

Golden Eyes

Chapter Seven: The Old House Demolition

The train sounded its long whistle and, with a deafening roar, slowly pulled into the **City** station platform. Just as he stepped out of the carriage, a piece of ice-cold snowflake landed on **Zhuang Rui**'s neck. The bone-chilling north wind made **Zhuang Rui** clutch his clothes tighter as he and his mother carried their luggage out of the station.

City Railway Station is considered a relatively large transit hub nationally. Whether heading south to **City Name**, north to the capital, or west to **Xian**, almost everyone has to transfer here. Even though it was already past 11 p.m., many people were still waiting for their trains in the temporary waiting hall set up in the spacious station square. The New Year was just over ten days away, and despite the biting cold, the anticipation of returning home to see loved ones filled everyone's faces with happy smiles.

Zhuang Rui's family owned two properties in this ancient **City**. One was the family's old residence, located at the foot of the scenic Yunlong Mountain. It was the ancestral home, which had been requisitioned during the Ten Years of Turmoil but was later returned. However, **Zhuang Rui** only spent his childhood there, moving to another place around the age of ten.

The other residence was allocated by his mother's former school. A few years ago, the state implemented housing reform, requiring previously allocated houses to be purchased, with the cost calculated based on years of service. This house was next to **Mother Zhuang**'s former school. It wasn't large—a two-bedroom, one-living room unit spanning only seventy-two square meters—but the location and floor were excellent, and the home was equipped with heating. Shopping and commuting were very convenient. **Zhuang Rui** lived here until he graduated from high school. Last year, he spent over thirty thousand yuan to buy it outright. **Zhuang Rui** only learned a few days ago, when his mother mentioned it, that the property deed had been secured last month.

Zhuang Rui hailed a taxi and arrived home for just the starting fare. Going up to the second floor, he saw the lights were on, confirming that his older sister, **Zhuang Min**, was staying there tonight. Pushing open the door, a wave of warmth rushed out from the room. A **Little Girl**, two or three years old, was hiding behind his sister, secretly peeking at **Zhuang Rui**, who was dusted with snow.

"This girl, she's been asking to see her uncle all day, and now that he's here so late, she's shy! **Nannan**, hurry up and greet your uncle..." **Zhuang Min** said with a smile.

Looking at the two bowls of steaming noodles on the table, each topped with a fried egg, a warm feeling instantly rose in **Zhuang Rui**'s heart. This was his home. After living and working in **City Name** for over a year, he remembered being sick and curled up in his rental room with no one caring, and having to take cold showers repeatedly to cool down in the heat. Thinking of

this, **Zhuang Rui** couldn't help but shed tears. At that moment, he felt an impulse to quit his job in **City Name** and return here.

"Mama, Uncle is crying! **Nannan** isn't crying anymore, Uncle is so shameless..." The innocent child's voice rang out, making everyone in the room burst into laughter.

Zhuang Rui lifted **Nannan** high up, scaring the **Little Girl** into shrieking. As soon as he put her down, she hid in her grandmother's arms, afraid to go near her uncle again. It wasn't until after dinner, when **Zhuang Rui** produced the **white rabbit** milk candy, a specialty of **City Name**, that the **Little Girl** warmed up to her uncle.

It was already past midnight after dinner. **Zhuang Rui** quickly washed up and returned to his room. It was exactly as it had been a year ago, with no changes. Lying on the bed and looking at the familiar room, it was a long time before **Zhuang Rui** finally fell into a deep sleep.

The next day, **Zhuang Rui** took his niece to the park for the whole day. They rode everything—water planes, carousels—instantly elevating him to the status of the dearest person in his Little Niece's heart, bar none.

Today was Friday. In the evening, his brother-in-law came home after work, bringing many New Year's goods. **Zhuang Rui** then remembered that he needed to buy New Year's provisions, but shopping for the New Year was usually done at the supermarket these days, which was quite convenient.

"Brother-in-law, how is the factory's performance these days?"

After dinner, the family sat on the sofa watching TV and chatting. Little **Nannan** crawled back and forth over everyone. After being glared at by **Zhuang Min**, she hid in **Zhuang Rui**'s embrace.

"The usual. The restructuring didn't bring any improvement. The salary is only about a thousand yuan a month—not enough to starve, but not enough to thrive, either. It just means your sister has to suffer with me..."

