

The Billion 131

Chapter 131

C131 – Su Ming Is the Most Powerful Person

Su Ming had hit the jackpot!

Wang Guohui had presented Su Ming with a generous gift!

Truth be told, an additional three acres of land didn't particularly excite Su Ming.

Even though the land in the city center was highly valuable, Su Ming was well aware that its worth wasn't intrinsic to the land itself, but to the System.

With the System, these two acres of land were truly valuable.

Without it, they were just another plot in the city center.

The amount of real estate didn't concern Su Ming.

But the System had the capability to integrate these lands.

And that was a tremendous gain for Su Ming.

His heart swelled with an indescribable joy!

With the new three acres, Su Ming's landholdings had expanded to five acres.

His farming operation had more than doubled overnight.

Only with the System's enhancement did this land gain its true significance; without it, it was merely a plot of earth.

Its location in the city center lent it some value, but otherwise, it would be worthless.

Clutching the red booklet, Su Ming could scarcely believe this was reality.

Frankly, when the System initially allotted him an acre to build a villa, he had his reservations about the System.

He could have lived in a villa anywhere.

Building one on this land seemed like a waste.

Now, with his extensive landholdings, Su Ming was indifferent.

"The land has been successfully integrated!"

The alert prompted a hearty laugh from Su Ming.

Wang Guohui had been anxious all this while.

He hadn't known Su Ming for very long, after all.

This was only their second meeting.

Wang Guohui was clueless about Su Ming's temperament, his likes and dislikes.

But with Su Ming's profound background and enigmatic identity, money was surely no object for him.

Wang Guohui feared that Su Ming might dismiss the land as inconsequential.

He was concerned that Su Ming wouldn't appreciate his gift.

But now, he could breathe easy.

Seeing Su Ming's reaction, Wang Guohui was certain that the gift was well-received.

"Mr. Su, I'm glad you like the gift."

"I was worried about what I'd do if you didn't. Now, I can rest easy."

To tell you the truth, he was at a loss about what thank-you gift to give Su Ming.

Knowing Su Ming's passion for farming, he decided to secure this plot of land for him.

It seemed like the perfect gift, especially since Su Ming wasn't interested in wealth.

In a single night, he brought in a legion of workers who, using an unconventional demolition technique, razed the building to the ground, damaged the foundation, and transformed the area into arable land.

Wang Guohui had spent a fortune, but if it made Su Ming happy, it was all worthwhile.

After all, Su Ming's mother was currently in the hospital, her health restored.

She could live for several more decades without any issues!

Su Ming had saved his mother's life!

If she could actually live past 100, that would be incredible.

How many people get to live over a century?

The senior executives who witnessed this transformation breathed a collective sigh of relief.

They were thrilled for Wang Guohui; he had finally forged a friendship with Su Ming.

The night before, these executives had gone without sleep, with some of the healthier ones even lending a hand in the demolition.

This was the first time Wang Guohui had issued such a stern command, prompting the entire company to drop their tasks, set aside all other business, and focus solely on executing Wang Guohui's directive.

These employees had been with Wang Guohui for years.

They understood his devotion to family.

If something happened to the elderly lady, their boss might disregard them, potentially leading to significant issues for the company. They were skilled, but none had the capacity to lead. Without their boss, Angel Group could face bankruptcy.

Su Ming's gesture not only saved his mother's life but also the future of the company.

So, seeing Su Ming's joy, they couldn't help but feel relieved.

Noticing Su Ming still lost in thought, Wang Guohui approached cautiously and said, "Mr. Su."

Su Ming snapped out of his reverie and blinked.

“Mr. Su, I hope the three acres of land I’ve given you haven’t caused any inconvenience?”

Su Ming didn’t see it as a bother at all.

It could be said that this was the finest gift Su Ming had ever received in his life.

“Mr. Wang, the gift you’ve given me is truly wonderful.”

Both Su Ming and Wang Guohui laughed, a shared moment of joy.

He felt a wave of relief wash over him.

When the time came for his mother to inquire about it, he could honestly say that Mr. Su was thoroughly pleased with the gift he had presented.

With a smile, Wang Guohui said, “You saved my mother’s life; you’re my hero. It’s the least I can do.”

Su Ming blushed slightly at the sentiment.

Wang Guohui was unaware of the true worth of those three acres, but Su Ming was acutely aware of their excessive value.

“Hold on, don’t leave just yet. Give me a moment.”

Su Ming returned to the thatched cottage with a notebook in hand, then emerged with a box of mineral water bottles filled with pitch-black ink.

“You’ve all put in a hard night’s work. Please, take this ink as a token of my appreciation.”

Su Ming handed out the bottles of ink to each person.

Wang Guohui was visibly moved by the gesture.

To think there was so much ink here!

If Su Ming could read Wang Guohui's thoughts, he'd surely have a chuckle.

Su Ming had an abundance of ink.

Truth be told, while this ink was a rarity for others, for him it was commonplace.

His cacti yielded an endless supply of ink.

That was Su Ming's perspective, yet Wang Guohui saw it differently.

He assumed that Su Ming was running low on ink.

After all, this was ink crafted from a secret formula, a treasure in its own right.

And yet, Su Ming had generously offered it as a gift.

Wang Guohui was deeply moved.

Indeed, Su Ming was a man of great kindness.

Chapter 132

C132 – Don't Kneel!

For Wang Guohui and his colleagues, these items were treasures beyond value, impossible to purchase with any amount of money.

After all, Mr. Su was not exactly strapped for cash.

Mr. Su likely felt a pang of guilt, knowing Wang Guohui had spent a considerable sum. He didn't want Wang Guohui to be at a loss, hence his decision to gift these items.

Perhaps Mr. Su didn't see much monetary value in them.

But Wang Guohui was well aware that there would be countless people in the market willing to pay top dollar for such a thing.

"Thank you, Mr. Su!"

Clutching the water bottle, Wang Guohui was so moved that he trembled and knelt down.

He gave Su Ming quite the scare.

"Stand up!"

Su Ming hurried to lift him to his feet.

"No, I won't stand. Mr. Su, you've been incredibly kind to me. You've given me something so valuable. How can I ever thank you?"

The senior executives behind him followed suit, kneeling as well.

It was an astonishing sight.

Angel Group was a leading trade conglomerate.

Yet there they were, the chairman and top brass, all kneeling.

Su Ming, witnessing this, could only press a hand to his forehead in disbelief.

Was this really the corporate culture of their company?

