

Golden Eyes

Chapter 1: Unexpected Calamity

In December, **City Name**'s nights were long and days short. It was just past six, and the sky outside gradually darkened. Streetlights on both sides of the road slowly lit up, keeping the city illuminated. Commuters, like a vast spiderweb, filled the streets and alleys of this metropolis, various sounds echoing above the city.♦♦ ♦♦

“Whoosh...” **Zhuang Rui** pulled down the store’s rolling shutter halfway, then carried several iron boxes, already packed and sealed, to the counter. He casually closed the security door. The items in these boxes were worth millions. Normally, two security guards would handle the handover with **Zhuang Rui**, but today was the weekend, and the security company had called them back for training.

The day’s work was coming to an end. Although it hadn't been very busy, a hint of fatigue still showed on **Zhuang Rui**’s young face. Perhaps it was the approaching year-end, and **Zhuang Rui**, who hadn't been home for a year, was feeling a bit homesick.

Zhuang Rui was 24 this year, born into a single-parent family in an ancient city in northern Jiangsu. He stood at 1.8 meters tall, and while not strikingly handsome, his smile gave people a friendly feeling. His every move exuded a sense of composure, making him appear a few years older than his actual age.

During his university days, **Zhuang Rui** was also someone who enjoyed lively gatherings. However, after leaving school, a string of misfortunes made **Zhuang Rui** much more reserved, and he became more mature and steady. Besides occasionally cursing a certain association while watching a game, he spent most of his time after work in his rented apartment reading historical novels. A few days ago, he had just bought a set of **Emperor Kangxi** by Eryuehe. If he weren't worried about causing a bad impression, he would have brought it to work to read.

In 2000, **Zhuang Rui** graduated from a prestigious university in **City Name**, majoring in financial accounting. By all accounts, university graduates back then didn't have to worry about finding work; it wasn't difficult. However, **Zhuang Rui** had bad luck; he fell ill just a few days after graduating and missed that year's civil service exam. After recovering, he worked for a small company in his hometown for a few days, felt there was no future, and returned to **City Name** to work as an accountant at this **Pawnshop**.

Generally, private companies prefer to hire experienced accountants, while joining government departments requires connections. When **Zhuang Rui** first arrived in **City Name**, he couldn't find a suitable job for over a month. In the end, it was his university classmate and dorm leader from **City Name** who helped him get into this newly established **Pawnshop**.

Speaking of **Pawnshops**, people's first impression is likely that of a pawnbroker. And thinking of a pawnbroker, the lines “bug-eaten and rat-chewed, bare and bald, a tattered and rotten coat” from the recently aired TV series immediately come to mind.

In fact, with the development of the times, **Pawnshops** have become multifunctional places that integrate financing, treasure hunting, and safekeeping.

In the unredeemed items section of the **Pawnshop** where **Zhuang Rui** worked, there were unredeemed items such as diamond rings, jade bracelets, and branded watches. Since the price at which these items are accepted is generally about half of their original price, once they become unredeemed, their selling price will only be slightly higher than the acceptance price. This holds great appeal for those who are short on cash but still desire branded luxury goods.

Zhuang Rui had seen many beautiful young men and women, adorned with gold and silver, come here to directly unredeem jewelry they no longer liked, and then go to the unredeemed items section to find items they preferred. This way, not only did the unredeemed items circulate, but it also prevented capital from accumulating.

The personnel structure within the **Pawnshop** was simple: Chief Appraiser **Uncle De** also served as the **Pawnshop** Manager, along with two young appraisers who had returned from abroad, mainly responsible for appraising foreign artworks and luxury goods. Both were in their early thirties and had been in this circle for a while, both having formal training. However, these two usually thought highly of themselves and were never favored by **Uncle De**. Besides them, there was the cashier **Xu Ling** and the sales clerk in the unredeemed items section.

