

# Golden Eyes

## Chapter 10: Best Buddy

After calling **Uncle De**, **Zhuang Rui** set his mind at ease. It was only then that he realized his stomach was rumbling. Checking the time, it was already past two in the afternoon. In his excitement, he had completely forgotten to eat lunch.→

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He looked up and glanced out the window. Outside, the cold wind howled, and the snow was getting heavier. **Zhuang Rui** had no desire to go out to eat, so he simply went to the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, found a bag of frozen dumplings, and dropped them into the pot. Then he peeled a few cloves of garlic, mashed them with a mortar and pestle, poured in sesame oil, vinegar, and other seasonings. Once the dumplings were cooked, he ate them while they were hot.

"Ding-a-ling..."

**Zhuang Rui** had just finished eating and cleaning up the dishes when he was about to continue organizing his grandfather's letters, hoping to find more good things. Just then, the home phone rang.

"Hey, is that **Wood**? You bastard, you've been home for two days and didn't even tell your **Buddy**! Come to my shop later. We'll have a drink tonight, and then big brother will take you to a sauna for a good steam. This damn weather is freezing people to death..."

**Zhuang Rui** had just picked up the phone, before even putting it to his ear, he heard the roar coming from the receiver. There was no need to ask; it must be **Liu Chuan**. He always yelled when he called. Last year when **Zhuang Rui** returned home, **Liu Chuan**'s call was answered by his mother, who later called **Liu Chuan** over and lectured him for ages while holding his ear.

**Liu Chuan**'s mother and **Mother Zhuang** were colleagues. From the third grade of primary school until high school graduation, **Liu Chuan** was always **Zhuang Rui**'s classmate. Their personalities were vastly different: one was impulsive and competitive, while the other was steady and reserved. No one expected them to get along so well. The elders of both families treated the boys as their own; if they made a mistake, they still got spanked. When he was little, **Zhuang Rui** was often disciplined by **Liu Chuan**'s Father, but he still called them **Godmother** and Godfather whenever they met, and he often ate meals at **Liu Chuan**'s house.

**Liu Chuan**'s Father transferred from the military and began working at the **City** Public Security Bureau in **City** when **Liu Chuan** was eight years old. Having grown up in the military compound, **Liu Chuan**'s personality was very much like his father's. When encountering disputes, he usually used his fists to explain things, and his interest in studying was far less than his interest in street arcades.

Oddly enough, from primary school to high school, **Liu Chuan** and **Zhuang Rui** were practically inseparable. **Zhuang Rui** spent no less time playing than **Liu Chuan** did, yet his academic performance was always among the top few in the class, never dropping out of the top 3. Meanwhile, **Liu Chuan** often ranked third but counting from the bottom. He was even forced by his family to finish high school. Looking at the relationship between these two, the saying "one who stays near vermillion gets stained red, and one who stays near ink gets stained black" is not absolute.

After graduating high school, **Liu Chuan**'s Father found him several jobs, but the boy never lasted long, either because he couldn't stand the supervisor or because he fought with colleagues. Later, when the **City** Flower and Bird Market was rebuilt, **Liu Chuan**, who had loved raising dogs and cats since childhood, simply persuaded his family to buy a storefront there. He became his own boss, selling pets. He dealt in everything: cats, dogs, cicadas, crickets, tortoises, and turtles. Over a few years, he actually made a lot of money. Every day he carried a cell phone and drove a second-hand Toyota, looking quite respectable; no one would guess that this guy was just a dog breeder.

In recent years, gambling on cricket fights has become popular in **City Name, Province**, and other places. **Liu Chuan** went to the rural areas of **Shandong** and collected many crickets. A few months ago, when he went to **City Name** to deliver goods, he even stayed cramped for a few days in **Zhuang Rui**'s rental room in **City Name**, which was neither cool in winter nor warm in summer. As he put it, his **Buddy** wasn't too poor to afford a hotel, but when visiting a brother's home, why would he stay outside?

Hanging up the phone, **Zhuang Rui** left a note for his mother, put on the wool hat his older sister had knitted, tucked a pack of **City Name** cigarettes into his coat, locked the door, and left. Because many people were taking taxis in the heavy snow, **Zhuang Rui** stood by the roadside for a long time but couldn't hail a cab. He simply opened his umbrella and walked slowly toward the Flower and Bird Market. It wasn't far anyway; it was only about a ten-minute walk.