Surely there was no need for such frequent kneeling.

Especially here, in the heart of the city center, right next to the Guoxing Building.

The bustling crowd stopped in their tracks, taken aback by the spectacle.

“Look, isn’t that the Angel Group’s logo on the car?”

“That’s definitely Angel Group.”

“The man at the front looks like the chairman of the Angel Group. I recognize his silhouette.”

“It does look like him!”

“The chairman and executives of the Angel Group are actually kneeling before a young man.”

“What’s the situation here?”

The crowd was dumbfounded.

They formed a ring around the scene, capturing the commotion with their phones.

Su Ming was at a loss for words.

“Please, stand up. There are too many onlookers. Honestly, the Body-stretching Pill is no big deal to me.”

Wang Guohui blinked.

Body-stretching Pill?

What a fitting name!

Indeed, only the living can stretch out their legs and open their eyes wide.

And only the healthy can manage that.

People with full-body paralysis can only open their eyes, unable to even stretch their legs.

If Su Ming were aware of what was going through Wang Guohui’s mind, he’d be torn between laughter and tears.

Yet, the more Su Ming insisted, the less they were able to rise.

The item in question was of extraordinary value.

Exchanging glances, they couldn’t resist turning their attention to the building next to them.

Were they considering purchasing it just to demolish it?

Su Ming was suddenly filled with regret. Had he anticipated this outcome, he wouldn't have given it to them in the first place.

It wasn't a matter of stinginess; the issue was the excessive attention it garnered.

"If you don't stand up this instant, I'm going to get angry."

With a stern expression, Su Ming said, "I'm going to be frank with you. These items might be of great value to you, but to me, they're insignificant. I could obtain them anytime I want. However, the three acres of land you've given me hold considerable value. So, our exchange is mutually beneficial. In fact, the land you've offered is worth much more to me than the Body-stretching Pill."

Su Ming had no choice but to feign anger.

As expected, upon hearing Su Ming's displeasure, Wang Guohui and his companions quickly scrambled to their feet.

"Mr. Su, our sincerest apologies, we must be going now."

With his hands clasped behind him, Su Ming gave a silent nod. "This remedy is good for health, whether you're ill or not. If you're well, it can prevent sickness; if you're unwell, it can fortify your body. Mr. Wang, in particular, I suggest you drink more. It might help you keep your spine straight when you walk."

Wang Guohui was at a loss for words.

He could stand tall in front of others, but in Su Ming's presence, he felt compelled to kneel.

Eventually, Su Ming sent them all packing.

Striding ahead with determination, Wang Guohui offered a casual smile to the onlookers: “Mr. Su is a valued friend of Angel Group. However, I’d advise against disturbing him, lest you wish to incur my displeasure.”

With that, they climbed into their car and left.

The onlookers at the Guoxing Building blinked in surprise.

Most of them worked there and were familiar with Angel Group, a prestigious company within their professional network. They all had connections to one another.

“Who exactly is this young man?”

“I come here to work every day, and this guy is out here farming of all things.”

“This land must be worth at least ten billion.”

“We should move on. We’re never going to rub shoulders with someone like him in our lifetime.”

“You’re right about that.”

The onlookers exhaled in resignation, abandoning any thoughts of making Su Ming’s acquaintance.

If even Wang Guohui had to kneel before him, they stood no chance of forming a connection.

They simply weren’t in the same league.

But it wasn’t long before the video made its way online.

Far from being upset, Wang Guohui was actually thrilled when he learned of it.

It was as if his association with Su Ming was now public knowledge.

Wang Guohui sat in his car, circling the city center.

He scrutinized the layout of downtown and the nearby skyscrapers before phoning his secretary.

“Check which buildings around here are on the market. Purchase them all and level the area!”

Chapter 133

C133 – Mr. Su Is Too Great!!!

Back in the day, the secretary would have been clueless about his boss’s intentions.

“Has the boss lost his mind?”

“If his boss wanted to show gratitude for saving his life, wouldn’t a few acres of land be more than generous?”

But now, it all clicked for him.

Clutching a bottle of medicine, his thoughts turned to his bedridden mother at home. He was willing to sell his house and give every penny to Su Ming.

If that was his line of thinking, imagine what was going through Wang Guohui’s mind.

Yet, Wang Guohui’s statement was giving him a headache.

The situation was unique, surrounded by office towers and banks.

Wang Guohui had managed to purchase that building yesterday because its owner was an old friend who owed him a big favor.

Moreover, the owner had suffered a business failure and was deep in debt, desperate to sell the property to settle his accounts.

Fortuitously, he met Wang Guohui, who was willing to buy the property at a premium, resulting in a smooth transaction.

The contract was signed swiftly, and the demolition of the building followed suit.

But acquiring another building would likely be a Herculean task.

Wang Guohui mused over this as he sat in his car.

Driving past Su Ming's plot of land once more, Wang Guohui's gaze lingered there, unable to move on.

He had thought that gifting Su Ming three acres would ease his conscience, but he hadn't anticipated Su Ming's reciprocation with something so invaluable.

He had believed himself to be quite generous.

But in comparison to Su Ming, he felt insignificant.

Once the crowd at the gate dispersed, Su Ming breathed a sigh of relief. He shut the door and phoned the contractor responsible for building his parents' villa.

"Mr. Su, rest assured, your family's villa is underway!"

"Per your specifications, we're using standard materials of guaranteed quality. It may take a couple of months to complete!"

“Just leave it to us, you have nothing to worry about!”

“We’ll ensure your parents are well looked after!”

The contractor assured him in a rush after picking up the call.

These folks sure have their ear to the ground.

Wang Guohui expressed his gratitude to Su Ming.

The construction company’s boss was already in the loop.

But who is Wang Guohui?

Wang Guohui is none other than the chairman of Angel Group, a heavyweight on the Wealthy Elite List!

It was his overseas trade company that Wang Guohui had contracted to build.

Wang Guohui’s daily earnings could match several months of his income.

Truth be told, the boss had his grievances when he initially built Su Ming’s villa for free.

Thankfully, Su Ming settled the bill, and owing him a favor, the boss begrudgingly went along with it.

However, his attitude has since taken a turn.

Just who is the man who got Wang Guohui on his knees?

He had been resentful before, and now he felt like giving himself a few good slaps!

So, upon receiving the news, he immediately rang up the villa project manager, insisting on utmost dedication to the build!

He also emphasized that the villa must be constructed to perfection, surpassing even Su Ming's villa in excellence.