Uncle De's full name was Ma Delin. Before the liberation, he worked as a young apprentice in a pawnbroker in **City Name**. Later, he continued to be involved in the excavation and appraisal of cultural relics, specializing in miscellaneous items and calligraphy and paintings. He had a high reputation in the **City Name** cultural relic and antique collection circles. Before the **Pawnshop** opened, a great deal of effort was made to invite **Uncle De**, who had retired from the **City Name Museum**, to be the chief appraiser and manager of the **Pawnshop**. In an old pawnbroker, he would have been called the Grand Shopkeeper.

Uncle De was very fond of **Zhuang Rui**, this diligent and hardworking young man, and intended to mentor him in this trade. However, although **Zhuang Rui** enjoyed reading historical novels, he wasn't very interested in these antiques. **Uncle De's** teachings went in one ear and out the other; he would often divert the conversation to a historical figure or story, frequently making **Uncle De** huff and puff with anger.

According to regulations, cashier **Xu Ling** was supposed to hand over the items from the unredeemed items section to the bank's armored car with **Zhuang Rui** at closing time. However, that gold-digger was going to dinner with her Nth boyfriend at the Oriental Pearl Tower today and had left early. **Xu Ling** was a local of **City Name**, and she always had various excuses. This wasn't the first time, and **Zhuang Rui** was used to it.

The **Pawnshop** closed at six in the evening, and the bank's armored car usually arrived around six-thirty. By six o'clock, **Uncle De** and the sales clerks from the unredeemed items section had all left. The two highly paid appraisers clocked in and out with precision, leaving only **Zhuang Rui**. After pulling down the rolling shutter halfway, he sat behind the counter to wait for the bank personnel. According to regulations, both the cash box and the boxes containing valuable jewelry had to be collected by the escorts, who would also check the integrity of the seals.

The last ray of sunset streamed into the store through the glass door. Suddenly, **Zhuang Rui** felt a shadow fall before him as three figures ducked under the half-closed rolling shutter.

“It’s only 6:10. The bank’s car usually doesn’t come this early.”

Zhuang Rui was startled. Although the armored car would arrive a bit earlier on weekends, it was usually around 6:20. Since the people who entered were backlit, **Zhuang Rui** couldn't make out their faces for a moment, but he knew they weren't bank escorts. He could see that no bank armored car was parked outside.

“Gentlemen, we’re closed. If you need anything, please come back tomorrow. We are open on Saturdays and Sundays, huh?”

Zhuang Rui stopped mid-sentence, suddenly realizing that all three men who entered were males. What made him stop speaking was that all three wore knitted hats, the kind that could be pulled down to cover the face, with only the eyes exposed. This type of hat was very popular a few years ago, but it was rarely seen now. Although it was December, the weather in **City Name** wasn't cold enough to warrant wearing such hats. A bad feeling immediately rose in **Zhuang Rui**'s heart.

“Kid, cut the crap, hand over the boxes next to you.”

Two people stood in front of the counter, and another ran directly towards the unredeemed items section. Judging by their movements, they seemed quite familiar with this **Pawnshop**.

“You are committing a crime. Bank security personnel will be here soon. If you don’t run now, you won’t be able to escape later.”

Zhuang Rui knew he had encountered robbers. Although the local police station had conducted several drills, he never expected that even a **Pawnshop**, besides banks, would become a target for these people.

However, after the initial panic, **Zhuang Rui** quickly calmed down, because the **Pawnshop**'s counters were all designed according to bank anti-theft and anti-robbery counters. Steel bars completely separated the counter from the outside. If they had come earlier, they might have been able to grab items from the unredeemed items section, but now that he had put everything inside, **Zhuang Rui** was confident that these few people would absolutely not be able to break through that security door in a short amount of time.

While talking to the robbers, **Zhuang Rui** sat back down in his chair. His hand had already reached for the alarm button. As soon as he pressed it, the 110 police and the nearby police station would immediately receive the alert, and they could arrive in as little as five minutes. This wasn't a movie; there had been several on-site drills this year, and **Zhuang Rui** had great confidence in the police who always arrived quickly.

