

Golden 91

Chapter Ninety-One: The Grassland Black Market (Part Six)

Everyone crowded around to examine the money tree, so Zhuang Rui didn't have a chance to use his spiritual energy to assess it.

Since his eyes were upgraded in the Jokhang Temple, Zhuang Rui's eyes have undergone great changes. Although he can no longer absorb the spiritual energy from objects, the distance at which he can release spiritual energy has increased. Now he can easily see through objects within ten meters.

Most importantly, after his encounter at the Jokhang Temple, Zhuang Rui's spiritual energy not only recovered automatically, but his ability to see through things also increased. He could use his spiritual energy to distinguish various minerals, such as iron, copper, and gold, including stones. In order to conduct an experiment, Zhuang Rui even went to a gold and silver jewelry store to verify this.

Seeing everyone blushing and arguing over prices, Zhuang Rui looked up and carefully examined the bronze money tree about seven or eight meters away. However, he did not immediately release his spiritual energy, but first observed the style and characteristics of the money tree.

The base of this bronze money tree is likely made of pottery and is shaped like a large mountain. It has three parallel circular holes at the bottom. The surface of the base is engraved with lotus and persimmon calyx patterns, with a monkey-like human figure sitting atop the petals. There is a vertical circular hole at the top of the monkey-like figure's head, into which the bronze tree trunk is inserted.

The trunk has six sections. Judging from its appearance, it should be made of bronze. Each section is roughly the same in shape, flat and round, with a hollow upper part that has a cross-shaped slot for hanging branches and leaves. On the front of the middle section of each trunk, there is a relief sculpture of a deity dancing with a snake. The deity is in a crouching position, with clear facial features and hands holding a snake.

Zhuang Rui looked very carefully. This money tree was divided into six layers from bottom to top. Each layer of branches and leaves were inserted into cross-shaped holes in the trunk. The lower layers were decorated with phoenix patterns. On the sixth layer, there was the image of the Queen Mother of the West standing, wearing a magnificent crown and looking straight ahead. To her left stood a green dragon, to her right a white tiger, behind her a black tortoise, and above her head stood a vermilion bird.

The entire money tree was exquisitely crafted. If Zhuang Rui hadn't seen it with his own eyes, he probably would have found it hard to believe it was made by ancient artisans, back when there weren't so many advanced tools available today.

"Four hundred and seventy thousand..."

The auction inside the tent continued, and the price kept rising. However, the initial bid of 20,000 had now become 10,000. The person who bid 470,000 was the middle-aged man sitting not far from Zhuang Rui.

"Four hundred and eighty thousand..."

Mr. Jiang from Sichuan was equally unyielding, raising the price by another 10,000. At this point, only the two of them were bidding, while the hot-tempered old man, Mr. Xie, seemed to have withdrawn from the competition.

"Damn it, I thought bringing 300,000 was a lot, but now I realize that it's just a lot of noise when we throw this money in."

Liu Chuan, who was initially stunned, has now become somewhat numb. Although Zhuang Rui's manuscript sold for 3.8 million, that was a fixed price, far less exciting than what he is seeing now. When these people shout out 10,000 yuan, it's as casually as paying a few cents more when buying cabbage, without batting an eye.

"Looks like this thing is real. Damn, even if it is real, it's just a few pounds of scrap metal. Is it worth that much money?"

Liu Chuan's words had a sour grapes vibe to them.

"Alright, you rascal, stop complaining. Let's just treat this as an opportunity to broaden our horizons."

Seeing this scene, Zhuang Rui also felt that the 300,000 yuan he brought was indeed a bit insufficient.

Slightly narrowing his eyes, Zhuang Rui released his spiritual energy. Just as his spiritual energy left his eyes, the little white lion in his arms seemed to sense something, making a "woofing" sound and desperately climbing onto Zhuang Rui's shoulder.

Zhuang Rui, both amused and exasperated, caught the little guy. These past two days, to test the self-regeneration of spiritual energy in his eyes, he had poured a considerable amount of this previously treasured spiritual energy into the little creature. As a result, the little guy could actually sense whenever he used spiritual energy.

Having dealt with the trouble in his arms, Zhuang Rui turned his attention back to the money tree. When the spiritual energy came into contact with the money tree, a transparent money tree appeared before Zhuang Rui's eyes. It was transparent because the branches and leaves of the money tree had disappeared, and what appeared to Zhuang Rui was just a tree-shaped object constructed of purple spiritual energy. Of course, only Zhuang Rui could see this.

On this purple, transparent money tree, there are many places where spiritual energy cannot circulate. Zhuang Rui noticed that most of these points are where the bronze leaves and branches connect. However, there are also some connection points where spiritual energy can circulate. After thinking about it for a moment, Zhuang Rui understood that these points must have been repaired later, but the technique was so skillful that it was not visible from the outside.