He needed to get on Su Ming's good side.

This was someone of significant stature!

The project manager was startled by his boss's call, but once he understood the situation, he was filled with trepidation. He knew Su Ming was influential, but he hadn't realized the extent of his clout.

Such a narrow-minded man!

Thus, when the project manager got a call from Su Ming, he was so startled that he shivered, quickly answering the phone.

Su Ming paused, blinking in surprise.

What's the matter? Why is this project manager so worked up?

Su Ming spoke up, "I trust you with the construction of my parents' villa. But I need a favor."

"Mr. Su, it would be our pleasure to assist you. What do you need?"

"I've acquired an additional three acres. I need a wall built around it."

“Not a problem, we’ve got it covered. Just send us the location, and we’ll dispatch a team right away.”

“Great!”

After hanging up, Su Ming promptly sent over the coordinates.

The project manager nodded upon receiving the location and immediately dialed another construction crew.

It was only after the call that it hit him.

Something seemed off!

He quickly pulled out his phone for another look!

This was the plot of land adjacent to Su Ming’s property!

He had spent several days working at that construction site and was intimately familiar with the area, which was surrounded by buildings.

The supervisor blinked in disbelief.

Could Su Ming have possibly purchased the neighboring building to convert it into farmland for his agricultural pursuits?

The idea was beyond the supervisor’s comprehension; such actions were unheard of for the average person.

But Su Ming was extraordinarily wealthy, and the simple life of a farmer was what he truly desired.

He promptly phoned his boss, who, upon hearing the news, drove out to see for himself and confirmed it to be true.

Before long, the world gained another figure like President Chen.

Yet, Su Ming remained oblivious to these developments. Glancing at the time, he noted the corn still required more time to ripen.

He also checked on the additional three acres of land he owned, finding the soil to be exceptionally fertile.

But there was no rush to plant; erecting a fence around the three acres would only take a few days.

Su Ming was accustomed to cultivating within the confines of a fence, and the sudden absence of one left him feeling oddly exposed, as if stripped bare for all to see.

Settling into his lounge chair, he soaked up the sun's warmth. Within five minutes, a gentle tapping sounded at the door.

Startled, Su Ming wondered if a journalist had come seeking an interview, though he wasn't in the mood to entertain them.

Approaching the door, he swung it open and recoiled in surprise!

A crowd stood before him, all donning construction helmets, with a fleet of heavy machinery behind them.

The adjacent lane was lined with large trucks laden with building supplies.

The workers' gazes were fixed on Su Ming with keen interest.

Leading the pack was a middle-aged man sporting a white hat, his face creased with an ingratiating grin.

“Good day, Mr. Su. Allow me to introduce myself—I’m the owner of Dihua Construction Company!”

Chapter 134

C134 – A Busy Construction Site!

“Hello,” Su Ming greeted, reaching out his hand. They shook hands briefly.

The boss was on the verge of tears. He had just shaken hands with Mr. Su! It was an immense honor for him.

“Rest assured, Mr. Su, we will construct the most impeccable wall for you in record time to meet your daily agricultural needs!” the boss declared, thumping his chest with confidence.

Su Ming observed the workers, buzzing with energy as if they had been given a shot of adrenaline. He blinked, puzzled. Had they all taken the Body-stretching Pill? He had simply asked for a wall to be built.

Yet, the boss had personally arrived, fully prepared. Gathering such a quantity of materials in a brief period was no small feat. The boss had mobilized the entire construction site, directing them to transport only the finest materials. They were in luck; a wall was already scheduled for construction at another site, and since the factory was for their own use, they had access to premium materials. That’s how they managed to deliver everything so swiftly.

“There’s no need to rush,” Su Ming said with a smile.

But the boss was adamant, shaking his head vigorously. “Mr. Su, please don’t worry. We understand your expectations and I assure you, we’ll complete the task as quickly as possible!” Without waiting for a response, he signaled the workers to start, and they sprang into action.

“Mr. Su, I’ll leave you be!” With that, the boss headed to the construction site to oversee the work.

Su Ming blinked again. This boss was the head of a construction company and was acutely aware of the value of the central building. Demolishing an entire building and reverting it to farmland was a colossal task, typically requiring at least half a month. Yet, Su Ming had accomplished it overnight, a testament to his significant influence.

This time, the boss had taken it upon himself to be present. Not only was he personally involved, but he also supervised the workers on-site. He had even tripled their wages and hired a chef to set up a small kitchen nearby. He was determined to ensure the workers had ample energy and unwavering morale to build a wall that was nothing short of perfection. He had also instructed the village head to spare no effort in supporting the project.

At that moment, Su Ming sat in a chair, his eyes closed in contemplation.

The gift had taken him by surprise, but what astonished him even more was the System's fusion of the two parcels of land.

He had never entertained such a possibility, having resigned himself to the idea of forever owning just two acres.

Recently, Su Ming had made a trip back home.

Although he had considerable farmland there, the System had remained silent, suggesting that perhaps only adjacent lands could be merged.

Any other combination seemed out of the question.

From a bird's-eye view, Su Ming's location formed a perfect square, encased by four major roads at its borders.

He stood on a vacant lot, with two major trading firms at his back.

Beside him rose the imposing Guoxing Building, along with the newly acquired empty plot.

Several towering buildings flanked the area, their collective presence creating a square enclosure.

A thought struck Su Ming: if he were to acquire all the surrounding structures, the expanse of his land would multiply exponentially.

Money had never been Su Ming's driving force.

Yet now, he pondered whether he should amass more wealth to purchase all the neighboring properties.

This time, Su Ming had resolved to cultivate vegetables, fruits, and other crops.

He phoned the shopkeeper, requesting a delivery of additional items.

Perhaps he should consider planting coconut trees?

The idea of growing fruit had long appealed to Su Ming.

But anyone who had visited an orchard knew well the low density at which fruit trees could be planted; a mere two acres could hardly accommodate a few.

Now, however, the situation had changed; three acres had appeared as if from thin air.

All of Su Ming's previous plantings, including the cacti, had withered after harvest.

He was curious to see if fruit trees might yield a different outcome.

Could it be that each harvest would bring a new surprise, given the land's remarkably short growth cycle?

The prospect of harvesting every couple of days thrilled him.

Yet, Su Ming realized his landholdings were still insufficient.

He should consider establishing another breeding farm, in line with his ranch system.

Previously, the limited size of his land had curbed such ambitions.