“Damn, big brother, all the stuff here has been put away. There’s nothing, it’s all clean. Big brother, didn’t you personally scout the place last time?”

The person who ran to the unredeemed items section naturally couldn't find anything and shouted towards Zhang Yang, speaking with a strong Northeast accent.

“Who the hell are you cursing? I told you to be civilized! Damn it, how many times have I told you to speak Mandarin?”

The bandit leader, separated from **Zhuang Rui** by an anti-theft screen, cursed in exasperation. He was very dissatisfied with the quality of his subordinates, or perhaps it was because he was being questioned by them. **Zhuang Rui** almost laughed internally, thinking, are there really robbers who preach the “Five Stresses, Four Beauties, and Three Loves” these days? But he immediately stopped laughing, because a dark gun barrel was pointed at him through the security window.

Zhuang Rui shivered. His finger, already on the alarm button, pressed down hard. A piercing alarm sounded. He believed that as long as he stalled for a few minutes, these people would definitely not escape. But just then, a braking sound suddenly came from the **Pawnshop** entrance. **Zhuang Rui** looked outside and was overjoyed; it was the bank's armored car arriving early, which was normal on weekends.

Seeing that the bandit leader standing in front of the counter seemed distracted by the braking sound outside, **Zhuang Rui** seized the opportunity to duck down behind the counter, which was a blind spot for gunfire. The robbers outside couldn't harm him there. However, **Zhuang Rui**'s swivel chair slipped, causing him not to duck down but to slide back over a meter, bringing him face-to-face with the bandit leader.

“Kid, you’re playing tricks!”

As the bandit leader roared, he suddenly pulled the trigger at **Zhuang Rui**. When he spoke, **Zhuang Rui** subconsciously turned his body sideways, and the bullet grazed past his eye. **Zhuang Rui** first felt a flash of fire fly past his eyes, followed by a burning, stinging pain in his eye.

The eyes are the most developed and sensitive part of the human nervous **System**. Blood was already seeping out from between **Zhuang Rui**'s fingers as he covered his eyes. The intense pain made **Zhuang Rui**'s body spin and fall backward. He couldn't see that the direction his head was falling was precisely where the alarm button was located.

With a “bang,” **Zhuang Rui**'s head struck hard against the glass box covering the alarm button. The immense impact shattered the square glass box, and blood instantly stained the counter where the alarm button was installed. **Zhuang Rui**'s head rested against the counter, and he had already fallen unconscious.

The gunshots and alarm startled the bank escorts outside. Armed with live ammunition, the bank escorts quickly rushed into the **Pawnshop**. The bandit leader's handgun seemed to be homemade; after firing the single wicked bullet at **Zhuang Rui**, it jammed. There were no hostages for them to take in the **Pawnshop**. After a struggle, it was clear that these robbers' professional skills were not very proficient, and soon the three robbers were subdued by several bank security guards.

“Xiao Zhuang, Xiao Zhuang, how are you? Can you speak?”

The bank escort familiar with **Zhuang Rui** urgently called out to **Zhuang Rui** behind the counter, but there was no reply. The hall, where a gun had just been fired, was filled with the strong smell of low-quality gunpowder, and their hearts gradually sank.

From outside, they could see the bloodstains inside the counter, but they couldn't open the security door, leaving everyone outside helpless. A few minutes later, the 110 police, who had received the alarm, also arrived at the scene. They cordoned off the **Pawnshop**, and the robbers were blindfolded and taken into the police car. However, everyone nervously watched **Zhuang Rui**, only a patch of his scalp visible inside the counter, waiting for the notified **Pawnshop** personnel to arrive and open the security door.

No one noticed that the blood seeping from the back of **Zhuang Rui**'s head slowly infiltrated the crevices of the alarm button. A blue current flowed into **Zhuang Rui**'s brain along with the blood, causing his body to twitch slightly. His hands, which had been covering his face, had long since fallen. If anyone could see **Zhuang Rui**'s face now, they would discover a multicolored halo around his eyes, but it only lasted for a short ten-odd seconds before disappearing.