying to scare them. This jade figure was definitely a national first-class cultural relic, and the bronzes and pottery figurines were all national second- or third-class cultural relics. Given the extent of the damage these two brothers caused to the tomb, even if they didn't get the death penalty, life imprisonment was definitely the only outcome.

A major case of tomb raiding and cultural relic trafficking was recently adjudicated in Hunan Province. All three main culprits were sentenced to death, six others were sentenced to life imprisonment, and the rest received sentences ranging from three to ten years. Therefore, Zhuang Rui's statement is not without basis.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Zhang Daniu's face showed a nervous expression, and he stammered, "Boss...you're joking, right? There are plenty of grave diggers in our village, why are you sentencing us?"

"Da Niu, I'm not a policeman, I won't arrest you, and I have no reason to lie to you. I wouldn't dare buy these things from you either; if I did, I'd be guilty along with you..."

Explaining things to someone as illiterate as Da Niu is a real struggle. Zhuang Rui racked his brains to organize his thoughts before continuing, "Do you know what kind of tomb you've robbed?"

"I don't know..." Da Niu shook his head.

"That's the tomb of an ancient emperor, something the state is protecting. If you dig it up, won't the government hold you accountable? They haven't caught you yet, but once they do, you'll probably get at least a life sentence..."

Zhuang Rui is right. If these things enter the antique market, it will definitely be a major cultural relics case, and it might even alarm the Ministry of Public Security. At that time, these two brothers will definitely be in trouble.

"Then... what should we do? We don't even know what kind of tomb this is..."

Da Niu was almost in tears after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. He didn't doubt that Zhuang Rui was lying to him, because from the moment they entered the store, Zhuang Rui had always been very sincere and hadn't discriminated against them because they were from the countryside. So Da Niu still trusted Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui shook his head helplessly. Neither of the two brothers were bad people, but they were ignorant of the law. Even if they hadn't met him today, their aimless search for buyers would definitely have attracted the attention of the police.

Zhuang Rui had a good impression of the two brothers. After thinking for a moment, he said, "Da Niu, if you trust me, I'll teach you a way to get the police to drop the charges against you. They might even give you a reward of a few thousand yuan..."

"Brother, what's the plan? Just tell us, and we brothers will definitely do as you say..."

Da Niu was completely bewildered. He hadn't expected that tomb raiding, which was practically an open business in their village, would lead to executions after only six months. This left Da Niu at a loss.

Hearing Zhuang Rui say that if he followed his instructions, not only would he not be arrested, but he would also get paid, Da Niu immediately began to see Zhuang Rui as his lifeline.

"By the way, where exactly did you dig these things?" Zhuang Rui asked. He needed to know the details before he could make up a story.

"this....."

Da Niu glanced at Zhuang Rui, a suspicion rising in his heart. Could it be that the other party was trying to trick him into revealing the location of the tomb so that he could dig it up himself?

Zhuang Rui saw through Da Niu's intentions. It's really hard to be a good person these days. He said, half-laughing, half-crying, "Da Niu, I'm saving you guys, don't ruin yourself..."

"That...that tomb is in a cave on a cliff. I saw it when Erniu and I went to collect herbs when we were kids. Later we found out that it was probably an ancient tomb, and it was only dug up last month..."

After thinking for a long time, Zhang Daniu finally chose to trust Zhuang Rui. He had worked in the city before and knew that the other party had no reason to lie to him. It seemed that he had really gotten himself into big trouble this time.

"On a cliff? In a cave?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment. It seemed that this was an imperial cliff tomb, but it would be difficult to make up a lie to exonerate these two big brothers.

After thinking for a moment, Zhuang Rui said to Da Niu, "Da Niu, when the police come, just say this: you discovered this ancient tomb while collecting herbs, and then took the items out to hand them over to the government. Remember, stick to this story, and don't change your story no matter who asks..."

Although this reason is somewhat far-fetched, the Da Niu brothers haven't sold anything yet, so it doesn't constitute the crime of illegally excavating and selling cultural relics. As long as they stick to this claim, and since the cultural relics were voluntarily handed over, they probably won't be held criminally liable.

"B-Brother, is there still any chance of getting the bonus? We only have three hundred yuan left, not even enough for the fare back home..."

Da Niu's words immediately amused Zhuang Rui. What kind of time is this to be thinking about the bonus? Actually, the bonus Zhuang Rui mentioned earlier was meant to be some money he would give to the two brothers, since they had also found an imperial tomb.

"There's a bonus, five thousand yuan. Wait a moment, I'll call the police. Explain this matter clearly, and you can collect the bonus..."

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment, then told Da Niu to wait inside. He took out his phone, went outside, and dialed a number.

"Hello, Officer Miao?"

"Zhuang Rui, why did you suddenly decide to call me?" Miao Feifei asked, somewhat surprised.

"Ahem, here's the thing, two farmers from Henan accidentally discovered an imperial tomb. They came to \*\*\* wanting to donate the artifacts to the country. Shouldn't this be under your jurisdiction, police?"

Zhuang Rui knew that Miao Feifei had been involved in some tomb raiding cases recently, so he reluctantly approached her. After all, the story he made up for the Da Niu brothers was a bit far-fetched.

"Farmers would donate cultural relics to the state? Zhuang Rui, are you kidding me?"

Officer Miao didn't believe it. These days, many farmers rob graves, but none of them voluntarily donate the graves to the state. Zhuang Rui's words sounded very unusual.

"I... how could I joke with you? I'm at the Panjiayuan store right now. Those two people and their stuff are here. You'll see when you get here..."

Zhuang Rui gave a wry smile. As expected, no one believed this, but he really couldn't bear to see Brother Da Niu go to jail for this, and wanted to help them.

"Okay, I'll contact the cultural relics department and head over right away..."

Although Miao Feifei didn't believe it, she knew Zhuang Rui wouldn't joke about this with her. After hanging up the phone, she called the relevant department and got into a police car to head to Panjiayuan.

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"Hello, teacher, this is Zhuang Rui. It's like this, today..."

After hanging up with Miao Feifei, Zhuang Rui called Professor Meng and explained the whole story. If this was an imperial tomb, his mentor would probably be involved in the future protective excavation.

"Xiao Zhuang, are you telling the truth? There was a jade figure among the burial objects? It's forty-eight centimeters tall?!"

Professor Meng was greatly surprised when he heard Zhuang Rui's words. He had participated in the archaeological excavation of many Han tombs and unearthed many jade figures, but those jade figures were all very small, the largest being no bigger than the palm of his hand. He had never heard of anything like what Zhuang Rui described.

"Teacher, it's true. The items are still in the store. I've also notified the police. I was wondering if the subsequent protective excavation of this ancient tomb could be submitted to our school?"

The Institute of Archaeology at Peking University is one of the top archaeological research institutions in China, and Professor Meng is a leading figure in the field. If it really is an imperial tomb, he would probably have to personally take charge.

"Okay, I'll head over right away. Make sure the artifacts are well protected. As for the subsequent archaeological excavation, I'll discuss it with the relevant departments and try to take on that task..."

Professor Meng has dedicated his life to the study of Chinese burial archaeology, and of course he wouldn't miss an unknown tomb. After thinking for a moment, he continued, "Since you're about to start your internship, why don't you come with me? If those burial objects are really as you say, it's likely that another major archaeological discovery will be made..."

The Eastern and Western Han dynasties each had twelve emperors, and countless others were granted titles of kings and marquises. However, after more than two thousand years, many tombs have been looted by tomb robbers. Now, another Han emperor's tomb has been discovered, which makes Professor Meng quite excited.

Professor Meng and Officer Miao arrived at Xuanrui Zhai at almost the same time. Professor Meng was accompanied by Dr. Ren, while Miao Feifei was followed by several police officers and relevant staff from the cultural relics department.

When the people from the Cultural Relics Bureau saw Professor Meng, they all rushed forward to greet him. However, Professor Meng did not have time to be polite with them. As soon as he entered Xuanruizhai, he asked Zhuang Rui to take him to see the items, while Officer Miao went to find Brother Da Niu to take a statement.

"A national treasure, a national treasure!"

Professor Meng's hands gently caressed the beautiful woman's body, the movements as tender as if he were caressing a lover, his face revealing an expression of barely suppressed excitement.

Chapter 884 Applying Knowledge to Practice

Anyone who achieves success in a particular field is undoubtedly a highly focused individual, and Professor Meng is exactly like that now. At this moment, his eyes see nothing but this beautiful woman.

"What a treasure! Such a large piece of jade, and the carving is so exquisite. It can be described as the finest of Han jade, representing the highest level of jade carving craftsmanship at that time..."

More than ten minutes passed before Professor Meng finally looked away from the jade figure, his face still showing amazement. Clearly, the jade figure had deeply impressed him.

Professor Meng has personally overseen the excavation of countless ancient tombs, but he has never seen such a large jade figure before. After looking at the jade figure, he then looked at the bronze candlesticks and terracotta figurines, and a look of regret appeared on his face.

Every artifact unearthed from a tomb is a treasure left behind by our ancestors. Looking at the broken bronze candlestick, Professor Meng's face did not look good.

"Xiao Zhuang, what era are these things from?"

After examining the object, Professor Meng asked Zhuang Rui a question, his words implying a thorough investigation.

"Teacher, these things are undoubtedly from the Han Dynasty, but I can't figure out whether they are from the Eastern Han or Western Han Dynasty..."

Zhuang Rui answered honestly that he had no problem distinguishing between genuine and fake, but he was not capable of explaining the dating process in detail.

Dr. Ren, who had been following behind Professor Meng, suddenly spoke up: "This should be an imperial tomb from the Eastern Han Dynasty..."