But with enough acreage, Su Ming might just see his plans come to fruition.

All of a sudden, Su Ming found himself with a multitude of admirers. It must be acknowledged that the gift from Wang Guohui had ushered in a whole new world for Su Ming.

Chapter 135

C135 – Why Did You Come Again??

The construction workers were bustling with activity at the site.

Glancing over, Su Ming estimated that the corn would be ready for harvest very soon.

Indeed, the corn had sprouted.

Upon entering the field, he observed that the stalks had reached over two meters in height.

Su Ming faintly recalled the days of his youth when his family lived in poverty.

He remembered cutting the corn, savoring the subtle sweetness in the final segments of the stalks, reminiscent of sugarcane.

To the eye, this corn seemed indistinguishable from any other.

Yet each ear was tightly swathed in its husk, concealing the kernels within.

A sense of anticipation stirred in Su Ming. What wonders might this crop yield?

Lost in thought, Su Ming caught a glimpse of a familiar silhouette at the door.

President Chen!

With a warm smile and hands rubbing together, President Chen entered with enthusiasm.

“Mr. Su, I see you’re hard at work.”

Su Ming paused, puzzled.

What brought President Chen here today?

Hadn’t he specifically asked President Chen not to visit?

“President Chen, what brings you here?” Su Ming inquired with a smile.

Anxiety was written all over President Chen’s face.

He knew he should have stayed away today, yet here he was, unannounced and uninvited.

The fear of upsetting Su Ming weighed heavily on him.

Fidgeting at the doorway, President Chen broached the subject, "Mr. Su, I have friends from the capital looking to purchase jade. I'm not well-versed in it, but I've heard you're familiar with these matters. Could you possibly lend your expertise...?"

Su Ming, taken aback, clarified, "President Chen, are you asking me to join them in buying jade?"

"No!" President Chen vehemently denied, shaking his head.

He respected Mr. Su's stature too much to impose on him as a mere guide.

"Is Mr. Su single, by any chance?" President Chen's expression turned mischievous as he added, "Among those accompanying you is a stunning beauty, and I've spoken of your credentials. Rest assured, there will be no complications."

Su Ming offered a nonchalant smile in response.

His recent experiences with Wang Xue had left him with little interest in romance.

Su Ming knew that with wealth and status, admirers were never in short supply.

He was neither capricious in love nor a womanizer.

While he did appreciate beauty, the true measure for him was whether she loved him in return.

Su Ming was well aware that President Chen was keen on setting him up with a girlfriend. Yet, he wasn't particularly interested in the idea. Still, he couldn't ignore the fact that President Chen had been a great help to him. And now, President Chen had a small favor to ask, and Su Ming wasn't otherwise occupied.

"Alright," Su Ming agreed, nodding. "Let me get ready, and I'll be with you shortly."

With that, Su Ming went back to his villa to change into fresh, crisp clothes to look a bit more presentable.

“Mr. Su, thank you so much!” President Chen was ecstatic, deeply moved by Su Ming’s acquiescence.

Instead of taking his own car, Su Ming joined President Chen in his vehicle, with President Chen taking on the role of chauffeur. He drove with meticulous care, and soon they reached their destination—a five-star hotel.

At the hotel entrance, three people were waiting. The man in the center was middle-aged, slim, and exuded an air of nobility. Despite his simple attire, his distinguished status was apparent. Flanking him were two individuals: to his left, a short, plump man gently fanning himself, his slightly squinted eyes giving off an air of simplicity; to his right, a young girl who appeared no older than seventeen or eighteen, with a cute, doll-like face that hinted at her intelligence.

“Mr. Zhang, my apologies for our tardiness,” President Chen said as he approached and shook hands with the middle-aged man. “Mr. Zhang, this is Mr. Su, the gentleman I’ve told you about.”

Zhang Tao paused, taking in Su Ming. President Chen had briefed him on Su Ming’s remarkable situation—a young man in possession of a city-center plot worth billions, who chose to cultivate the land himself. To Zhang Tao, the concept was almost beyond belief.

After making a few inquiries with his contacts in the capital, Zhang Tao found no mention of a Su Ming among the city’s prominent families. Just who was this Su Ming?

“Hello, my name is Zhang Tao. Please, feel free to call me Uncle Zhang,” said Zhang Tao, offering a warm handshake.

Su Ming responded with a serene smile, and they shook hands. “I’m Su Ming.”

Zhang Tao nodded with a warm smile.

“Mr. Zhang, Mr. Su, it’s sweltering outside. Shall we continue our conversation in the car?”

“Sounds good.”

Shortly thereafter, an RV rolled up from a distance, and they climbed aboard one by one.

Zhang Tao grinned, gesturing towards the plump fellow beside him. “This is my friend, Lee Tiankuo, a seasoned pro in the world of antiques. He’s here to lend me a hand with my purchases.”

Lee Tiankuo, a man of few words, simply offered a shy smile and a nod in response.

“And this is my daughter, Zhang Tongtong. I’m afraid I’ve doted on her a bit too much. If she happens to say anything out of turn, please don’t take offense.”

Zhang Tao chuckled.

“Dad!”

Zhang Tongtong’s mood soured at the remark. She pursed her lips and protested, “I’m very well-behaved. Nice to meet you, Mr. Su!”

Su Ming couldn’t help but smile.

One glance at the young woman’s demeanor, and he could tell Zhang Tao’s words were spot on.

Once the introductions were out of the way, Zhang Tao got down to business.

“My father’s 80th birthday is coming up, and he’s always had a passion for antiques.”

“I’m here on a work trip and lost track of time. I’ll be heading back in a few days, and it would be too late to shop for antiques elsewhere.”

“I’ve heard about a famous spot in Eastsea City known for its antiques, so I thought I’d check it out.”

“Su Ming, I’ve been told you’ve accomplished quite a bit in the field of antiques, and I was hoping you could assist me. Would that be possible?”

Zhang Tao’s request was delivered with a pleasant ease.

Su Ming replied, “President Chen might be giving me too much credit. My experience is limited, and I’m not sure how much help I can be.”

“Don’t sell yourself short.”

Zhang Tao let out a hearty laugh.

Su Ming was no stranger to Antique and Jade City.

Legends of his expertise still circulated there.

Chapter 136

C136 – Ancient Antique Shop

“Mr. Zhang, are you looking to purchase a finished jade piece this time, or are you considering cutting your own stone?” President Chen inquired from nearby.

