

Golden 90

Chapter Ninety: The Grassland Black Market (Part Five)

Liu Chuan guessed correctly. Zhuang Rui did intend to buy it as a gift for Qin Xuanbing. After that kiss the night before last, even the most clueless Zhuang Rui had sensed Qin Xuanbing's feelings. Seeing such a beautiful shawl, he decided to buy it as a present for Qin Xuanbing.

"Twenty thousand..."

Boss Ma quickly called out the price. In his opinion, the kid who refused to sell the dog was deliberately going against him. The others in the tent were obviously not interested in the shawl and were just watching from the sidelines.

"Mr. Ma has offered 20,000. Mr. Liu's friends, are you still interested?"

Although the shawl was just a small item worth tens of thousands of yuan, Lang Jie still valued it highly as the first item in the auction. After all, it was a good start, so he was now shouting enthusiastically, hoping that Zhuang Rui would bid again.

"Brother Zhuang, you shouldn't buy this. Such a price increase will only encourage those who hunt Tibetan antelopes."

Zhou Rui nudged Zhuang Rui with his arm and whispered something in his ear.

At that time, the famous film "Kekexili" had not yet been released, and the Chinese people did not know much about Tibetan antelopes. Zhuang Rui also thought that Tibetan antelopes were just ordinary animals, not much different from cattle and sheep. After hearing Zhou Rui's words, he asked with some curiosity, "Brother Zhou, are there very few Tibetan antelopes? How come that Lang Jie just said that people who hunt Tibetan antelopes have a bad reputation?"

"Nonsense! In 1990, there were about 1 million Tibetan antelopes. By 1995, the number had dropped to 50,000. Now, there are probably not even 70,000 left. Do you know that just this one shawl requires the killing of at least three adult Tibetan antelopes? Some people call this shawl a shroud. How can you feel comfortable wearing this thing?"

Zhou Rui glared at Zhuang Rui with annoyance before explaining the current situation of the Tibetan antelope. Upon hearing the words "shroud," Zhuang Rui shuddered. When he looked at the shawl again, all he could think of were the bloody corpses of Tibetan antelopes, and he lost all interest in the shawl.

After watching Zhuang Rui speak quietly with someone for a while and then not raise the price further, Lang Jie was somewhat disappointed. However, this was just an appetizer; he had spent a lot of effort setting up the black market, so it wasn't for selling this shawl. He immediately announced the sale at 20,000 yuan.

To be fair, the fat man actually got a good deal. A shahtoosh shawl like that would fetch at least tens of thousands of dollars in Europe. The difference between 20,000 RMB and tens of thousands of dollars is huge, which is one of the reasons why black market auctions are so rampant.

Although the fat man won the bid for the shawl, he wasn't very happy. He had been eager to compete with Zhuang Rui, but Zhuang Rui stopped after bidding once, leaving him feeling like he had thrown a punch into thin air.

"Hey Langjie, we didn't come here to see this disgusting stuff. Let's get something real."

Old Xie seemed to know the origin of the shawl, and his eyes were full of contempt as he looked at the fat boss. He then spoke to Lang Jie.

"Okay, I believe everyone will like the next item."

Langjie wasn't angry. He gestured to the young man next to him, who quickly walked to the isolated area inside the tent. This time, he didn't put the item he took out on the plate, because there was simply no room for it. It was a bronze artifact that was about 70 centimeters tall and about 20 centimeters high on the base.

The young man held the bronze artifact in his arms, walked around the crowd once, and then placed it on the table in the middle of the tent.

"I believe everyone is familiar with this. It is a money tree from the Han Dynasty. A money tree that is so well preserved is probably not even found in some major museums. The starting price is 180,000 RMB. If you are interested, you can come up and take a look."

Langjie is very tactful in his speech. He tells you that if you're interested in buying, then come up and take a look; otherwise, you'd better stay downstairs and have some tea. Langjie's black market is famous not for the number of participants, but for the fact that most of the items that come through it are high-quality. Of course, there are also fakes and counterfeits, and buyers can only blame their poor judgment.

"Money tree? Hey, that's a good omen."

The fat man struggled to his feet, his carrot-like hands giving the voluptuous woman's breasts a hard squeeze before he staggered toward the table where the money tree stood.

"A complete disaster..."

Old Xie, who was sitting not far from Zhuang Rui, muttered a curse under his breath and got up to go forward. However, he was holding a magnifying glass and a small file that looked like nail clippers.

"Zhuang Rui, what is a money tree?"

Liu Chuan nudged Zhuang Rui and asked in a low voice.

"Nonsense, a money tree is a money tree. Didn't you hear the story of the money tree when you were a kid?"

Zhuang Rui's reply nearly made Liu Chuan furious. That was nonsense; he was asking about the origin of the money tree.