"Senior Brother Ren, how do you know?"

Zhuang Rui was completely convinced that his senior brother's knowledge was inferior to his mentor's, but he was a little unconvinced that his senior brother had determined it to be an imperial tomb of the Eastern Han Dynasty. He had looked at it for a long time but still couldn't figure out whether it was from the Eastern Han or Western Han Dynasty.

Dr. Ren laughed upon hearing this, and pointed to the jade figure, saying to Zhuang Rui, "Zhuang Rui, look at the jade figure's clothing. It's a straight-hemmed robe, with long and wide sleeves and a vertical hem. This is a characteristic of Eastern Han Dynasty clothing..."

Furthermore, the female figure on this bronze artifact has her robe opening to the right, while the robes of Western Han dynasty clothing open to the left. In addition, a tomb that could afford to bury a jade figure must have been an imperial tomb. Even nobles and kings would not have dared to be buried so lavishly..."

When the Western Han Dynasty was established, it basically followed the clothing system of the Qin Dynasty, which was called "Quju Chanyi" meaning the opening was curved diagonally from the collar to the armpits. However, by the Eastern Han Dynasty, the clothing had changed to "Zhiju Chanyi" where the opening was vertical from the collar downwards.

This view has been confirmed in the academic community through the excavation and verification of many burial objects. Therefore, when excavating Han tombs, one can usually determine whether the objects are from the Eastern Han or Western Han dynasties based on the clothing of the pottery figurines or human figures.

Of course, these things sound simple, but if you are not an archaeologist with extensive experience, it is difficult to make judgments from those pottery figurines with mottled glazes.

"Xiao Ren is right, Zhuang Rui. You've learned this knowledge before. Don't just memorize it; you need to learn it and apply it in practice..."

After Dr. Ren finished speaking, Professor Meng nodded approvingly and then gave Zhuang Rui a lecture, saying that as a teacher, one should always remind students which knowledge points need to be learned.

"I understand, teacher. Now that you mention it, it makes perfect sense. Senior, you can't keep things to yourself anymore; you have to remind me more often..."

After listening to Dr. Ren's words, Zhuang Rui also realized his own shortcomings. He had learned all the things that Ren Chunqiang mentioned, but in practical application, he was still far inferior to his senior.

Dr. Ren was a little embarrassed by Professor Meng and Zhuang Rui's praise, and waved his hands repeatedly, saying, "Hehe, Professor, Zhuang Rui, please don't flatter me. If I hadn't presided over several on-site excavations of Han Dynasty tombs, I might not be as good as Zhuang Rui..."

"Well, Xiao Ren has a solid foundation in basic knowledge, while Zhuang Rui, you have rich experience in appreciating antiques. As long as you visit more excavation sites in the future, you will gradually be able to apply it to practice..."

Looking at his two students, Professor Meng felt extremely proud. Dr. Ren was a very proper and methodical person, and now that he had stayed on to teach at the university, he would definitely follow the same path as him in the future.

Zhuang Rui's actions are somewhat unconventional, often surprising people with his unexpected and delightful deeds. For example, the discovery of the Krause pirate treasure brought great recognition to the Chinese scientific community on the world stage.

As for the "ancient porcelain" incident that caused a great stir some time ago, Professor Meng had also heard about it. If he was not mistaken, it was most likely the work of his prized student.

Although Zhuang Rui's methods were not entirely aboveboard, and Professor Meng had some reservations, the results were excellent, at least keeping the neighboring countries quiet about the so-called "cultural disputes."

Of course, Zhuang Rui himself would not admit that he used underhanded methods. The antique business is inherently full of deceit and it is difficult to distinguish between real and fake. If you are not good at identifying fake items, you have to swallow your pride and bear the consequences. Who told you to be incompetent and try to take advantage of others?

Although it may sound harsh, it's the truth of the antique business. If you don't believe me, try buying a fake item and complaining about it all over the world. People will surely comfort you by saying it's just tuition, and no one will condemn the person who sold the fake.

Even those selling fakes might not be able to tell the difference between real and fake items. The antique business is all about having a keen eye, which is also where the fun of shopping on Taobao lies.

...

"Xiao Zhuang, where are those two farmer brothers you mentioned? Let's go, we need to get to Henan right now. We can't let this tomb be damaged again..."

After examining all the items brought by the Zhang brothers, Professor Meng's solemn face showed a hint of excitement. Although the tomb had been opened, there were still many things inside worth studying.

From the perspective of cultural relic preservation, antiques are better preserved when placed in sealed ancient tombs than when excavated, because once the tomb is opened, the air circulation will cause these burial objects that are thousands of years old to suffer devastating damage.

At least for now, there is no good way to excavate ancient tombs without damaging the burial objects.

Therefore, from an archaeological perspective, it is not advisable to open tombs extensively. In many cases, archaeological excavations are only carried out as a last resort, usually as a remedial excavation after the tomb has already been looted by grave robbers.

Just like the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor, although its exact location has been explored, the country has not yet made up its mind to excavate it. Firstly, due to technical factors, there is still no way to properly deal with the mercury that fills the surface of the mausoleum. Secondly, there is a fear of damaging the burial objects inside the mausoleum.

Opening the sealed imperial tomb will inevitably result in weathering, and those precious cultural relics that have been preserved for more than two thousand years will likely turn to ashes. This is the main reason why relevant departments have been unable to make a decision despite repeated investigations.

"Teacher, only these two brothers know about the tomb, so it's fine for now..."

Zhuang Rui hadn't expected Professor Meng to be so impatient, wanting to head to Henan so soon. He wasn't prepared at all. Zhuang Rui was a little reluctant to leave his children who had just learned to call him "Dad."

Professor Meng shook his head and said, "Sigh, the tomb passage has already been opened. The burial objects inside won't be properly preserved and will decay quickly. Let's hurry over there..."

"Okay, teacher, I'll go see if the police have finished questioning us."

Zhuang Rui had no choice but to nod in agreement. Anyway, he was going to do an internship at an archaeological excavation site this year, so he might as well use this tomb as practice.

Although the two brothers had almost emptied the burial goods, they hadn't touched the stone coffin, and the most valuable item was likely inside.

"Officer Miao... Officer Miao, how's the inquiry going on your end?"

Zhuang Rui went to the backyard and found that the statements of the Zhang brothers, Daniu and Zhang Erniu, had been taken. Judging from Miao Feifei's furrowed brows, she must have been quite angry with Zhang Erniu.

Miao Feifei glanced at Zhuang Rui and said, "Zhuang Rui, come with me..."

Zhuang Rui didn't know why Miao Feifei had called him, so he followed behind her, saying, "Officer Miao, what's wrong? If there's nothing else, I'd like to take them both to Henan. That ancient tomb needs to be excavated..."

Although he knew it was a cliff tomb built on a cliff, Zhuang Rui didn't know its exact location. Mangshan was so big, where would he find it if it weren't for Brother Zhang Daniu?

"Hey, what are you doing?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Miao Feifei suddenly stopped in her tracks, almost causing Zhuang Rui, who was following behind, to bump into her.

Miao Feifei looked at Zhuang Rui and lowered her voice, saying, "Zhuang Rui, those two people are clearly tomb raiders, yet you claim they're donating antiques. What exactly do you mean by that?"

While they were taking statements, Zhang Daniu was alright and followed Zhuang Rui's words. However, Zhang Erniu kept spouting nonsense, his every word revolving around making money by digging graves. Zhang Daniu kicked him repeatedly, but he ignored him, and the two brothers almost came to blows.

Even if Miao Feifei had handled many major cases, she could see through the trickery. Therefore, Officer Miao was extremely angry. This was clearly a major tomb raiding case, so how did it turn into a farmer donating antiques?

"Hehe, Officer Miao, as the saying goes, a prodigal son who returns is more precious than gold. These two brothers aren't bad people, they didn't have any criminal intent, and the damage they caused to the tomb wasn't too great. So please, just let them off the hook..."

Zhuang Rui hadn't expected to be able to hide it from Miao Feifei. The reason he called her directly was because it's easier to get things done when you know someone. If it were another policeman, they might have dragged the Da Niu brothers to the station because of this major tomb raiding case.

"Zhuang Rui, so you're using the law to curry favor?" Officer Miao glared at Zhuang Rui with displeasure.

Chapter 885 Archaeological Team

"Officer Miao, how could I dare? Our policy is to punish past mistakes to prevent future ones and to cure the disease to save the patient, right? These two brothers are not bad people by nature. There's no need to make them spend the rest of their lives in prison because of this mistake, is there?"

If it turns out this is indeed an imperial tomb, then the Zhang brothers' crimes are truly serious; even if they don't get life imprisonment, they'll certainly face at least ten years.

"Besides, the other person has already repented, and the items have been donated. Even if you want to convict them, it's too late..."

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to continue speaking, he saw Miao Feifei glare at him and immediately shut his mouth.

"Isn't this all because you instigated it?"

Although the two brothers were a bit entangled, they were both quite honest people. After hearing Zhuang Rui's explanation, Miao Feifei lost interest in pursuing the matter and immediately said, "This is a one-time thing, don't let it happen again. The damage these local farmers cause to ancient tombs is far worse than that of tomb raiders..."

Many of the cases Miao Feifei has handled in recent years involve the smuggling and theft of antiques, and the root cause of many of these cases lies with local farmers. These people are uneducated, unreasonable, and prone to local protectionism, making them the most difficult to deal with.

Moreover, almost all tomb raiding by farmers involves violent excavation. In Hebei, there was an incident where a family of three used explosives from a quarry to blast open an ancient tomb in broad daylight, with a crowd of onlookers around. This shows how ignorant these people were.