In the past, the jade trade was the domain of professionals. But as living standards improved, the industry flourished rapidly, attracting a surge in counterfeiters. Finished jade pieces are, of course, extracted or carved from raw stones, and there are many varieties. The most coveted are the top-tier emeralds and earth king greens. Often, it’s a matter of luck. Some strike it rich overnight, while others fall into poverty just as quickly. Finding a flawless piece of jade is no small feat, yet even the simplest carving can fetch an exorbitant price if the stone is right.

“We’ll see how it goes,” Zhang Tao mused. “I might just pick up a finished piece.”

President Chen nodded, then added, “However, I’ve heard that a new shipment of foreign raw stones recently arrived. Wouldn’t you like to give it a try?”

Zhang Tongtong’s eyes lit up at the mention. “I want one!” she exclaimed.

Zhang Tao affectionately stroked his daughter’s hair. At over fifty, he was the father of a twenty-year-old, a fact that seemed to delight him.

Their conversation flowed easily as they made their way to their destination. Su Ming had visited before but hadn’t ventured inside; this time, he was keen to explore. President Chen, well-acquainted with the area, led the way with ease. Lee Tiankuo, the quiet one, kept to himself, while the beautiful Zhang Tongtong, close in age to Su Ming, chatted with him nonstop.

Two hours flew by as they browsed through numerous shops, yet few items truly captured Zhang Tao’s attention. Nonetheless, he had come prepared and had mentally noted a few pieces of interest: an ivory fan, a high-quality jade ruyi, and an inkstone. The trade in ivory was now illegal, with only heirlooms remaining on the market. This particular fan was a rarity, valued at over three million. Its price was lower than it should have been due to minor defects—two of the fan’s blades had cracks. The jade was of decent quality, albeit with some impurities.

Su Ming couldn’t help but realize the immense profitability of the antique business.

He had a knack for finding treasures in the countryside and other places, often earning hundreds of times the profit margin.

“I didn’t eat much at lunch, and now I’m actually feeling quite hungry,” Zhang Tao remarked as he paused.

He had been tied up in meetings all morning and had only grabbed a quick bite with his daughter and Lee Tiankuo at noon. His hunger was catching up with him now.

President Chen quickly located a restaurant he had visited before, known for its tasty cuisine. Su Ming, upon entering, immediately noticed the prime location of the establishment. The top floor was the third,

and it was adorned with elegant mahogany furniture that exuded an air of antiquity. The waitresses were all tall and attractive, adding to the pleasant ambiance. It was no surprise, given that this was Antiques City, a place frequented by the affluent. Those less well-off seldom ventured here. Though Su Ming was wealthy, he seldom indulged in such luxuries.

The group of five settled at their tables, ordering six dishes in total, with a bowl of rice each. Zhang Tao, being older and having a diminished appetite of late, didn't eat much. Lee Tiankuo's hefty size made sense, given his hearty appetite. Su Ming, not one for fuss, had worked up a hunger after skipping lunch and ended up eating three bowls of rice. Watching him, Zhang Tao felt a pang of envy; in his younger days, he could out-eat Su Ming and found himself longing for those times.

Zhang Tongtong, who was usually very disciplined with her diet to maintain her figure, was tempted by the sight of Su Ming's enjoyment and allowed herself a bowl of rice. After a period of relaxation and some tea, they descended the stairs.

As they approached the entrance, a middle-aged man holding a box brightened up and approached them. "President Chen, you've arrived?"

With a hearty laugh, President Chen replied, "This time, I'm accompanying Mr. Zhang from the capital. He's looking for a birthday gift for a relative."

"Oh?" Boss Zhu, momentarily taken aback, smiled at Zhang Tao. "Mr. Zhang, what kind of gift are you looking to buy? I have a few treasures that might interest you. Would you honor me by taking a look at my collection?"

"Of course," Zhang Tao readily agreed to the request.

As they traveled, President Chen took the opportunity to tell Zhang Tao a bit about Boss Zhu.

Boss Zhu owned a sizable shop known as Fragrance Hall.

He indeed possessed some fine treasures.

President Chen had previously purchased several items from him, and over time, they had become friends.

Chapter 137

C137 – Good Stuff

Boss Zhu led the way, and the group of six quickly reached their destination. The area was bustling, so Boss Zhu took them through a back entrance, up a narrow set of stairs, directly to the third floor. The first and second floors were crowded with vendors, creating a cacophony of noise. In contrast, the third floor was a haven of tranquility.

This level was entirely composed of private rooms—four in total. It was common knowledge that these rooms were reserved for dealing in particularly valuable treasures. Boss Zhu ushered them into one of the private rooms, and upon entering, they were struck by its spaciousness. Bookshelves brimming with volumes lined the walls, and a circular sofa occupied the center of the room. Next to the sofa stood a tea table, upon which tea was steeping, and at its heart, a sandalwood burner emitted a fragrant smoke. The walls were adorned with the calligraphy and paintings of notable figures.

Lee Tiankuo cast a cursory glance at the surroundings before dismissing them; the artwork was clearly counterfeit. After all, who would hang genuine masterpieces in a commercial establishment?

“Boss Zhu, let’s dispense with the pleasantries,” President Chen said with a smile. “You wouldn’t have invited us here unless you had some treasures to show. Please, bring them out for us to see.”

“Not a problem, just give me a moment,” Boss Zhu replied and stepped out to have a waiter come in and serve tea.

“Boss Zhu really is a major player; he’s got a few treasures,” President Chen remarked, a twinkle in his eye. “I’ve heard he recently acquired some impressive items.”

“He’s probably gone to his office,” chimed in Zhang Tao. “I’ve heard he has a custom-made safe there, costing him millions from overseas. That’s where he keeps all the treasures.”

As President Chen and Zhang Tao engaged in lively conversation, Lee Tiankuo remained preoccupied with the tabletop. Meanwhile, Zhang Tongtong and Su Ming were huddled together, whispering quietly. Zhang Tao looked on with delight at the scene—his daughter was at the age to find a boyfriend, and Su Ming, who had merely come to accompany President Chen, had inadvertently turned into an exceedingly suitable son-in-law.

After a short wait of about fifteen minutes, the door swung open, and Boss Zhu re-entered, beaming as he approached with several boxes in hand.

“I understand you’re looking for a gift for an elder, and naturally, you wouldn’t settle for anything ordinary. I have a selection of items here for you to consider.”

As Boss Zhu spoke, he unveiled the first box to reveal a painting.

