

A Father 63

Chapter 63: Thousand Buddha Carving Banquet, Chess Saint Watching the Game

Xi Xi's birthday had just passed, and the weather became increasingly frigid.

Winter-sweet flowers stood proud in the cold winter, touched by pure white snowflakes, and the bluestone slabs on the long street of the Inner City were piled high with thick snow, dazzlingly white.

Li Che bid farewell to Xu You, who led the team out of the city to clear away evil spirits, and returned to his own courtyard in Qingfeng Lane.

Old Chen sat in a rattan chair, drinking old wine under the eaves, staring blankly at the dry old tree in the courtyard.

"Old Chen, what are you thinking about?" Li Che asked curiously after returning and shaking the snow off his oil-paper umbrella.

Old Chen's eyes refocused, and he shook his head, "When you get old, you tend to space out easily..."

"In a while, the Divine Sect will send people to Fei Lei City to select Spirit Children... If Xi Xi stays safe during this period, she will likely be chosen to enter the Divine Sect..."

"Old Chen... I might find it very difficult to see Xi Xi in the future."

Old Chen sighed and took several gulps from his wine gourd.

Having spent so much time with the child, a sudden and long separation would truly make Old Chen feel a tightness in his heart, invaded by endless loneliness and worry.

Worrying that he wouldn't see the child once he passed away...

"Then why don't you join us and go to the Divine Sect to accompany Xi Xi in her cultivation?" Li Che said softly.

Old Chen rolled his eyes at Li Che as if looking at a fool, "A Che... you're still too young."

"The Divine Sect recruits disciples and only family members can accompany them. If Xi Xi joins the sect for cultivation, how could I possibly qualify to follow?" Old Chen shook his head. After all, he was someone in his forties and knew a few things about the inner workings of the Divine Sect.

Upon hearing this, Li Che couldn't help but chuckle, "Don't worry... Xi Xi won't abandon you."

"It's just going to the Divine Sect, no problem..."

Old Chen shook his head. How could the rules of such a colossal entity as the Divine Sect change so easily for you?

Li Che chatted idly with Old Chen for a few more moments before planning to head to the independent workshop to practice his craft.

However, before he could leave, there were rustling footsteps from outside the courtyard.

Li Che looked up, and the snowstorm was torn apart.

Two figures wrapped in crane robes stepped on the soft snow and approached, gently knocking on the wide-open courtyard door.

"Is Master Li there?"

The visitors were none other than Xu Heli and Xu Beihu.

"Congratulations to Master Li on advancing to the 'Ten Cities' Woodcarving Master, it's truly joyous and praiseworthy, and indeed a fortunate event for our Xu Family," Xu Heli said with a gentle smile on his lips, a Divine sword hanging at his waist.

His eyes held a mix of surprise and fervor as he looked at Li Che.

Xu Heli had truly not expected a mud-legged commoner from the Outer City to have risen to become a Woodcarving Master.

"It's just luck," Li Che responded with a fist salute.

It was clear that the Xu Family didn't take him as seriously as one might imagine, otherwise it wouldn't have been Xu Heli who came but the Family Head, Xu Nanming.

A Woodcarving Master doesn't warrant a personal appeal from the Family Head?

Chen Dabao, who was nonchalantly sitting in the rattan chair, jumped up in shock upon hearing that Li Che had become a Woodcarving Master, his jaw dropping.

What the hell, he didn't know he was the one who taught Li Che woodcarving? Was there no trust anymore?

Old Chen stared at Li Che with uncertainty and disbelief.

But after all, he was an old hand in the martial world and quickly calmed down, keeping many thoughts to himself, without asking aloud.

Xu Beihu, standing beside Xu Heli, also had a complex expression, his shock at this moment still not fully digested.

"A Woodcarving Master relies on true skill and craft, not something that can be achieved with just luck."

"Master Li, don't be modest. I heard Master Li carved a 'Three Immortals Riding Ox Pondering Sword Statue' for my younger brother yesterday? I wonder... could Heli request a Divine Wood Carving from Master Li?" Xu Heli asked with a fist salute.

"Five Hundred Gold Leaves, I'll provide the form and the Spiritual Wood, and although Master Li is a woodcarver for our Xu Family, according to the rules of Woodcarving Masters, Xu Family won't take any commission..."

Five hundred gold for a wood carving.

That truly was an exorbitant price.

But for Divine Cultivators, a Divine Wood Carving that could alleviate months of arduous cultivation was naturally worth it.

After all, building a Divine Foundation and cultivating... every second counted.

Li Che looked at Xu Heli with surprise, coming directly to request a Divine Wood Carving?

The Xu Family's attitude and reaction after learning he became a Woodcarving Master was truly... somewhat unexpected to Li Che.

Chen Dabao by his side also furrowed his eyebrows.

Li Che thought carefully, the 'Chess Saint' Dao Fruit greatly enhanced his reasoning and thinking abilities.

He quickly understood the reason.

"Shopkeeper, I've just become a Woodcarving Master, and carving that statue for Xu You took a lot out of me... I won't be taking orders for now..." Li Che shook his head, refusing the deal.

It wasn't that he didn't want to earn the Five Hundred Gold Leaves.