"Thank you, thank you Officer Miao, I thank you on behalf of those two brothers..." Zhuang Rui quickly clasped his hands and bowed when he heard that Miao Feifei had relented.

Zhuang Rui made quite a few friends during his last trip to Henan Province, and they still keep in touch. So he has a good impression of Henan Province. Although there are some bad apples, as the birthplace of Central Plains civilization, the people are still very simple and honest.

Just like the small village where the Yu brothers hid their stolen goods, as long as you treat those villagers even a little bit well, they will give you their whole heart. That's why Zhuang Rui didn't want to see the Da Niu brothers' lives ruined at such a young age.

Miao Feifei waved her hand and said, "Alright, the cultural relics department will handle the rest. I won't worry about it anymore. By the way, that Zhang Daniu said he wanted a reward? It's good enough that we didn't arrest him..."

"Nonsense, he's talking nonsense, Officer Miao, please don't take it seriously..."

Zhuang Rui was sweating profusely. These two brothers were no pushovers. He was a damn fool for helping them get away with it. They were clearly tomb raiders, but instead of helping them get away with it, he ended up spending money on them.

After thanking Miao Feifei and the other police officers profusely, Zhuang Rui returned to the shop. Er Niu had finished eating, and Da Niu was wolfing down the remaining food. When he saw Zhuang Rui come in, he quickly stood up, with a piece of meat still stuffed in his mouth.

"Da Niu, you can't do that illegal grave robbing thing again. If you find any ancient tombs, report them to the government. Otherwise, if the police arrest you next time, I won't be able to help you..."

Zhuang Rui patted Da Niu on the shoulder, gesturing for him to sit down and continue eating.

"Big brother, I understand. I definitely won't do it again. Thank you, big brother..."

Da Niu had just been lectured by the police and knew that although his behavior was nothing serious in the village, it was indeed illegal. The charges that the policewoman mentioned could all be applied to the two brothers.

"Don't thank me, you brothers are all capable, you can make a good living doing anything..."

Zhuang Rui suddenly remembered something and continued, "Oh right, after you've eaten, I'll find you a place to stay. We're heading to Henan Province early tomorrow morning. We'll need some laborers to excavate the ancient tomb. You two brothers can both work there; you'll get over a hundred yuan a day..."

Zhuang Rui checked the time; it was already three or four in the afternoon. Rushing to Henan Province was too hasty. He thought he would discuss it with Professor Meng later and try to leave early tomorrow morning.

"More than a hundred a day? That's great, brother! From now on, my brother and I will work for you, okay? After two years, my brother and I can even get married..."

Erniu, standing nearby, gleamed with excitement upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words. Back when he worked on construction sites, he only earned forty or fifty yuan a day, and even that was often skimmed on by the foreman.

As for Zhuang Rui's statement about 100 yuan a day, wouldn't that be more than 3,000 yuan a month, and more than 30,000 yuan a year? That's enough to get married. Erniu, who lives a very simple life, has already started to sketch out his wonderful life.

"I...I, Monkey, take them to the guesthouse next to Panjiayuan to stay..."

Zhuang Rui simply couldn't communicate with Er Niu. Archaeological excavations weren't something that happened every day. Where was he going to find so many ancient tombs to ask him to dig every day? He was even thinking about his wife. Zhuang Rui was speechless.

After seeing Da Niu and his brother off, Zhuang Rui returned to the inner room. The cultural relics department had already inventoried the burial objects, but Professor Meng signed a document

instructing them to send all of these items to the Archaeological Institute of Peking University for further study after their trip to Henan Province.

After the cultural relics department personnel left, Zhuang Rui walked up to Professor Meng and said, "Professor, it's very late today. Let's go early tomorrow morning, and we can get to the vicinity of Luoyang by the afternoon..."

"Okay, we'll drive there tomorrow. We also need to bring some tools..."

Professor Meng nodded, thought for a moment, and then said, "Xiao Ren, you should come too. This time there might be a significant discovery. Also, contact the relevant departments and ask the local garrison to help us guard the site..."

Professor Meng, an archaeologist, knows more about tomb raiding in Henan Province than Zhuang Rui does. Near Mangshan, many people who work the land by day might sneak into some grave at night.

(The provinces of Shaanxi, Henan, and Gansu have always been places with many tomb raiders. This is due to geographical reasons. Some things are not visible to those outside the circle, and even if they are, they don't understand them. I went to the vicinity of Mangshan a few years ago, and the mountain was full of soil brought out by Luoyang shovels. Just take it as a story and there is no need to argue. Someone added me on QQ today to talk about this, so I'll explain it here.)

So if no one guards it, once the news of the tomb's opening spreads, even the murals in the passageway could be completely chiseled away overnight.

Professor Meng frequently goes out to conduct on-site excavations and is very familiar with relevant departments. As long as he makes a request, the local garrison will generally cooperate.

The next morning around 7 a.m., Zhuang Rui and Hao Long picked up the Zhang brothers in their Hummer and drove them directly to Peking University. The Hummer was a car they had just bought recently. Although it was a four-wheeled vehicle, it had a large interior space. After the doors were modified, even a King Kong could be stuffed inside.

Of course, Zhuang Rui couldn't bring Jin Gang along on this trip. If that guy went out for a stroll, he would definitely become the most valuable news story of the day.

Peng Fei didn't come with Zhuang Rui this time, but Hao Long insisted on coming along. He had been cooped up for the past two years as a gatekeeper, and with Peng Fei's child still young, Hao Long naturally became Zhuang Rui's number one bodyguard.

Professor Meng and others also prepared a van. In addition to Professor Meng and Dr. Ren, there were also staff members from three other research institutes going together. Including Zhuang Rui and Hao Long, the archaeological team consisted of seven people in total.

After seeing Zhuang Rui's car, Professor Meng put some jacks and other tools on it, as well as some ropes and other things. According to Da Niu, the entrance to the cliff tomb was on a cliff.

...

The distance from \*\*\* to Los Angeles is 800 kilometers. Although it was all highway, it still took more than nine hours to drive there, including lunch time, and we didn't arrive in Los Angeles until evening.

Luoyang is located in western Henan Province, on the south bank of the Yellow River. It was built by the Duke of Zhou in the 12th century BC. It is one of the eight ancient capitals and one of the first batch of historical and cultural cities announced by the State Council. It is the only city in Chinese history to be named "Divine Capital".

The Heluo region, centered on Luoyang City, is an important cradle of Chinese civilization, boasting numerous scenic spots and historical sites, such as the Longmen Grottoes, White Horse Temple, and the Eight Scenic Spots of Luoyang, all of which are renowned both at home and abroad and attract a large number of tourists every year.

Although Zhuang Rui had been to Henan Province before, the last time he visited was Zhengzhou. This was his first time in Luoyang, and he was filled with curiosity about this city, which can be described as the hometown of ancient emperors.

"Teacher, should we find a hotel to stay in first, and then go to the cliff tomb tomorrow?"

Zhuang Rui parked his car on the side of the road and met with Professor Meng. On-site archaeological excavation was a new field for Zhuang Rui, and he was a complete novice in this field.

"Stay at a hotel?"

Before Professor Meng could answer, the other people in the car all had strange expressions on their faces, which puzzled Zhuang Rui. They couldn't possibly dig in the dark with just a flashlight, could they?

"Xiao Zhuang, in archaeology, proximity and convenience are key. We usually stay with local people. If we stay in a hotel, we'll waste a lot of time traveling every day..."

Professor Meng knew that Zhuang Rui was well-off and this was his first time participating in an archaeological excavation, so he patiently explained it to him.

"Oh, I see. Teacher, then let's stay at Da Niu's house..."

Zhuang Rui felt a little embarrassed after hearing Professor Meng's words. When he first met Professor Meng a few years ago, he, his granddaughter, and two students were living in the home of a villager in the countryside.

Professor Meng nodded and said, "Okay, ask them if it's convenient for you to stay at their house. We'll give you a subsidy of 100 yuan per day. Also, ask if they can find someone to cook for you."

When Zhuang Rui got back to the car and told Da Niu that he would pay them 100 yuan a day, the two brothers were overjoyed. Their family had four tiled houses and a large courtyard, which was enough for all of them to live in.

"100 a day, that's 36,500 yuan a year. Plus, our parents give us 50 yuan a day for cooking. Brother, if they stay for two years, and we don't do anything, that money is enough for them to get married..."

Although Erniu is a bit slow on the uptake, he's very good with numbers, and he's been muttering to himself again, almost driving Zhuang Rui, who's sitting in front of him, to a breakdown.

## Chapter 886 Shocking

Mangshan, also known as Beimangshan, is located north of Luoyang City in Henan Province. It is a spur of the Qinling Mountains, with its main peak, Cuiyun Peak, covered in lush, verdant trees, creating a breathtakingly beautiful landscape.

Beiman Mountain is majestic with deep water and fertile soil. The Yi and Luo rivers flow through Luoyang from west to east, and the area is nestled against the mountains and beside the water, which is in line with the ancient feng shui saying of "pillowing on the mountain and stepping on the river".

Moreover, the soil layer 5-15 meters below the surface of Beiman Mountain has low water permeability, good bonding properties, and is hard and compact. Therefore, Beiman Mountain has been regarded as a feng shui treasure land for burial and tomb placement since ancient times.

Since Liu Zhi, the King of Chengyang, was buried in Beiman Mountain in the eleventh year of Jianwu of the Later Han Dynasty, many kings, marquises, and nobles chose this place as their burial site. Even the King of Baekje on the Korean Peninsula chose Mang Mountain as his burial place after he died far from home.