The group leaned in for a closer inspection and were astounded to discover it was a Tang Bohu original.

“Boss Zhu, you’ve got quite the knack for acquiring rare pieces. How did you manage to obtain a Tang Bohu painting?” President Chen exclaimed, well aware of the high market value of Tang Bohu’s work, not to mention the fact that his paintings were considered priceless treasures rarely sold.

“Nothing is impossible. I stumbled upon it by chance in a rural area,” Boss Zhu replied with a satisfied grin. “However, based on the style, it appears to have been painted during Tang Bohu’s youth, before his technique had fully matured.”

Lee Tiankuo perked up at this and scrutinized the painting with great interest.

President Chen and Zhang Tao also studied the artwork attentively.

Zhang Tongtong, however, seemed unimpressed and listlessly shifted her gaze to the other boxes.

“This is no forgery,” Lee Tiankuo finally declared after a thorough examination, giving a nod of approval.

Zhang Tao breathed a sigh of relief, relieved to have found a gift option that met his satisfaction for the day.

“But...” Lee Tiankuo paused, “If I’m not mistaken, there used to be a significant stain in the lower right corner, which has since been expertly cleaned and restored. Without that stain, the painting’s value would undoubtedly be higher.”

Boss Zhu was taken aback, not expecting Lee Tiankuo to be such a connoisseur.

“You’re quite impressive! Indeed, the painting had a stain previously,” Boss Zhu admitted openly, without any attempt to conceal the truth.

Zhang Tao’s face fell slightly upon hearing this; his grandfather was an expert in these matters.

“Let’s move on to the next item,” Boss Zhu suggested with a chuckle, setting aside the small box next to him and revealing its contents.

To their surprise, it contained a pearl.

“And this is...” Lee Tiankuo carefully donned a pair of gloves and examined the object closely. “Could this be a pair of Night-Luminescent Pearls?”

“They’re quite remarkable, but my grandfather isn’t fond of such items,” Zhang Tao commented, shaking his head in disinterest.

“No worries, I have more treasures to show you,” Boss Zhu assured them, undeterred.

Zhang Tao, with an air of mystery, carefully opened the last box, revealing a tiny wine cup.

“This is...”

Lee Tiankuo’s eyes sparkled with recognition.

This artifact was thought to be lost to time.

Crafted from porcelain, the small wine cup was a relic of a bygone era.

The technique used to fire such pieces had vanished long ago.

The ceramic was so delicate, as thin as a cicada's wing, that it would break upon the slightest touch. In ancient times, only the Wang Clan nobility possessed such treasures.

Yet, a century ago, during a dark chapter in history, the artisan who mastered this craft destroyed it to prevent its secrets from spreading.

Since then, the technique had been lost.

Now, such porcelain was exceedingly rare on the market.

The cup was modest in size, so its price wouldn't be exorbitant, but it wouldn't be cheap either.

Lee Tiankuo refrained from handling it directly, instead examining it closely within the box.

"Boss Zhu, we've come with genuine intentions this time. Please, name your price," President Chen said with a smile.

Boss Zhu returned the smile and leisurely held up four fingers.

President Chen glanced at Zhang Tao, who in turn looked to Lee Tiankuo.

After scrutinizing the piece for a full thirty minutes, Lee Tiankuo finally nodded in approval.

Su Ming watched on, internally marveling.

Four fingers likely meant 40 million.

They might not be experts in this field, but they were no strangers to the headlines.

Blue and White Porcelain carried a hefty price tag, especially when crafted using a technique that had disappeared.

A decade ago, an auction that captivated the nation featured a royal blue and white porcelain bowl that fetched an astronomical 300 million.

Chapter 138

C138 – Is It Fake??

But that was the price a decade ago. Nowadays, inflation has driven costs up.

“Boss Zhu, how did you come by this item?”

“Don’t worry, I acquired it from a friend. He had borrowed money from me, but due to his company’s troubles, he couldn’t repay it. So, he sold it to me. I paid 20 million yuan for it.”

Boss Zhu certainly wouldn’t be so candid with just anyone.

Yet, those in the antiques trade place great importance on an item’s provenance.

A treasure once used by royalty and handed down commands a premium.

Conversely, antiques of dubious or stolen origin fetch far less.

And the potential for appreciation in value for antiques is significant.

“This piece is exceptional, and it’s Chenghua porcelain.”

“Its craftsmanship is highly refined. It’s clear that the creator was a master. The most remarkable aspect is how well this precious item has been preserved. It’s flawless – truly miraculous.”

“The motif appears to be ‘All Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix,’ likely an artifact intended for royal use, possibly even for the empress.”

“It seems there was a minor issue during production, which has left the red color somewhat less vibrant.”

Lee Tiankuo is usually a man of few words, but in situations like this, he can’t stop talking.

Su Ming, sitting to the side, struggles to grasp his full meaning.

But Lee Tiankuo’s insights are sound, and his observations factual.

“Mr. Lee, you’re clearly a connoisseur. You’re spot on,” Boss Zhu acknowledged with a nod.

“Perhaps we could discuss the price now?” interjected President Chen.

“President Chen, my asking price is steep. Frankly, for anyone else, I’d inflate it tenfold. But for you, a friend, I’ve quoted a fair figure.”

Boss Zhu then opened a folder, revealing it was brimming with photographs – snapshots of industry experts posing with antiques.

The items Boss Zhu had prepared were indeed impressive.

With such photos, the price could only go up, never down.

Zhang Tao was quite content.

The elder in his family adored Blue and White Porcelain. Securing this gem would surely delight him.

For Zhang Tao, a few tens of millions of yuan was a trifle.

“If I can, I’ll just buy this piece outright.”

Zhang Tao said with a grin, “Boss Zhu, give me your rock-bottom price.”

After a moment’s consideration, Boss Zhu replied, “35 million yuan.”

Boss Zhu had his reasons for the price drop.

Firstly, President Chen was the head of the largest local bank. A successful deal would ensure that he’d be the first person President Chen thought of for future business, potentially yielding profits well beyond five million yuan.

He could see that Zhang Tao was no ordinary man—there were plenty of wealthy individuals in the capital.

He also noticed the old man of Zhang’s family had a penchant for antiques. So, while he earned less on this deal, he viewed it as an investment in his future.

He was acquainted with a heavyweight in the capital, which could lead to more clients from that area.

Zhang Tao considered the price to be quite a bargain.

They weren’t rushing to close the deal; instead, they struck up a conversation.