Reaching this conclusion, Zhuang Rui felt a slight surge of excitement. With such a keen eye, he would be virtually invincible when searching for bargains on Taobao. However, his first priority was to read extensively on antiques.

Otherwise, even if Zhuang Rui could see that something contained spiritual energy, it would be useless if he didn't know how to date it, its origin, or its market price. For example, if Zhuang Rui saw an old object, bought it for 200,000, and then found out that it was real but only worth 100,000, he would have suffered a loss due to his lack of knowledge.

"580,000, Mr. Jiang offers 580,000. This bronze money tree is in such good condition, it's very rare. Although it's a little smaller than the ones that were unearthed, its intricate and exquisite workmanship is even better. In China, you absolutely can't find another one like it. Mr. Li, this is a rare opportunity."

Lang Jie had been shouting for a while, and his voice had become a little hoarse, but he was still very energetic. Seeing that Mr. Li seemed to be backing down, he quickly started to persuade him.

"Six hundred thousand. Anything higher would be Mr. Jiang's. This item is nice, but it has signs of repair. I can only offer a maximum of 600,000."

Upon hearing Mr. Li's words, Zhuang Rui broke out in a cold sweat. He had originally thought that only he knew that the money tree had been repaired, but now he realized that there were many experts in this world. If this unassuming middle-aged man could tell that, then the few people present who hadn't bid were probably not to be underestimated either.

After hearing what Mr. Li said, Mr. Jiang hesitated for a moment. This item was commissioned by Takeuchi to buy, and to be honest, the price was already quite high. After glancing at Takeuchi, Mr. Jiang still shouted, "Six hundred and one thousand."

"Okay, Mr. Jiang has offered 610,000. Are there any other bidders?"

Lang Jie was already quite satisfied with the price. You see, even if this money tree were put in a regular auction house, the final price would not exceed 2 million RMB. The reason is that several bronze leaves are severely damaged. Although Lang Jie put a lot of effort into repairing them, it still couldn't fool some discerning people. Besides, items like this that are obviously from tombs cannot be put in a regular auction house in China.

As for whether Takeuchi buys it for his own collection or puts it up for auction at an international auction house, that's none of Langjie's business. Perhaps those present will call to report it as soon as they leave the tent. In any case, Liu Chuan is already thinking about it.

"Alright, since no one else is making a bid, this Han Dynasty bronze money tree, worth 610,000, belongs to..."

"Seven hundred thousand, I'll offer seven hundred thousand RMB..."

A voice rang out, and everyone looked in the direction of the sound. It was none other than Boss Ma. After calling out a price of 700,000, he was busy eating an orange that the glamorous woman next to

him had peeled, as if he hadn't just called out that price. But no one noticed that deep in the eyes of this fat Boss Ma, whose eyes were reduced to slits, a shrewd and cunning look would occasionally appear.

"Seven hundred thousand, Mr. Ma is indeed extraordinary. His first offer is seven hundred thousand. Mr. Jiang, this item is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Langjie took a sip of water, cleared his throat, and shouted loudly. He had originally thought the deal would be settled for 610,000, but he didn't expect this Fatty Ma to be so rich and powerful. It seems that inviting him this time was the right decision.

Actually, it was quite by chance that we were able to invite Fatty Ma. This wealthy man was traveling in Lhasa with his mistress when Langjie learned from a friend in Shanxi that this big boss had been indulging in refined pursuits in recent years, frequently visiting auction houses and similar venues. So, Langjie gave him a call, and to his surprise, he actually managed to invite him, which was such a pleasant surprise.

After exchanging a few words with Takeuchi beside him, Mr. Jiang from Sichuan shook his head at Lang Jie, indicating that he was giving up on bidding. Lang Jie was not disappointed. His original price for this money tree was 500,000, but Fatty Ma's intervention had truly turned it into a money tree that could be sold for RMB.

"Congratulations, Mr. Ma. Having this in your home is a real status symbol. Please come forward and make the transaction, Mr. Ma."

"It's worth hundreds of thousands, why all this trouble? Xiao Zhao, go and get that thing, and give them 700,000."

The fat man, his mouth stuffed with food, waved his hand impatiently, signaling the young man behind him to go and make a deal with Lang Jie.

"Alright, the next item is today's third lot, 'Li Duanduan' by Tang Yin (Tang Bohu) of the Ming Dynasty. If you are interested, you can come up and admire it, but please do not touch it."

The matter of trading the money tree was naturally handled by someone else. Lang Jie had already started the auction of the third item, which was a work by Tang Bohu that had once made Yang Wei's father a laughingstock.

To Zhuang Rui's surprise, after Lang Jie announced the item for auction, no one came forward to take a look, and the scene became deserted.