Instead, he planned to make an attempt at the Meridian Connection Realm in the next few days, allowing himself to have more confidence in the Qi and Blood Martial Path.

Li Qingshan said he would take him to the Mysterious Temple, which Li Che took very seriously, but he was also cautious; the stronger he was, the safer he would be.

Xu Heli's smile gradually faded, and he did not expect Li Che to refuse, even though the reason was plausible.

But he still felt somewhat uncomfortable.

"Then I've troubled Master Li for nothing. Heli will come another day to request a carving..." Xu Heli reined in his emotions and bowed with a fist salute.

After returning the gesture, Xu Heli and Xu Beihu, the two brothers, turned and left.

Old Chen looked at their retreating figures, his brows knitted, "A Che, you really should have taken that order."

"Major changes are likely to happen in Fei Lei City, which is why the Xu Family's attitude towards Woodcarving Masters has changed a bit. They're worried that if they invest resources, you'll just pack up and leave... But if you took the order, the Xu Family's attitude might have softened a bit."

Li Che held open his oil-paper umbrella and smiled, "It's fine."

"Old Chen... now I have the confidence to refuse orders."

Once he finished speaking, he stepped into the snow with his umbrella in hand.

Chen Dabao stared at Li Che, somewhat dazed for a moment.

It was impossible for him to overlap the calm and confident young man before him with the nervous and timid figure who had once sought his help at Xu's Wood Carving Shop in the Outer City.

Could time really bring about such great changes to a person?

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Inside the luxurious carriage, water boiled in the stove.

Steam billowed within the compartment.

Xu Heli sat expressionless on the soft seat, watching the flying snow outside the carriage window.

"I seem to have misjudged... I never imagined that the country bumpkin of those days could one day become a Woodcarving Master..."

"A fish leaping through the dragon's gate, a complete and utter transformation," said Xu Beihu as he poured Xu Heli a cup of tea.

"That is what talent is... producing an Upper Class Spiritual Child like Li Nuanxi, his own talent must certainly be extraordinary."

"What a pity..." Xu Heli shook his head.

He thought of the words spoken by the old grandfather, and a hint of malevolence flashed through his lowered eyelids.

You carve wood carvings for the third brother for free, yet you won't take an order from me even for Five Hundred Gold Leaves...

You surely think highly of yourself!

You have been given face, yet you do not take it...

Xu Heli slowly closed his eyes and said to Xu Beihu, "Go to the City Lord's Mansion and find Zhao Xuanhai. Tell him about Li Che becoming a Woodcarving Master—he has always wanted Li Che to do wood carving, hasn't he?"

"Let his wish be granted."

Upon hearing this, Xu Beihu's hand pouring tea suddenly froze.

Scalding tea spilled out.

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As the sky gradually darkened, snowflakes floated everywhere.

The snowflakes, like goose feathers, scattered across the human world, bringing with them biting cold.

On the main street, there were fewer and fewer pedestrians.

Although the Inner City was more prosperous than the Outer City, it had many fewer inhabitants. Therefore, as soon as it got dark, hardly any pedestrians could be seen.

Zhao Xuanhai wore a bamboo hat, his hand tucked inside the chest of his clothing, his burly figure walking through the human world like a massive bear—yet as he passed, the snow-covered ground did not bear his footprints.

"This Li Che... has actually become a Woodcarving Master, how interesting."

"He truly is a genius. The City Lord will definitely like him. The City Lord's 'Thousand Buddha Carving Banquet' will surely be a success if it can feature a Woodcarving Master."

Most Woodcarving Masters were bound to Noble Families and Clans for many years and were reluctant to make a move.

A newly promoted wild Woodcarving Master was too tempting an opportunity to pass up.

"The Xu Family is decisive, knowing that they cannot stop the City Lord's 'Thousand Buddha Carving Banquet,' they have chosen to directly sell out this newly promoted Woodcarving Master."

"Indeed befitting their merchant origins, cold-blooded and solely profit-driven."

He looked toward the independent workshop in the alley—the Xu Family had directly revealed its location to him.

"Li Che, oh Li Che..."

"You once refused the silver I offered you to drink a toast; now... you shall drink a penalty."

With a step, Zhao Xuanhai pulled out an angry childish mask from his bosom and placed it over his face.

The wind and snow seemed to pause mid-air, as if consumed and melted away by flames.

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Inside the independent workshop,

Li Che sat quietly as the fluttering snow.

Just as it was about to land on the tips of his hair, it was twisted and torn apart by an invisible force.

In front of him, on a nanmu wood board, Li Che had made a chessboard, its vertical and horizontal lines laid out, but without a single chess piece on it—empty and bare.

His palm gently swept over the chessboard.

In an instant,

Inside his chest,

The Dao Fruit "Chess Saint," shook violently.

His spirit soared in an instant, and divine patterns of energy, boiling and interweaving within heaven and earth, traced invisible lines like the crisscrossing of lanes and alleys to form an invisible chessboard.

Li Che slowly opened his eyes.

He saw...

At the mouth of the alley, Zhao Xuanhai slowly took out an angry child's mask and placed it over his face...

He saw him step by step towards the workshop in the alley.

Like a black chess piece on the chessboard.

Impatiently...

Moving towards death.