There's a saying: "Born in Suzhou and Hangzhou, buried in Beiman Mountain." This saying originates from the fact that Beiman Mountain has been a cemetery for Luoyang people since the Eastern Han Dynasty. It contains the tombs of famous figures throughout history, including Qin Dynasty Prime Minister Lü Buwei, Emperor Chen Houzhu of the Southern Dynasties, Emperor Li Houzhu of the Southern Tang Dynasty, the Sima family of the Western Jin Dynasty, Emperor Guangwu of Han Liu Xiu, Tang Dynasty poet Du Fu, and the great calligrapher Yan Zhenqing.

Because Beiman Mountain has been considered a sacred place for burial sites since ancient times, many myths and legends have incorporated it into their stories. The so-called Ghost King of Beiman Mountain in many novels refers to this Beiman Mountain.

Of course, Mangshan was also one of the places that suffered the most disasters. Cao Cao's tomb raiders during the Three Kingdoms period, and later warlords who raised military funds, all set their sights on the rich burial goods in the tombs at the foot of Beimanshan.

So for thousands of years, the entire Beiman Mountain has been visited by tomb robbers countless times, and the remains of countless emperors and generals have been thrown into the wild. I wonder if the ancient feng shui masters thought about the desolation of the emperors' remains today when they were surveying the tombs.

Zhang Daniu's family lived in a small village at the foot of Beiman Mountain. Due to the drought and lack of rain, it was difficult to support the family by farming alone. Therefore, most of the young and middle-aged people in the village went out to work, while those who stayed in the village all set their sights on Beiman Mountain.

Even with the most thorough excavations by the ancients, some of the thousands of tombs of emperors and generals still managed to escape some. Although the Beimang Tomb Protection Complex has been established, many workers still work there late at night.

"Xiao Zhuang, stop the car on the hill ahead..."

After crossing that small hill, it would take another seven or eight minutes to reach Zhang Daniu's house. However, Zhuang Rui received a call from Professor Meng, who asked him to stop the car on the hillside.

"Teacher, what's wrong?"

After Zhuang Rui asked Hao Long to stop the bus, he got out and greeted Professor Meng, who was coming out of the minibus.

"Shocking! Absolutely shocking!"

Professor Meng's expression was somewhat unpleasant. He waved his hand and walked straight towards a slope, staring at a fault-lined soil surface riddled with holes the thickness of fingers, remaining silent for a long time.

Professor Meng pointed to a hole in the fault line that appeared to be only thirty or forty centimeters in diameter and said to Zhuang Rui, "There used to be a tomb here, but it has long been looted. This is the tomb robber's hole, and it must have been there at least 100 years ago..."

Professor Meng paused for a moment, then beckoned to Zhuang Rui, telling him to climb up a slightly sloping mound. In the afterglow of the setting sun, he looked at the empty farmland in the distance, a trace of sorrow appearing on his face.

"In a few decades, there may be no more ancient tombs left in Mangshan..."

Professor Meng suddenly squatted down, picked up a round clod of earth about ten centimeters long and six or seven centimeters in diameter, and said, "Xiao Zhuang, take a look at this."

"this?"

Zhuang Rui didn't know what Professor Meng meant by showing him this. He held the clod of soil for a while and was about to say he didn't know when he suddenly remembered the shape of the Luoyang shovel. He remembered that the soil he used to bring up with the Luoyang shovel was this shape.

"Teacher, was this left behind by tomb raiders exploring the tomb?"

Zhuang Rui tentatively asked a question. The clod of earth in his hand was incredibly hard, having been there for who knows how long; it probably wouldn't crumble even if dropped.

Professor Meng nodded, pointed around, and said, "Yes, look around again, see how much of this is on the ground..."

Following his teacher's instructions, Zhuang Rui looked down at the ground. What he saw made him instantly understand the meaning of Professor Meng's earlier words, "shocking and appalling."

It turns out that on this hillside, there are many such soil piles on the ground every five or six meters or so, and their round or columnar shapes are easy to identify.

This means that the hillside he was on, which resembled a mound of earth, had been almost completely screened by fences. Qin Dynasty tombs often had palaces built on top of the burial chambers and earthen mounds erected on top of them, so this hillside was also highly sought after by tomb raiders.

Hearing about it is one thing, but seeing it in person was an indescribable shock. Zhuang Rui muttered to himself, "This...is nobody going to do anything about this?"

"Sigh, the local government has put in a lot of effort to clean up the mess, but they simply can't manage it all. You can't see a soul during the day; they only come out at night. The police are human too; they can't guard these mountains 24 hours a day, can they?"

Professor Meng is extremely familiar with the situation here, and his comments are relatively objective. As the saying goes, "You can only be a thief for a thousand days, but you can't guard against thieves for a thousand days."

Even tigers have their moments of rest, let alone these locals who have all the advantages of timing, location, and popular support. The Beiman Mountains stretch for hundreds of miles from east to west; even if you threw three or five hundred policemen in, it probably wouldn't make much of a difference.

Wealth is a powerful motivator. The only way to eradicate tomb raiding is for antiques to become worthless, which would naturally deter people from robbing ancient tombs.

Of course, given the current peaceful and prosperous society, this possibility is unlikely.

Professor Meng pointed to the mountains bathed in the setting sun and said to Zhuang Rui, "In that direction, there are the tombs of more than a dozen emperors from the Eastern Han, Cao Wei, Western Jin, and Northern Wei dynasties, as well as the accompanying tombs of royal family members and ministers, totaling more than a thousand. Unfortunately, from ancient times to the present, only a handful have been completely preserved..."

"Teacher, with the popularization of legal education, I believe people will become more aware of it in the future..."

Zhuang Rui offered Professor Meng a word of comfort, though he himself didn't believe it. The more educated and knowledgeable about the law, the more secretive their actions become. Just like Boss Yu's tomb raiding gang, it took nearly ten years and more to track them down across more than a dozen provinces before they were brought to justice.

"Let's go, let's do our best to protect as much as we can..." Professor Meng said somewhat dejectedly, turning back and walking down the hillside.

For this expert who has dedicated his life to protecting and researching Chinese scientific expeditions and ancient tombs, reality is undoubtedly cruel, much like a ceramics expert watching his beloved antique porcelain being broken piece by piece.

...

Strictly speaking, the place where Zhang Daniu lives is not even a village. His family leased an orchard on a hilltop and built a house at the foot of the hill. There are no other residents around.

Fortunately, although the mountain road was difficult to travel, it was wide enough. After Zhuang Rui's car chassis bumped against the protruding rocks countless times, it came to a group of houses built of bluestone and bricks.

"Dad, we're back. We've sold everything..."

The car had just come to a stop in front of Zhang Daniu's house when Zhang Erniu jumped out and shouted something that almost made Zhuang Rui bite his tongue. What kind of person is this? Does he still think those antiques were sold?

"You child, how many times have I told you that those dead things are unlucky, but you just won't listen..."

As the voices were spoken, an old man in his early fifties came out of the yard and was stunned to see two cars parked in front of his house.

"Dad, we didn't sell those things; we donated them to the government. They're government officials who came to investigate the ancient tomb..."

Fortunately, there was one sensible person among them. After kicking his younger brother, Zhang Daniu explained the situation to his father. Erniu didn't care at all and went straight into a house with smoke coming from the chimney. The silly brother was hungry again.

"Quickly, please come in. We don't have much to offer you, brother. Please don't mind. My wife, please cook extra rice tonight and make soup with the blackfish I caught yesterday..."

Although Old Zhang was a countryman, he was very perceptive and immediately recognized that Professor Meng was the leader. He then led the group into the house.

"Brother, I'm a few years older than you, so please excuse me and call me Old Zhang. Don't be shy, we'll be staying at your place for a while. We'll eat whatever we can find, so don't make us feel like outsiders..."

Professor Meng has a wealth of experience dealing with rural people. With just a few words, he warmed Old Zhang's heart. People should respect each other. From a human perspective, a king and a beggar are completely equal.

However, some people like to stick green onions in pig noses... to show off. They come to the countryside and act all high and mighty, without ever thinking about what their ancestors did for eight generations or more.

After Professor Meng told Old Zhang about his expenses for lodging and food, the old man immediately waved his hands and said, "Brother, you're looking down on us country folk. Rice and flour are free at home, what's wrong with having a few more people to eat? My simple-minded wife eats more by herself than three or four people..."

"Uncle Zhang, please don't be so polite. We need to eat some meat while we're working, so we'll have to trouble you to go to town to get some, right? That's settled then..."

Finally, after being persuaded by Zhuang Rui and others, Old Zhang accepted the two thousand yuan. His hands were trembling at the time. The orchard he contracted was not doing well. It hadn't borne much fruit in the past few years, otherwise his two sons wouldn't have gone out to work.

For dinner, we ate vegetables grown by Old Zhang's family, and then Da Niu's mother killed the rooster they used for crowing.

You know, in the countryside, crowing roosters are highly regarded; it's a courtesy reserved for the most distinguished guests. There was also a rich, creamy blackfish soup, which the staff members who came with Professor Meng praised highly.

Unable to go up the mountain at night, Zhuang Rui and the others worked together to clean up the vacant rooms and the rooms where the grain was stored, which served as their place to stay.

Chapter 887 The Tip of the Iceberg (Part 1)

"You...you've committed a crime!"

After tidying up the house, Professor Meng and Zhuang Rui went to the backyard of Zhang Daniu's house. The yard was filled with burial goods that the Daniu brothers had stolen from the tomb.

Old Zhang had put up a large light bulb in the yard, which was very bright and attracted a lot of mosquitoes to fly around it, while some landed on the objects in the yard.

These burial objects are mostly terracotta figurines. From the glaze that has not yet completely fallen off, it can be vaguely seen that these should all be painted figurines. There are fifty or sixty painted figurines with different shapes and none of them are the same.