As the New Year approached, although heavy snow was falling outside, there were quite a few pedestrians on the road. After walking and looking around for a while, he arrived at the street where the Flower and Bird Market was located.

The Flower and Bird Market in **City** was connected to the Antique Market and was divided into several sections: Pets, Birds, Flowers, Antiques, Jade Articles, Calligraphy and Painting, Books, and Stamps. Established merchants either rented or bought storefronts, while some enthusiasts set up scattered stalls in the aisles on both sides of the shops, only needing to pay a small management fee to the Market Management Office every day.

**Zhuang Rui** had been here several times before. Every time he visited, the place was bustling with crowds, sometimes so packed he couldn't move. However, due to the heavy snow that had fallen for several days in a row, most of the individual vendors had not set up their stalls. Only a few people had stalls set up near shops where they had good relationships, and everyone else was hiding inside the shops to keep warm. It was much quieter than usual.

Walking up to **Liu Chuan**'s pet shop, **Zhuang Rui** noticed an **Old Madam** standing outside the entrance. She looked to be around fifty years old, dressed plainly but cleanly, carrying a floral

cloth bundle in her hand, and seemed to have a hint of sadness on her face. **Zhuang Rui** didn't pay much attention, pushed open the glass door, and walked inside.

**Liu Chuan**'s pet shop was about twenty square meters. When he bought it, it only cost seventy or eighty thousand yuan. If he were to sell it now, people would be scrambling to buy it for three hundred thousand yuan. This was only over four or five years, showing how fiercely housing prices had risen.

The few cages scattered around the pet shop were empty. With the New Year approaching and heavy snow falling for days, he probably wasn't focused on doing business. A stove was burning inside, and the temperature was a good twenty-seven or twenty-eight degrees Celsius. As soon as **Zhuang Rui** entered the shop, he immediately felt the warmth on his slightly stiff, frozen face.

**Liu Chuan** was hunched over the computer, fiddling with something unknown. Hearing the glass door chime, he didn't even look up and shouted, "The shop is out of stock. Tell me what you want first, and come pick it up after the New Year."

"Do you have a Great General? I want one..."

**Zhuang Rui** joked. The last time **Liu Chuan** went to Shanghai, he complained to **Zhuang Rui** for days that when he was collecting crickets in **Shandong**, he arrived a few days late, and a Great General had been snatched up by someone else. At the time, he looked more depressed than if his wife had been stolen.

"Great General? I want one too... Damn, it's you! Go sit down and smoke. Let me finish this round..."

**Liu Chuan** saw it was **Zhuang Rui** and tossed him a pack of cigarettes. **Zhuang Rui** leaned closer and couldn't help but feel amused and speechless: the guy was actually playing Super Mario, an antique game! It was rare to see him enjoying it so much.

"MD, I didn't clear the level again. I told you, kid, you came back and didn't report to me! If my mother hadn't mentioned it, I still wouldn't know. I heard from my mother that you were shot a while ago. Are you okay? Let me see, let me see..." **Liu Chuan** threw down the game controller and walked toward **Zhuang Rui**. After snatching the pack of cigarettes from **Zhuang Rui**'s hand, he insisted on checking the wound on the back of his head.

"I'm not that delicate. The wound is almost completely healed. You're the comfortable one. If I had known, I wouldn't have gone to college. How great would it have been to work with you? You're even using a computer now. I didn't see that coming; you're really keeping up with the trends."

**Zhuang Rui** lit a cigarette, pushed **Liu Chuan**'s hand away, and settled onto the sofa in the shop. He wasn't a heavy smoker; he only lit up when he was very happy or very depressed. Sometimes he couldn't finish a pack of cigarettes in four or five days.

"If you hadn't gone to college, even my old man wouldn't have spared you. Oh, right, my mother also said you were heartless for not coming home to see her when you arrived. Why do people get so nagging after they retire? I couldn't stand it, which is why I came to the shop."

**Liu Chuan** first vented his frustrations, and then his eyes lit up. He said, "Just quit that job of yours. If you keep doing it, you might lose your life one day. Seriously, brother, come work with me. We haven't been together these past few years, and whatever I deal in feels awkward. Your brain is much better than mine. If you join this line of work, I guarantee we'll make this shop the only one of its kind in **City**."