Su Ming and Zhang Tongtong were engaged in lively chatter. Being close in age, Su Ming saw no reason to decline a conversation with a beautiful woman.

At that moment, Zhang Tongtong examined the item with a magnifying glass. After a long inspection, finding nothing, she passed it to Su Ming.

Su Ming hadn't intended to speak up today.

But when Zhang Tongtong handed over the item, he couldn't resist activating the scan.

Blue and White Porcelain, the base of the cup is a forgery, valued at 500,000 yuan.

Su Ming was dumbfounded by the result.

He blinked, struggling to believe his eyes.

Staring intently, he scrutinized the piece for a good while.

The System was infallible.

This meant the so-called 35-million-yuan treasure was a counterfeit.

Su Ming looked up at the group, still deep in jovial conversation, then took the magnifying glass and gave the Blue and White Porcelain another close examination.

Indeed, he discovered several minuscule cracks at the base.

Lee Tiankuo had been specifically brought in by Zhang Tao.

President Chen had described Su Ming as a formidable figure in the field.

Even Lee Tiankuo had not detected the fake.

Su Ming glanced at Boss Zhu again, who remained unfazed.

Could Boss Zhu also be in the dark about this?

Considering that even Lee Tiankuo failed to notice, it wouldn't be surprising if Boss Zhu missed it too.

Or could it be that Lee Tiankuo and Boss Zhu are in league with each other, conspiring to fool everyone?

That seems highly improbable, given that Lee Tiankuo hails from the capital and likely hasn't visited this place before.

Moreover, their visit was prompted by President Chen.

Su Ming carefully took the object and examined it closely.

He activated the scanning system again, and this time, the system revealed a crack to Su Ming.

The base of the cup was a counterfeit!

Su Ming blinked, coming to terms with the reality before him.

Chapter 139

C139 – It Was Actually Fake!!

"This expert is truly remarkable," Su Ming marveled.

The counterfeit was so masterfully crafted that it managed to deceive both Boss Zhu and Lee Tiankuo!

Rumors had been circulating about a group of experts in the market who specialized in creating fakes.

These individuals had been around for over a century, blending seamlessly into society.

Resorting to fluorescence powder was the most basic trick in the book.

If a counterfeit was the work of a truly skilled expert, it would be nearly impossible for anyone to detect its falseness.

Take this Blue and White Porcelain bowl, for instance.

Without the scan, Su Ming would never have spotted the subtle signs.

The bowl's main body was authentic, but its base was a forgery. Yet, the base's origin was peculiarly unique, and it commanded a hefty price.

It seemed quite possible that the two pieces were originally one, but had separated due to some mishap. An expert had then meticulously restored the bowl, reuniting the main body with the base.

Nevertheless, if the bowl had ever been broken, its value would be significantly diminished, regardless of its original unity.

At that moment, Zhang Tao and Boss Zhu had just shaken hands, with Zhang Tao preparing to make the payment.

Su Ming blinked and interjected, "Hold on a moment."

His words cast a hush over the room as everyone turned to look at him.

President Chen paused before inquiring, “Mr. Su...?”

Truth be told, Su Ming had no desire to entangle himself in this debacle.

But Zhang Tao was a decent man, and the stakes were high—the bowl’s price tag exceeded 30 million.

“I’m relatively new to the world of antiques,” Su Ming confessed.

“I’m not particularly knowledgeable about them either. However, something about the base of this Blue and White Porcelain bowl seems off to me. Perhaps we should examine it more closely?”

He spoke with deliberate caution.

His statement left the onlookers dumbfounded, exchanging bewildered glances.

Lee Tiankuo and Zhang Tao’s brows furrowed as they carefully inspected the bowl.

Boss Zhu’s anxiety spiked.

Could there actually be an issue with the item?

A successful transaction would net him a profit of over ten million, not to mention a new friend. But if the deal was flawed, the money would pale in comparison to the potential damage to his reputation.

Lee Tiankuo scrutinized each bowl with a magnifying glass, examining the details with intense concentration. Despite his efforts, the problem eluded him.

Su Ming let out a sigh. “Take a look at where the base meets the bowl; there seems to be a gap,” he suggested abruptly.

Lee Tiankuo was momentarily taken aback. He hadn't noticed any issue. "Mr. Su..." President Chen was equally puzzled. He respected Su Ming as a man of reason, who wouldn't speak without cause. Yet, with Lee Tiankuo's extensive experience in the antiques trade, even he had failed to detect any flaw in the bowl. What was the explanation?

"Su Ming, there's no need to hold back. Speak your mind," Zhang Tao urged, his smile tinged with seriousness. The gift was meant for a respected elder in the family, and it mattered greatly.

"I'll be straightforward then. I suspect that the bowl's base and sides were once broken and have been glued back together," Su Ming declared.

Boss Zhu burst into laughter. "Brother, don't spout nonsense. I've had the bowl's authenticity verified by experts. There's no chance it's flawed. We even have signed photos and a certificate of authentication. I would never dream of deceiving President Chen with a counterfeit."

"I was merely speculating," Su Ming responded with a nonchalant shrug.

Boss Zhu's mood soured. Zhang Tao was on the verge of completing the transaction when Su Ming interjected his doubts, potentially jeopardizing the deal.

Zhang Tao's face grew stern. Quick-witted Zhang Tongtong chimed in, "Dad, this place is vast. How about we explore a bit?"

Gift-giving should be accompanied by auspicious signs, especially when it's for an elder's milestone 80th birthday. A smooth purchase process boded well, but any complications could be seen as a bad omen.

As Zhang Tao prepared to leave, frustration boiled within Boss Zhu. His potential sale was slipping away, along with a valuable friendship.

"President Chen, we've been acquaintances for years. You're familiar with my integrity in business. How could this possibly be a fake?"

Boss Zhu was growing impatient.

President Chen blinked, his gaze shifting from Zhang Tao to Su Ming, and finally resting on Boss Zhu. He simply shook his head, remaining silent. He was in a bind, unable to risk offending either man—one a friend of the head of the capital's central bank, the other the enigmatic and influential Mr. Su.

On the sidelines, Lee Tiankuo peered through his magnifying glass, absorbed in scrutiny. Su Ming's words had planted a seed of suspicion in his mind. No matter how he looked at it, something seemed off.

Boss Zhu, unable to contain his frustration, turned to Su Ming. "How about a wager, Boss Zhu? If this item is a counterfeit, what kind of compensation are you thinking?"