Professor Meng was deeply saddened. If proper protective measures had been taken, perhaps the colors on the terracotta figurines could have been preserved, but that was no longer possible.

"Xiao Ren, Xiao Zhuang, look around and see if there are any bamboo slips or jade knobs or similar items..."

In fact, the most valuable thing is not the gold and silver jewelry. For archaeologists, the seal that can prove the identity of the tomb owner is the most important thing.

The Han Dynasty was not too far removed from the Qin Dynasty, so it is highly likely that some ancient books and scriptures that have been lost to time could be unearthed there, which would be priceless.

However, bamboo slips are not easy to preserve. In many large tombs, only traces of decay can be seen on the bamboo slips, and very few actual artifacts are unearthed. Some tombs have yielded bamboo slips of Sun Tzu's Art of War, but unfortunately, they are also incomplete.

"Teacher, no, there are only these terracotta figurines and some silverware, but no owner's seal or stamps..."

After a thorough investigation, Zhuang Rui and Ren Chunqiang were unable to find any clues about the owner's identity. These terracotta figurines were common burial objects in Han Dynasty tombs and did not prove anything.

"Da Niu, how many tomb chambers did you excavate in total?"

Professor Meng pondered for a moment. There were only a few dozen burial objects, far from the imperial tombs he envisioned. Even a minister's tomb would contain dozens of times more burial objects, let alone an emperor's.

"A tomb chamber? What's a tomb chamber?" Da Niu didn't quite understand Professor Meng's words.

"That's where the coffin is placed..." Zhuang Rui prompted from the side.

"Oh, there was only one. Erniu and I broke through two stone doors and found a coffin. Besides the coffin, there were only these things. It took us several trips to get it out..."

Da Niu recalled the scene and suddenly said, "Oh right, when we broke through the first stone door, we also found two dead bodies. Their clothes were tattered, and only bones remained..."

"What a disgrace! You two unruly brats, I'll beat you to death..."

Zhang Daniu's words infuriated Old Zhang, who grabbed a broom and chased his son all over the yard. This momentarily dispelled the chill that Zhang Daniu's claim of discovering skeletal remains had brought to everyone.

"That bastard! How can you just wander into a grave? Erqiangzi from the east end of the village dug up a grave, and he ended up covered in rashes and died before he could even get to the hospital!"

Even after being persuaded to stop by Zhuang Rui and others, Old Zhang was still trembling with anger, pointing at his two sons and cursing them.

"Old Zhang, it's alright. After thousands of years, even if there's something in the tomb, it won't matter anymore. But you must teach your son well, and he must never do such a thing again..."

Professor Meng also offered some advice to Old Zhang, saying that he had excavated many ancient tombs and encountered countless traps and hidden weapons.

Poisoning is quite common in tombs, but the toxicity usually dissipates over time. Traps filled with sharp weapons and boulders placed above passageways pose a greater threat to tomb raiders.

"Da Niu, come here, tell me again how that tomb was discovered, and what was inside..."

Upon seeing these items, Professor Meng had a hunch that the Da Niu brothers hadn't actually discovered the tomb chamber; perhaps they were merely at the entrance to the treasure mountain.

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"Nothing's wrong. When I was gathering herbs, I saw a cave peeking out from behind some vines. Erniu and I climbed in to take a look. After walking three or four meters, we came across a stone door. Erniu used an axe to chisel it open, and there was a passage. Ugh, the smell inside was awful..."

We waited outside for a long time before daring to go in. After walking about ten meters inside, there was another stone door. Two dead people were there, but we didn't know how they died. After opening that stone door, we saw these things..."

Although Da Niu was more sensible than Er Niu, his words were still vague. However, Professor Meng's face showed joy. Based on his understanding of Han tombs, the Da Niu brothers had only discovered the tip of the iceberg of this burial site.

Professor Meng was extremely excited and couldn't wait to go to the tomb site to take a look. After forcing himself to restrain himself, he said to Zhuang Rui and the others, "Alright, sort and organize the items. The local garrison will be here tomorrow, so have them take them to the local cultural relics department first..."

Zhuang Rui wasn't very good at this kind of work. He watched as Ren Chunqiang and the other staff members skillfully labeled and categorized each item, finishing in just over half an hour.

After a long day of travel and working overtime in the evening, everyone went back to their tidied rooms to sleep after finishing their tasks.

...

The crowing of roosters in the distance heralds the start of a day's work in the countryside. A light mist drifts through the mountains, while smoke rises from the village at the foot of the mountain. The sounds of roosters crowing and dogs barking fill the air, creating a picturesque rural scene.

"Zhuang Rui, what's wrong? Didn't you sleep well?"

When Zhuang Rui came out, Dr. Ren was washing up by the hand pump in the yard, while Professor Meng was practicing Tai Chi at the yard gate, and Er Niu, that simpleton, was following along with him with great enthusiasm.

"There are so many mosquitoes! It's only May, where did all these mosquitoes come from?"

Zhuang Rui rubbed his bloodshot eyes. He had spent the entire night battling mosquitoes. He wondered if it was because of the scent of his own flesh that the mosquitoes were all drawn to him, while Hao Long had slept soundly.

Old Zhang, who was chopping wood to prepare breakfast, heard Zhuang Rui's words and quickly came over, saying apologetically, "Young man, mosquitoes come early in the countryside. This afternoon I'll fumigate your room with some mugwort, and there won't be any mosquitoes tonight..."

Hearing their conversation, Professor Meng put down his fist, walked over, and said with a smile, "Hehe, Zhuang Rui, there are a lot of mosquitoes in the mountains, sometimes even in winter. Our country is considered to be in a better situation. I once went to the Amazon rainforest for scientific research and saw with my own eyes the overwhelming swarms of mosquitoes that bit a cow to death..."

"Mosquitoes killed a cow?"

If these words hadn't come from his mentor, Zhuang Rui would have thought it was a fantasy. How could a mosquito bite through a cow's thick hide?

"Zhuang Rui, what the teacher said is true. You have to be careful when you're on a field trip. Getting bitten by mosquitoes can easily cause all sorts of diseases..."

Dr. Ren taught his junior colleague another trick. Despite his high doctoral degree, Dr. Ren had extensive experience in wilderness survival. Ancient tombs are usually located in farmland and forests, where there are many mosquitoes, snakes, and rats. Some wilderness knowledge is essential.

"Alright, buddy, come on over and have some breakfast..."

As the group was chatting, Old Zhang shouted.

For breakfast, we had sweet potato porridge and some pickled radish from Old Zhang's own home. It tasted great, and the whole pot of porridge was eaten clean by the group.

After finishing his meal, Professor Meng made a phone call and waited for another half hour. Three locals, along with five armed police officers, arrived at Old Zhang's house.

After introductions, it was revealed that the locals were all staff members of the local cultural relics department. One of them, surnamed Wu, was the director of the local cultural relics administration bureau, and he was in his forties. The others were young people.

The armed police were led by a second lieutenant platoon leader named Wei Qiang, who was responsible for the on-site protection of the archaeological excavation. Several armed police officers carried tent packs on their backs, and they would stay near the archaeological site for the night.

Once everyone was present, Professor Meng assigned tasks. Feeling uneasy about leaving the courtyard full of antiques unattended, he said, "Xiao Wu, you and Xiao Zhao stay here and notify your county to send someone to take these things back for safekeeping. These two young men can come with us up the mountain. Also, have someone stationed here. If any more artifacts are unearthed, they must be properly preserved immediately..."

When Professor Meng saw Director Wu's pot-bellied appearance, he knew that this man would definitely not be able to accompany him to the cemetery, so he simply put him in charge of logistics.

"Professor Meng, don't worry, I will make sure everything is arranged properly. Xiao Liu, please follow Professor Meng's instructions..."

Upon hearing that there was no need to go up the mountain, Director Wu nodded repeatedly and called over a clever-looking young man to accompany the expedition team into the mountains.

...

"Xiao Zhuang, I didn't realize you were so strong despite your refined appearance..."

After breakfast, the group prepared to go up the mountain. Zhuang Rui carried forty or fifty kilograms of things on his back without seeming to be struggling at all, which surprised Professor Meng and the others.

As they thought, Zhuang Rui must be used to a life of luxury, given his good family background and wealth. They were surprised to find that the other members of the archaeological team, who often worked in the field, were not as strong as Zhuang Rui.

However, this made Professor Meng even more satisfied. Although scientific research work sounds mysterious, it is very tedious and boring. Moreover, it requires one to travel through mountains and valleys in deserted places all day long and must be able to endure hardship.

"Hehe, I'm naturally strong, this weight is nothing to me..."

Zhuang Rui walked in the middle of the group, with the Da Niu brothers leading the way. They were now considered unofficial members of the archaeological team, earning 100 yuan a day, so they worked very hard.

Beiman Mountain is not steep, but its terrain is undulating, like a coiled dragon. Following the paths that were either worn out by mountain people or tomb raiders, the group gradually entered the deep mountains.

#### Chapter 888 The Tip of the Iceberg (Part Two)

Professor Meng was extremely familiar with the distribution of tombs in Beiman Mountain. Whenever they passed a site with a tombstone, he would stop to explain to Zhuang Rui and the others whose tomb it was. After walking three to five kilometers, Zhuang Rui's ears were filled with the names of many famous figures.

Many tombs have now been protected, surrounded by walls and barbed wire, but it's hard to say how effective these things are; at least Zhuang Rui could easily step over them with a push of his hand and a lift of his leg.

Listening to Professor Meng's explanation, walking in this quiet mountain forest is like walking through the long river of history, where one after another, famous figures have settled.