However, there was no need for him to ask any more questions, because the two people who had moved their chairs away to avoid Liu Chuan were also talking about the money tree. The middle-aged

man, who was about forty years old, was explaining the origin of the money tree to the young man who came with him, which Liu Chuan and Zhuang Rui, who were also confused, heard clearly.

"The money tree, also known as the money tree or the divine tree since ancient times, was widely popular in the southwest region during the Eastern Han Dynasty. It is the most wonderful and outstanding expression of the divine tree art in Chinese mythology."

This type of money tree has only been unearthed in Sichuan and Hubei provinces. It was primarily used by powerful officials and nobles as a precious decorative item placed on their family shrines, or as a burial object for the wealthy and powerful. It symbolized power, status, wealth, and good fortune. If Langjie's object is genuine, then who knows which prince's tomb in Sichuan has been robbed?

The middle-aged man spoke very logically, explaining the origin of the money tree in great detail, and even speculating on the origin of the bronze money tree in front of him, much like a university professor lecturing to students.

"Bullshit, tell me how much it's worth." Liu Chuan, that roughneck, muttered in dissatisfaction after hearing this.

After the middle-aged man spoke, he also got up and went forward to check. Even the Japanese man took out a magnifying glass and surrounded them. Zhuang Rui looked around and saw that it seemed that only their small group of three and the woman wearing sunglasses showed any interest in this money tree.

Aside from the fat man, who pretended to stroll around the money tree before returning to his chair, the others examined it meticulously, scrutinizing every inch from the leaves and branches to the ground with a magnifying glass. Old Xie, with Lang Jie's permission, even scraped a bit of powder from the copper branches and ceramic base of the money tree with a file, then tasted it, making Zhuang Rui and the others shudder.

Since there were few people and they were all regular customers, Langjie let them appraise it without setting a time limit, because he had already determined the authenticity of this bronze money tree.

The price Langjie paid was only 15,000 yuan. Moreover, when the seller handed it to him, it was in pieces that had been disassembled for easy carrying. He had to piece it together himself, confirming that it was undoubtedly a Han Dynasty bronze artifact.

Therefore, even if only one person among those present makes an offer for this item, as long as it can be sold for 180,000, he will still make a profit. This black market event was not in vain.

They spent a bit too long identifying the money tree, and it was already past noon. Langjie had someone put the freshly roasted whole lamb, beef, cold yak tongue salad, steamed buns, and drinks such as sweet tea, milk tea, and yogurt on a food cart and pushed it into the tent for everyone inside to choose from. Several bottles of liquor were also provided.

Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan were both hungry at the moment, so they didn't care about anything else and ate and drank to their hearts' content. Zhou Rui, on the other hand, didn't touch the food. Instead, he broke up the crushed biscuits he had brought from the car and put them in his mouth. He also drank the water he had brought himself.

Not only Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan were eating, but the fat man was also eating with his mouth full of oil, though he didn't drink any alcohol. Only the woman in sunglasses and her companion were eating what they had brought, and they didn't touch the food provided by the black market.

After everyone below had eaten and drunk their fill, the few who had gone up to make the appraisal returned, their complexions unchanged from when they first went up.

Liu Chuan scrutinized them for a long time, but couldn't discern the true nature of this "money tree" from their faces. He couldn't help but mutter sullenly, "A bunch of old foxes."

"Everyone, would you like to eat something first to fill your stomachs, or shall we start now?"

After Langjie and the others sat back down, they asked.

"Skipping one meal won't kill you, let's get started."

Old Xie glanced at the fat boss, whose mouth was greasy, and replied irritably.

"Alright, let's begin. As you can see, what I, Langjie, have brought out are all top-quality items. This Han Dynasty bronze money tree has a starting price of 180,000. Please make your bids."

Anyway, this wasn't an auction house, so Lang Jie didn't forget to encourage Zhuang Rui and the others who hadn't gone up to have their items appraised. However, after he finished speaking, the tent became quiet, and no one bid.

Lang Jie wasn't in a hurry. He waited there calmly. He knew that in 1993, a Han Dynasty bronze money tree was auctioned overseas for \$2.5 million. Although that bronze tree was a large piece, more than 2 meters tall, if his bronze tree were put in a regular auction house, the final price would definitely not be less than 3 million RMB. His starting bid was only 180,000 RMB. He didn't believe that the veteran players present wouldn't be tempted.

"Eighteen thousand..."

Finally, someone spoke up; it was the middle-aged man who had just told the story of the money tree.

"Two hundred thousand..." Someone took the lead, and before Lang Jie could speak up and encourage them, Old Man Xie also offered his price.

"Two hundred and fifty thousand..."

"Two hundred and eighty thousand..."

"Three hundred thousand..." The price was rising rapidly, and even General Manager Jiang had made an offer. However, everyone in the tent could tell that he must have received instructions from that Japanese man, since he hadn't even gone up to check earlier.

What was most surprising was that Mr. Ma, who was the first to run up, sat calmly in his chair without making any move to speak.