Boss Zhu's patience had reached its limit. "Prove that my item is a fake, and you can choose anything from my shop. But if it's genuine, my loss today will be substantial. How will you make it right?"

With a serene smile, Su Ming replied, "Tenfold compensation."

With that, Su Ming tapped the bowl on the table, eliciting gasps from the onlookers as it shattered with a crisp, resonating snap. The once thought-to-be-lost ceramic bowl fragmented in an instant.

Before the crowd could voice their astonishment, they saw the bottom of the Blue and White Porcelain bowl, perfectly intact. The break revealed the hidden chemicals inside.

The room was filled with astonishment—the item was indeed a fake.

Chapter 140

C140 – Good Gift

Boss Zhu was initially furious, but the sight before him made him rise to his feet in an instant.

Lee Tiankuo quickly brought the item over and after examining it intently for a while, he let out a sigh.

"You're truly impressive."

Truth be told, everyone present knew the reality of the situation, even without Lee Tiankuo's acknowledgment.

Having worked on Antique Street for many years, their judgment was sharp.

Boss Zhu was on the verge of tears.

He had hoped to turn a profit and perhaps gain a friend in the process. Instead, his predicament had only worsened.

Zhang Tao was equally taken aback.

A heavyweight in the capital, he wielded considerable status and power.

Yet, even for someone of his stature, the unfolding events were startling.

The sophistication of the forgery was remarkable, but it had been exposed by the young man. They had been outsmarted by someone much younger.

The forger had been clever, indeed.

The bowl was so thin and delicate that most would refrain from handling it too much.

Hence, the adhesive used wasn't very strong.

It only needed to maintain a semblance of integrity.

But the forger likely never anticipated that today, a young man would shatter it outright.

The thought still sent shivers down Zhang Tao's spine.

If he had spent tens of millions on this counterfeit today, it would be one thing. But the consequences would be dire if the elder found out.

President Chen's expression grew stern.

The guests at Boss Zhu's were there on account of Zhang Tao's influence.

Yet, Boss Zhu had attempted to deceive them with such an item.

Boss Zhu's actions seemed a deliberate attempt to disgrace me.

President Chen fixed his gaze on Boss Zhu. "Boss Zhu, we've known each other for quite some time. Can you explain what's happened here?"

Boss Zhu stood there, his hands shaking, his complexion ashen, his feet tapping nervously.

"President Chen, I truly had no idea it was a fake. I've been duped just the same!"

Boss Zhu seemed so frail he was nearly collapsing.

"Boss Zhu, buying a fake is your own doing. But our patronage today was based on the trust we placed in your honesty."

Mr. Zhang is a prominent figure from the capital, and this time he's looking to purchase a birthday gift for a senior family member. Should his elder discover the gift is a counterfeit, it would reflect very poorly on Mr. Zhang," President Chen stated with an icy gaze.

"I am truly sorry!" Boss Zhu quickly offered his apologies. "President Chen, you know my character. I would never intentionally sell fake merchandise."

Everyone present could almost certainly conclude that Boss Zhu had been unwittingly swindled, given his lack of awareness.

“Let’s go,” President Chen commanded, his face a mask of stoicism as he led the way out, with the others trailing behind him.

Boss Zhu remained in the private room, lost in thought. The item had cost him a staggering 20 million yuan. Not only had he suffered a significant financial loss, but he had also managed to offend President Chen. Should word get out, his reputation would be tarnished.

Once the group descended to the street, they noticed the sky had darkened.

Zhang Tao let out a sigh and shook his head, “I think I’ll return to the capital to find a birthday present.”

“Mr. Zhang, I sincerely apologize for the inconvenience today,” President Chen said, clearly mortified.

“It’s no trouble at all,” Zhang Tao replied with a smile, giving President Chen a reassuring pat on the shoulder. His attention then shifted to Su Ming. “Young man, you have an impressive eye for detail. Without you, I might have been duped today.”

Lee Tiankuo chimed in with a grin, “I’ve always prided myself on my discerning abilities, but I must admit, I pale in comparison to this young man.”

Laughter filled the air, dissipating any lingering discomfort from earlier.

He promptly left the parking lot in his car.

After saying goodbye to Zhang Tao, Su Ming and Zhang Tongtong exchanged contact details before heading their separate ways.

President Chen had initially planned to join Su Ming in the fields for some work, but after a moment's hesitation, he refrained from asking. Su Ming had, after all, told him not to come today. With a heavy heart, President Chen returned home, while Su Ming made his way back to the fields.

Upon his return, Su Ming observed that the construction workers had nearly completed the perimeter wall. At this rate, the job would be finished within two days. Yet, Su Ming noticed another group of laborers busily working on a small patch of open ground just beyond the area.

Su Ming didn't dwell on the construction noise, chalking it up to likely being a city-planned project that had no bearing on him. Yet, no sooner had he entered the courtyard than the sound of a car engine drew his attention to the gate. Turning around, Su Ming spotted a black car that seemed vaguely familiar.

As he pondered its origin, the car door swung open, and out stepped Wang Guohui.

"Mr. Su," Wang greeted, approaching with a congenial smile.

Surprised, Su Ming queried, "Mr. Wang, what brings you here?"

Wang Guohui's chuckle left Su Ming feeling slightly uneasy.

"Mr. Su, I've heard about the underground garage you've built, housing hundreds of cars," Wang began. "I imagine refueling them all could be quite the hassle."

"Therefore, I've constructed a gas station right next to your property. Rest assured, it's exclusively for your use."

With that, Wang Guohui produced an oil card from his pocket, offering it to Su Ming. "Please, take this."

Blinking in astonishment, Su Ming couldn't help but be impressed. It was clear why Wang was the chairman of the Angel Group. The oil card, while of modest value to someone like Su Ming who wasn't concerned about money, addressed the sheer inconvenience of refueling his extensive collection of vehicles. He was genuinely pleased with the gift.

“I’m aware that money isn’t an issue for you, but convenience can be when you’re on the go. Moreover, this card is a supreme VIP card from the Business Alliance,” Wang continued. “I registered it under your name. With it, you’ll enjoy significant discounts and top-tier service whenever you patronize any Business Alliance hotel or shopping center.”

Wang then handed over a sleek black card, placing it into Su Ming’s hand. This gesture was yet another that Su Ming found immensely gratifying. Wang Guohui’s talent for ingratiation clearly outshone that of President Chen. The gift might not have been extraordinary, but its utility was undeniable.