Li Yu, the last emperor of the Southern Tang dynasty who wrote "When will the spring flowers and autumn moon end? How much of the past do we know?", Yan Zhenqing, the famous calligrapher of the Tang dynasty, Du Fu, the poet saint, and Lü Buwei, the powerful prime minister of Qin at the time, all rest in these vast mountains.

"Teacher, isn't the tomb of Liu Xiu, the founding emperor of the Eastern Han Dynasty, located in the mountains?"

The practice of burial at Beiman Mountain originated in the Eastern Han Dynasty, and the initiator was Liu Xiu, the founding emperor of the Eastern Han Dynasty.

When modern people talk about the Han Dynasty, they mostly talk about Liu Bang of the Western Han or Emperor Wu of Han, Liu Che. As for the Eastern Han, they mainly talk about the Three Kingdoms period. Therefore, Zhuang Rui is a little curious about Emperor Liu Xiu.

All founding monarchs were renowned for their military exploits, but Liu Xiu was an extremely low-key and mysterious figure in history. Zhuang Rui wanted to see if his tomb, like him, was unknown to the public.

"Liu Xiu's tomb is in Mangshan, but it's not on the mountain..."

Professor Meng, leaning on his cane, gently nudged Da Niu, who was walking ahead, and asked, "Da Niu, how far is the place you mentioned?"

Da Niu stopped and pointed to a mountain peak ahead, saying, "It's just ahead. Do you see that mountain? The highest one, that's it..."

"Yes, that location is quite good. Although it's a peak, it's sheltered from the wind, allowing it to gather vital energy. It also echoes the Yellow River from afar, making it an ideal place for a burial, with mountains behind and water in front, sheltered from the wind and gathering vital energy..."

Professor Meng gazed at the mountain peak, then carefully observed the surrounding terrain. A look of astonishment crossed his face. Such a propitious burial site must have been for a high-ranking emperor.

It is worth noting that 24 emperors from 6 dynasties are buried in Beiman Mountain, making it the most densely distributed, numerous, and spanning the longest period of time in China.

In a place where there is so much space for a reclining ox among the many tombs, this person's tomb must have a very important background to occupy such a prominent location.

However, ancient imperial tombs are the most secretive things. Even if there are some records in historical materials, they are vague. Therefore, Professor Meng could not determine whose tomb it was.

"By the way, Xiao Zhuang, didn't you ask about Liu Xiu's tomb? You'll see it once you get to that mountain peak..."

Professor Meng was getting closer to his destination and, feeling excited, quickened his pace towards the hilltop.

Zhuang Rui was somewhat confused by Professor Meng's statement. It seemed that Liu Xiu's tomb had been discovered and protected long ago, so why did the professor say that Liu Xiu's tomb was on the mountain?

With questions in mind, Zhuang Rui carried dozens of kilograms of tools and climbed up the mountain. The original ecology here was well preserved, with many old trees over a hundred years old on the mountain and many flowers and plants whose names he did not know growing on the ground.

"Senior brother, this mountain seems to have been the subject of much attention before, so why hasn't that tomb been discovered?"

On the ground between some trees on the mountain, clods of soil brought out by Luoyang shovels could be seen from time to time, indicating that this place was also the focus of tomb raiders. However, Zhuang Rui did not know why those people had failed to find the ancient tomb inside the mountain.

"Zhuang Rui, Han Dynasty tombs are divided into brick tombs and cliff tombs. Brick tombs are mostly the mausoleums of ordinary people and court officials, and can be found with a Luoyang shovel..."

However, imperial tombs are mostly built inside mountains. For example, the Lion Mountain Han Tomb in Pengcheng was built by hollowing out the entire mountainside. Therefore, when you probe down with a Luoyang shovel, you usually only hit the rock face, which is not very suitable for exploring large Han Dynasty tombs..."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Dr. Ren explained that even the most skillful Luoyang shovels couldn't penetrate the mountain walls to discover these imperial tombs deep within the mountain.

After hearing Ren Chunqiang's words, Professor Meng turned around and said, "Yes, Professor Wang, who excavated the Shizishan Han Tomb, is also an old friend of mine. He is a very respectable archaeologist..."

The Lion Mountain Han Tomb mentioned by Dr. Ren is located in Zhuang Rui's hometown. It is the tomb of Liu Wu, the third King of Chu who was enfeoffed in Pengcheng in the early Western Han Dynasty. The entire tomb was carved into the stone and buried through the mountain. The tomb chamber is embedded more than 100 meters deep in the mountain.

When discussing the discovery of the Lion Rock Royal Tombs, one cannot ignore Professor Wang, who, along with Professor Meng, was an alumnus of Peking University and initially worked in Los Angeles.

Later, Professor Wang worked in the city and, over a period of more than 20 years, presided over the excavation of seven Han Dynasty Chu king tombs. His name was included in the Cambridge, England's "Who's Who of the World's Intellectuals".

The Shizishan Han Tomb, which was excavated at the time, is a typical cliff tomb. The tomb has a total of 12 rooms, and the burial chamber alone covers an area of more than 850 square meters, almost hollowing out the entire Shizishan Mountain.

However, the imperial tomb had already been visited by tomb robbers, and many precious cultural relics had been lost. Nevertheless, more than 2,000 precious international-level cultural relics were still unearthed from it.

As the mountain rose higher, the group's pace slowed down. Although Professor Meng was in good health, he was almost sixty years old and needed to sit down and rest every now and then.

Sunlight filters through the tall tree canopy, dappling the mountain path. Occasionally, squirrels peek out from between the trees, their fluttering sounds prompting people to look up. A woodpecker takes flight, its yellow and white striped wings disappearing into the forest in an instant.

A gentle breeze carried the delicate fragrance of forsythia to Zhuang Rui's nose, while the chirping of birds near and far accentuated the rare tranquility.

Perhaps it was due to their state of mind, but as Zhuang Rui and the others walked through the space created by ancient trees, lush grass, and secluded flowers, everyone felt a strong sense of ancient charm.

Therefore, it is true that these emperors were buried in Mangshan. They enjoyed wealth and honor in life, and after death, they also wanted to be buried in a place with mountains and rivers, occupying auspicious feng shui locations.

Da Niu, who was walking in front, would occasionally introduce some herbs to everyone. He and Er Niu had accidentally discovered a very hidden cave entrance on the other side of the mountain wall while they were picking herbs on the mountain, which led them to the discovery of this tomb.

"Alright, let's take a break..."

It was more than an hour after they reached the top of the mountain. Apart from Zhuang Rui, even Hao Long was panting heavily, after all, he was carrying more than 30 kilograms of equipment.

"Teacher, where is the tomb of Liu Xiu that you mentioned?"

Zhuang Rui was still thinking about this matter. Professor Meng had just said that you could see it once you reached the top of the mountain, so Zhuang Rui asked about it.

Professor Meng took a sip of water, stood up, walked to the edge of the rock face, pointed into the distance, and said, "Look, that's it, near the Yellow River..."

"That...isn't Mangshan?"

Zhuang Rui looked in the direction Professor Meng was pointing, and saw a lush, tree-lined area in the far distance. However, the terrain there was flat, and it seemed that they had already left the Mangshan area.

"It's Mount Mang, specifically the northern part of the Mangling Mountains. Liu Xiu's achievements actually far surpassed those of Emperor Wu of Han. He quelled the separatist forces in various regions and completed the third great unification in Chinese history..."

Professor Meng spoke highly of Liu Xiu, and after introducing some of Liu Xiu's achievements, he said, "Xiao Zhuang, do you see anything wrong with that place?"

Standing atop this mountain peak, one can have a clear and unobstructed view of the location of Liu Xiu's tomb. After observing for a while, Zhuang Rui said, "That location is backed by Mangshan Mountain and faces the Yellow River, which is a feng shui formation of 'pillowing the river and climbing the mountain.' This is a dangerous place!"

Zhuang Rui didn't know much about feng shui, but after studying it for more than two years, he could say a few things about it.

The feng shui of tombs emphasizes "pillowing on the mountain and stepping on the river," meaning the tomb must be built on high ground to avoid floods. However, Liu Xiu's tomb is the opposite, located in a dangerous place with "pillowing on the river and stepping on the mountain."

Professor Meng laughed upon hearing this and said, "Xiao Zhuang, you're right. This feng shui arrangement is indeed one that ordinary emperors wouldn't choose. If the Yellow River rises, the tomb will definitely be flooded..."

Professor Meng paused for a moment, then continued, "But Liu Xiu was a clever man. Do you know that everyone in the world knows that Liu Xiu's tomb is here, but from ancient times to the present, his tomb has never been robbed even once..."

"Teacher, why is that?"

Zhuang Rui was a little confused. Ancient tomb raiders were far more vicious than those of today. They would never let Liu Xiu's tomb go just because he was a good emperor.

"Hehe, firstly, Liu Xiu was frugal throughout his life. Before his death, he instructed that no gold, silver, or jade artifacts should be buried with him, and only earthenware should be used. These items are not valuable, so tomb robbers have no interest in them."

Secondly, Liu Xiu's tomb is located on the Yellow River beach, with water just a few meters below the surface, making it impossible to rob. Therefore, this tomb, which seems to be in a dangerous location, has been preserved for more than two thousand years..."

After Professor Meng finished speaking, he pondered for a moment, and then said, "However, I suspect that the tomb is a fake imperial tomb. As a founding emperor, even if Liu Xiu himself did not want a grand burial, his descendants probably would not have agreed to it..."

In ancient times, to prevent tomb robbery, many people had decoy tombs after their death, the most famous of which is Cao Cao's tomb.