Zhuang Rui's brother-in-law, **Zhao Guodong**, was an honest man. He worked in a subsidiary enterprise of the Railway **System**. Although he possessed excellent car repair skills, he didn't know how to flatter superiors in a state-owned enterprise, so he was stuck with a fixed salary. In those years, everyone with skill, capital, or connections went into business. The growing pains following enterprise restructuring were particularly evident in the **Early Stage** of the century.

"Stop talking nonsense! Aren't you afraid of making your brother laugh?" **Zhuang Min** interrupted her husband. **Zhao Guodong** gave a sheepish smile and stopped talking. Judging by this, **Zhuang Min** had mastered the art of managing her husband.

"Oh, right, Mom. Last time I heard you mention it, is Aunt Xie next door selling her apartment? Let's buy it. It would be great to keep it for Sister to live in or rent out..."

Zhuang Rui suddenly recalled the topic they had discussed a few days ago during a casual chat with his mother. He knew from his time in **City Name** that housing prices had soared in the past two years. Last year, housing prices were just over 3,000 yuan per square meter, but this year they were already approaching the 6,000 mark. He heard they would rise further after the New

Year. Although **City** was located in Northern Jiangsu, in terms of the major trend, buying several houses now would definitely be a safe investment.

Zhuang Rui wanted to buy this house for his older sister. His brother-in-law had many siblings, and their living situation was very cramped. His sister had been extremely kind to **Zhuang Rui** since he was a child. He wanted to buy the house so her family could move in, and since **Mother Zhuang** was getting older, having his sister live nearby would make caretaking much easier.

"Buying this house outright cost over 30,000 yuan, which wiped out all my savings. Where would I get the money to buy another house? Let's talk about it after you get married. We can sell this house then and add some money to upgrade to a bigger one."

Although **Mother Zhuang** was getting old, she wasn't conservative. After retiring, she and a group of **Old Madams** often danced in the square next to her home, keeping her well-informed. When **Zhuang Rui** brought up the idea of buying the house last time, she had been tempted. The house next door had also been allocated by the work unit previously, and since the colleague had other property elsewhere, they wanted to sell this one. The layout was the same as theirs, and the price was only ten thousand yuan more than what she had paid to purchase her own, making it a reasonable buy.

"But I have one hundred thousand yuan! Mom, go ask about it tomorrow. If it's suitable, let's buy it. That money was basically free anyway. Once we buy the house, we'll give it to Older Sister. Consider it **Nannan's** dowry, haha..." **Zhuang Rui** encouraged her from the side.

"Uncle, what is dowry?" The Little Guy asked, biting her finger while lying in **Zhuang Rui's** arms, confused.

"You're a grown man, stop talking so carelessly. That money cannot be touched. You risked your life for it; it must be saved for when you take a wife..." **Zhuang Min** took her daughter back and flatly refused.

"Even if you don't want the house, we should buy it as an investment. Sister, don't worry about it. I'll discuss it with Mom..."

When **Zhuang Rui** was in **City Name**, he had already decided to leave the one hundred thousand yuan for his family. He had also saved over twenty thousand yuan from his own salary last year. Even if he returned to **City Name** after the New Year, renting a slightly better apartment would be affordable, especially since his salary and benefits would be much higher after being promoted to manager of the **Pawnshop**.

"I think we should buy it. Guodong treats me almost like his own son, so giving you a house is nothing. Besides, Little Min, you didn't have much dowry when you got married, so consider this making up for it."

After pondering for a moment, **Mother Zhuang** made the final decision. Over the years, while **Zhuang Rui** was studying and working elsewhere, her son-in-law had handled all the major and minor affairs of the family. Seeing her son's sincerity, she naturally wouldn't object.

"Alright, no more discussion. Oh, right, Guodong, tomorrow you and Xiao Rui go to the old residence. It's about to be demolished, and then we'll have another house. There are some things we need to bring back. I've already packed them up and organized them. You just need to rent a vehicle and bring them back..."

Seeing that her son-in-law seemed about to decline, **Mother Zhuang** changed the subject.

"The old residence is being demolished?"

This was the first time **Zhuang Rui** had heard his mother mention this. For a moment, his heart felt as if a bottle of five flavors had been overturned, with all kinds of complex emotions flooding his mind.