When Cao Cao was alive, in order to raise military funds, he formed the Tomb Raiders and almost looted all the imperial tombs in the world. After his death, fearing retribution, he built a total of seventy-two false tombs, and the real tomb of Cao Cao has not yet been found.

"That's all for now, this is just my personal guess. Alright, if everyone's rested enough, let's get started preparing..."

Professor Meng waved his hand, stopping himself from speaking. As an academic expert, speculating on things without evidence could cause a huge uproar if it got out.

Chapter 889 The Tip of the Iceberg (Part 3)

"Young comrades, you just need to stay on the mountain and prevent anyone from coming up..."

After resting for a while, Professor Meng began to assign tasks. The armed police officers guarded the mountaintop, while the rest busied themselves selecting suitable rocks and trees to tie ropes to.

This was Zhuang Rui's first time conducting an archaeological excavation in the field, and he was quite excited. After taking off the bundle of ropes he was carrying, he found a huge rock weighing over a thousand pounds that was deeply embedded in the ground and tied it to the rock. He pulled on it with his hand, thinking that it should be able to support his weight.

"Xiao Zhuang, you need to add a pad to the corners of that..."

Professor Meng naturally didn't need to lift a finger. He walked around watching others prepare. When he got to Zhuang Rui, he stopped and took out a few soft leather mats from his bag on the ground.

Seeing Zhuang Rui's puzzled look, Professor Meng laughed and said, "Hehe, this is to prevent the sharp edges of the stone from wearing the rope off. Better safe than sorry, so we added it inside..."

"Thank you, teacher..."

Zhuang Rui then realized what all those leather cushions in the bag were for. It turned out that the teacher had thought of this long ago and had made preparations in advance. Zhuang Rui couldn't help but feel a little embarrassed. He still had a lot to learn.

The weather in May was already quite hot, and there were few trees on the mountaintop. Several armed police officers had already started setting up tents, and judging from Professor Meng's expression, he also had the idea of staying here.

After working for a while, four ropes were lowered from the mountaintop to the cliff face on the other side of the mountain.

"Alright, Da Niu, you go first, confirm the location, Xiao Ren follow behind, then I'll go, Xiao Zhuang, you go last..."

As for Erniu, Professor Meng didn't arrange for him to go down into the tomb at all. Erniu was too reckless, and if something went wrong while exploring the tomb, Professor Meng wouldn't be able to explain it to his fellow villagers.

According to Professor Meng, the tomb discovered by the Da Niu brothers is only the tip of the iceberg; whether there are hidden mechanisms behind it is uncertain. It's important to remember that the wisdom of our ancestors should not be underestimated.

This mountain is also very strange. One side is a gentle slope covered with tall trees, while the other side is a cliff with a slope of nearly 90 degrees, which is 70 or 80 meters high. If you fall down, you will definitely be smashed to pieces.

Hao Long was also left on the mountaintop. Only the few people Professor Meng brought, plus the local staff member, made up a group of eight people to go down. Archaeological excavation is different from other work; it requires knowledgeable people to do it personally.

This is a special case; otherwise, even experts wouldn't be allowed to enter the archaeological site. For example, during open-pit excavations, the villagers who are invited at the end are kept separate to prevent the artifacts from being stolen.

It's important to know that a large tomb often yields tens of thousands of artifacts. If there are many people and things are chaotic, it would be very difficult to detect if someone quietly takes away a few small items.

"Teacher, I'm feeling well, so I'd like to go down first..."

Zhuang Rui knew that Professor Meng was taking care of him. Those who went down first should find a safe place to stay, and the last person to go down would be the safest.

"You have no experience, and you arrange it like this..."

Professor Meng waved his hand, interrupting Zhuang Rui, and walked to the edge of the cliff to observe the terrain below.

"Why are you wearing this damn thing? Just grab a rope and get down..."

Da Niu walked over, muttering to himself. He wasn't used to the climbing equipment used by the archaeological team; the protective straps, which looked like briefs, felt very awkward to wear.

Despite his words, Da Niu was still very quick. After securing the rope to the alloy lock around his waist, he grabbed the rope with both hands and slid away, disappearing from the edge of the cliff.

When they descended about forty meters, Da Niu's figure suddenly disappeared. Zhuang Rui looked through his binoculars from above and saw a short, crooked tree growing where Da Niu had vanished.

"Hey, come down, it's right here..."

Da Niu stuck his head out and shouted towards the cliff edge. Dr. Ren had already hooked up to the harness and was plummeting downwards.

Although the cliff looks steep, there are still footholds. With ropes supporting the body and bearing most of the weight, there is basically no danger. Professor Meng descended with great ease.

Dr. Ren had the heaviest task, as he had to carry the small diesel exhaust fan that Zhuang Rui had carried up the mountain down. This thing weighed more than 40 kilograms, and it took the help of a staff member to get the exhaust fan down.

...

When Zhuang Rui stepped onto the tree growing in the crevice of the rock wall, a hole about one meter square appeared before him. Originally, there were many vines growing at the entrance, but they had all been cleared away by the people who had come down first.

Zhuang Rui really admired the Da Niu brothers. Judging from the growth of the vines, they must have blocked the entrance at first. Yet, the two brothers were able to discover this ancient tomb. They were truly extraordinary people.

With Dr. Ren's help, Zhuang Rui climbed into the cave. The entrance was not large, but the inside was very spacious. Zhuang Rui looked up and saw that the cave was about 2.2 to 2.3 meters high.

The rock wall next to the cave shows no signs of being carved by knives or axes, so it must be a natural cave. It is estimated that more than a thousand years ago, those ancient people who were specializing in surveying feng shui and finding burial sites for the royal family must have discovered this place by lowering ropes down from the mountaintop.

Many emperors began preparing their mausoleums as soon as they ascended the throne. The construction of a mausoleum often took thirty or forty years. For example, the mausoleum of Qin Shi Huang almost exhausted the resources of the entire country. However, this also sowed the seeds of the Qin Dynasty's short-lived existence after only two generations.

"Is everyone here? Okay, Da Niu, take us to that tomb chamber..."

After Zhuang Rui came down, Professor Meng counted the people and asked Da Niu, who was walking in front, to turn on the lights. There was light at the entrance of the cave, but after going in for more than ten meters and turning a corner, it became pitch black.

Since the excavation was carried out inside the mountain, each member of the archaeological team was equipped with a battery-powered lamp. Once the lights were turned on, the cave immediately became bright.

Walking through the cave, Professor Meng suddenly spoke up: "This isn't the entrance to the tomb; rather, the tomb just happened to be built here..."

Although the cave is very high, it is relatively narrow, allowing only two people to walk side by side at the same time. This would be very difficult to excavate for a tomb with such a large-scale project. Furthermore, the cave is surrounded by rock on both sides, so it could not have been filled in later.

When they reached the first stone gate, everyone stopped. Professor Meng told Da Niu to step back and went forward to inspect it himself.

"You people, what a terrible thing you've done! Such an exquisite stone gate, and yet... sigh..."

Professor Meng stroked the stone gate, which was about two meters high and three meters wide, with both hands, his face full of regret.

The stone gate is carved with two animal heads, neither lions nor tigers, with bulging eyes and a stone ring hanging from their mouths, staring at the group of people in front of the gate. They are so lifelike that no one can tell what kind of animals they are.

Zhuang Rui and the others following behind could see that a hole had been smashed open in the upper part of the stone gate, about one meter square. Without a doubt, this was the work of the Da Niu brothers.

"Ahem, back then, this door was buried in the ground. When we dug it up, we found it was just a rock, so we had to break it open..." Da Niu explained somewhat embarrassedly.

It turns out that when they discovered the door, the animal head relief below was not yet visible. Erniu noticed that the smooth stone was somewhat different from the cave, so he tapped it with a hammer, but unexpectedly it produced a hollow echo.

Humans are naturally curious, and being in Mangshan, it would be absurd to say they didn't know what an ancient tomb was. So, with the intention of making a fortune by tomb raiding, the two brothers returned home, found an axe and a heavy hammer, and came back here to smash open the stone door.

However, the hammer blow from the Da Niu brothers may very well unlock an age-old mystery, bringing a history sealed for thousands of years back into the public eye.

Zhuang Rui took the camera and filmed the stone gate from all angles. It was his first time participating in on-site archaeology. Professor Meng had assigned him the task of filming and recording the entire archaeological excavation process.

Professor Meng observed the door, muttering to himself, "Something's not right. This isn't the entrance to the tomb. Logically, there shouldn't be a stone door here."

After holding a wooden clip and gesturing it on the stone door for a while, Professor Meng's face showed a relieved expression.

"This should be called a windbreak wall, not a stone gate. You see, the gaps in the middle are actually fake. It's a single piece of stone..." Professor Meng concluded after observing carefully for a while.

At the end of the passageway of a large tomb, there is usually a horizontal stone weighing thousands of kilograms blocking the way. However, this tomb uses a stone slab that is not very wide or thick. Perhaps it was thought that it would be close to the rock wall and not be discovered by others.

"Xiao Li, go to the cave entrance and turn on the blower, then stay there and we'll communicate via walkie-talkie..."

After entering the stone gate, the air inside became stale. Although it wasn't difficult to breathe, the rotten smell was unbearable. Only after the blower brought in fresh air did everyone feel that they could breathe easily again.

"This...this is a brick and stone passageway?"

After entering the tomb passage through the damaged stone door, Professor Meng was visibly taken aback.

Behind the stone gate is a passageway paved with wide bluestones, and next to the bluestones are two drainage channels more than ten centimeters wide.

People more than two thousand years ago were no less intelligent than modern people; they had already considered the damage that flooding could cause to tombs.

The passageway is lined with stone slabs carved with reliefs, mostly depicting human figures. Although the lines are simple, they are distinct and orderly. Looking at the people wearing tall hats and long robes on the rock walls, Zhuang Rui felt as if he had returned to ancient times.

"The purpose of this passageway is for drainage..."

Professor Meng walked and observed, and soon arrived at the second stone gate. This stone gate was much thicker than the previous one. Zhuang Rui took a quick look under the light and found that it was at least thirty or forty centimeters thick.

Chapter 890 The Tomb

In the quiet, dimly lit burial passage, near the stone door, lay two skeletons, their bodies glowing faintly under the lamplight. Their clothes were long since decayed, and it was impossible to tell what era they belonged to.

Zhang Daniu, who was walking at the front, repeatedly bowed to the skeleton, muttering, "Just passing by, just passing by, please don't be offended, sir..."

Zhang Daniu's actions made the people behind him laugh. With such audacity, he actually dared to rob a tomb? No wonder he didn't even dare to open the coffin after entering the tomb, and none of the items he took out were gold or silver.

"Come on, turn on two more lights, it's a bit dim..."

Professor Meng squatted down next to the two corpses and examined them carefully. Since he would be working in the burial site for an unknown period of time, he had to use the lights sparingly.

After Zhuang Rui and Dr. Ren turned on the high-powered lights, the entire tomb passage became brightly lit, and the light shone through the damaged stone door into the tomb chamber.

Professor Meng poked at the clothes on the two skeletons, which had turned to fibrous material, with the wooden stick in his hand. After observing them carefully for a while, he said, "These are two tomb raiders. Judging from their appearance, they should be from the mid-Qing Dynasty. They died from traps and hidden weapons..."

"organ?"

The man in front, Da Niu, was startled and quickly said, "Grandpa Meng... don't scare me! Last time we came, we didn't encounter any traps..."

There are many folk tales that ancient tombs are full of traps and mechanisms, such as arrows, stones, poisonous water, and other traps, making them impossible to guard against. Some superstitious people believe that there are ghost soldiers guarding the tombs, who will steal people's souls.

Upon hearing that there was a mechanism, Da Niu's legs immediately trembled, and he stood there motionless, completely forgetting that he had been here before.

"Hmph, you think you'd still be alive to talk here after running into a trap?"

Professor Meng snorted coldly, took the lamp from Da Niu's hand, moved it a little closer to the skeletons, and said, "Take a look at what's inside these skeletons..."

"What's that dark thing? A lump of iron?"

When Da Niu came last time, he didn't dare to look at the two dead men for long. Now he discovered that there were four or five rusty triangular iron blocks stuck in the chest and ribs of the dead men.

"Teacher, is this an arrowhead?"

Zhuang Rui approached. Having frequented the archaeological research institute of Peking University every day, Zhuang Rui was already used to seeing dead people.

There were also many such arrowheads on the ground next to the two skeletons. Zhuang Rui roughly counted them and found that there were as many as forty or fifty of them.

Looking up at the gate, Zhuang Rui felt a chill run down his spine. If another attack like that were to happen, all of his men would probably perish here.

Professor Meng nodded and said, "It's an arrow. Xiao Zhuang, what else did you notice?"

"The arrow shafts should be rotten by now, and these iron arrowheads are almost completely rusted. Hmm?"

Zhuang Rui examined the skeletons carefully, then suddenly became suspicious and pointed at the two skeletons, saying, "Teacher, were the arrows poisoned?"

Zhuang Rui said this because the remains of a normally deceased person are usually white, and even after a long time, they will turn slightly yellow. However, the bones of these two dead people were somewhat black, which seemed to be a sign of poisoning.

"That's right, the arrow was poisoned. I didn't expect that after more than a thousand years, these toxins would still be effective. Xiao Ren, when you leave, take a rib and have it tested to see what kind of poison it is."

Professor Meng's expression was somewhat solemn. This was not a major archaeological excavation that would reveal the secrets of the site. No one knew what kind of danger might lurk inside this ancient tomb.

"Be careful, everyone, don't touch or tamper with anything..."

If arrow traps were installed even in the drainage tunnel, who knows how many deadly traps might be lurking in the main burial chamber? Professor Meng brought an archaeological team and didn't want anyone to lose their life due to negligence.

The Da Niu brothers were actually quite lucky. Centuries ago, two tomb raiders saved their lives; otherwise, they might have died silently here, and who knows how many years it would have taken for their bodies to be discovered.

Professor Meng saw one of his staff members poking at the top of the stone gate with a wooden stick and quickly said, "Xiao Liu, don't touch that. Maybe the mechanism isn't completely rotten and will still shoot arrows..."

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui glanced at the spot and discovered a square iron box, about a meter in size, buried in the soil above the stone gate. It was completely rusted.

To Zhuang Rui's amazement, there were actually four or five arrows inside, and they were well preserved, with no decay even in the fletching.

Of course, Zhuang Rui wouldn't reveal what he had seen, but after hearing Professor Meng's words, he became cautious and decided to use his spiritual energy to thoroughly sense the entire tomb later.

"Teacher, where did these two tomb raiders come from?"

Zhuang Rui suddenly remembered something. According to the Da Niu brothers, the stone door was intact before they came in. So how did these two tomb raiders from hundreds of years ago get into this tomb?

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Professor Meng pointed to a hole about the size of a fist above his head and said, "Look, that's the tomb robber's hole. The soil on the ground here is what they dug down..."

"Is this a robber's hole?"

Following Professor Meng's finger, Zhuang Rui noticed a very small hole on the top of his head, no bigger than a fist, about the size of a rice bowl at home.

Zhuang Rui's face showed an incredulous expression. He simply couldn't believe his eyes. Even if he had practiced bone-shrinking techniques, he couldn't have climbed in here.

"Hehe, Zhuang Rui, it's been hundreds of years. As long as the earth's crust changes even slightly, the structure of these soil distributions will naturally change. It's already good that there's still a hole left..."

When Dr. Ren saw Zhuang Rui's surprised look, he explained to him that ordinary tomb-raiding tunnels, let alone after hundreds of years, would become very small even after thirty or fifty years, even if the entrance was originally big enough for people to enter and exit.

"It seems the entrance to the tomb passage is still in these mountains. Xiao Ren, tomorrow you take two people and dig some holes in the mountain to see if you can find it. Let's go check out the tomb chamber first..."

The discovery of the tomb robber's tunnel indicates that the mountain is not entirely encased in rock. If tomb robbers could enter in ancient times, modern people certainly could too. Therefore, Professor Meng looked somewhat anxious. If the main burial chamber were robbed, it would be a major loss for the national scientific research community.

The group squeezed through the stone gate and entered the tomb chamber where the Zhang brothers had once been. The floor inside the tomb was covered with thick dust and messy footprints, which were undoubtedly left by the two brothers.

The entire tomb chamber is about twenty square meters in size and about three meters high. The ceiling is also very unique. It is not flat, but is composed of several rhombuses that gradually slope towards the center of the roof from the angle between the wall and the ceiling. It is also carved with fine lines.

The walls are constructed of bluestone with reliefs, each stone adorned with exquisite carvings. These reliefs are far more detailed than those in the passageway, and they are all interconnected, seemingly telling a story.

In the very center of the tomb chamber, there is a stone coffin about 2.5 meters long and 1 meter wide. The surface of the stone coffin is also carved with cloud patterns. Under the stone coffin is a huge blue stone base, which is exactly the same size as the stone coffin.

At the two opposite corners of the tomb chamber, there are two tall, square stone pillars with smooth, flat surfaces on all four sides. These were likely used to reinforce the tomb chamber's load-bearing capacity and increase its resistance to collapse.

"Who...who did this?"

There were some broken ceramic shards left on the ground, and Professor Meng flew into a rage when he saw them.

Although these ceramic tiles are not of high value, they are relics from more than two thousand years ago and are irreplaceable cultural relics. It can be said that once they are broken, they are gone forever.

"This...this was broken by my younger brother..."

Zhang Daniu shrank his neck and answered cautiously. In fact, he was not telling the truth. Erniu had broken these things out of boredom, thinking they were too heavy to carry out.

There was a large earthenware jar, but it was in the way of the door, so Erniu smashed it to pieces.

Professor Meng could no longer suppress his anger and pointed at Zhang Daniu, saying, "Alright, get out! Get out now!"

Archaeologists hate these half-baked tomb raiders because they have no concept of protecting cultural relics. They only measure the value of cultural relics by whether they are valuable or not, and their harm is far greater than that of professional tomb raiders.

A tomb-raiding gang like Boss Yu would never damage anything they couldn't retrieve. In a sense, they were archaeologists themselves, even more knowledgeable and experienced than some experts.

Some tomb raiders in ancient times were even more particular. Some would only take the three most valuable items from a tomb and would never take anything more. This is why many large tombs were robbed a dozen or even dozens of times.

"Grandpa, I...I'll leave, I'll leave right now..."

After hearing that the two corpses had been shot to death by a trap, Zhang Daniu had been suspicious and absent-minded. Professor Meng's decision to kick him out was exactly what he wanted, so he scrambled out of the stone door.

"Xiao Zhuang, you're in charge of filming. Xiao Ren, check around and see if there's anything of value left behind..."

After scolding the big shot away, Professor Meng took a few deep breaths to calm himself down, because the next task was to open the coffin, which could not afford to be wrong in the slightest.

"Teacher, besides some pottery, there's nothing else..."

After carefully searching the tomb, Dr. Ren gathered all the broken ceramic shards left on the ground into a pile.

Although these items were broken, they could still be pieced together and repaired after being brought out. For archaeologists, repairing damaged burial objects is a basic skill that must be mastered.