

Golden 106

Chapter 106 Picture within a Picture (Part 3)

"This is a drying board, used to flatten and dry the painting, mounting materials, and various other mounting materials. You don't understand what a drying rod is? Of course, it's used to dry processed backing paper, colored paper, and various other materials."

While explaining the tools in the room to Zhuang Rui, Song Jun also lectured Zhuang Rui, as if he wanted to return the anger he had suffered to Zhuang Rui.

"This is a copying table, a brush, a bristle brush, a ruler, and a cutting board. And that stone? That's a burnishing stone, also called a polishing stone, used to burnish and smooth the back of the mounting."

Zhuang Rui was also intrigued when he entered. Since Song Jun was willing to be a teacher, he asked him questions one by one. However, Grandpa Fang was impatient and gave a heavy "humph" to Zhuang Rui, saying, "Young man, come here and spread this painting out on the copy table. Song boy, do whatever you want, don't cause trouble here."

Song Jun scratched his head and remained silent. He wasn't stupid; the old man's behavior earlier had made him sense something was amiss, so he naturally wanted to stay and see what mysteries lay within the painting.

The copying table is made of glass and has a built-in fluorescent light. There is another fluorescent light on top of the copying table. This is used when unmounting damaged old paintings. There must be very strong light to avoid damaging the old paintings if you are not careful.

Zhuang Rui unfurled the scroll and laid it flat on the copying table. Old Master Fang first turned on the fluorescent light on the table and observed for a while. Then he turned on the fluorescent light above his head, wanting to see what changes would occur under the strong light. However, after a while, Old Master Fang shook his head in disappointment and turned off both lights.

"Go fetch a basin of water..."

The old man kept his eyes glued to the painting, and gave an order. Zhuang Rui quickly picked up a basin from the corner of the room, went outside, and brought in a bowl of water.

When Zhuang Rui entered, he found that the scroll's top and bottom rods, as well as the scroll ends, had all been removed by Old Master Fang, leaving only the scroll itself. Seeing Zhuang Rui enter, the old man beckoned him over.

After Zhuang Rui brought the basin over, the old man dipped a small brush, about the size of a nail clipper, in the water and began brushing the lower left corner of the painting. The paper was very absorbent; the brush was immediately absorbed upon contact with the paper. The old man continued to dip the brush in water and brush, and after three or five times, the lower left corner, an area of about five or six centimeters square, was completely soaked.

After waving for Zhuang Rui to take the basin away, Old Master Fang stretched out two fingers and gently rubbed them at the corner. The scroll, which was originally a single piece of paper, immediately split into two pieces of paper. However, there were no three pieces of paper as Zhuang Rui had imagined. If this trick was discovered so easily, then the person who mounted the painting would have wasted all that effort.

"Xiao Zhuang, right? I suspect there's more to this painting than meets the eye. I'd like to peel off a few more layers from the Xuan paper, but it's made of sized Xuan paper, which is quite brittle. I'm worried that peeling off the layers might damage it. What do you think?"

If this painting belonged to the Song army, the old man would probably have taken it immediately. However, since the painting belongs to Zhuang Rui, he naturally had to ask first. Otherwise, if he damaged the painting and found nothing inside, it would be difficult to explain. Although he was a master of mounting, he still had to be responsible to his customers.

Zhuang Rui was already overjoyed, but he was still a little surprised by the old man's words and asked with a puzzled look, "How many more layers can be peeled off from such a thin painting?"

"If others can't, I certainly can. Just tell me, if you agree, I'll tear it off; if you don't, take the painting away," Old Master Fang replied decisively.

Zhuang Rui pretended to think for a while before speaking, "Okay, Grandpa Fang, since this painting is fake anyway, let's just consider it as spending three thousand yuan to see your craftsmanship."

"It's hard to say whether it's true or not now..."

The old man replied meaningfully, not because he thought Zhuang Rui could see through the mystery, but because he himself had already guessed most of it.

Seeing that Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement, the old man perked up. The weather was still a bit cold in March, so he took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and took out many bottles and jars from the house. As if he were preparing medicine, he poured some liquid that neither Zhuang Rui nor Song Jun could understand into a basin, and then asked Zhuang Rui to stir it.

After Zhuang Rui stirred for about ten minutes, the liquid in the basin, which was originally like paste, turned into a transparent and very thin liquid. When the old man saw this, he took the basin, placed it at his feet, and then turned the painting "Li Duanduan" over and laid it on the table.

Then, Grandpa Fang found a brand new brush, put the soft bristles into the basin, and after the transparent liquid soaked the brush, he immediately started brushing on the back of the painting. He used one hand to apply force, as if writing calligraphy, and applied the force evenly. In a short while, the entire painting, which was 18,772 centimeters in length and width, was covered with the transparent liquid.

That wasn't all. The old man then found a hand-operated spray bottle in the room and started spraying it onto the painting that had been coated with a transparent liquid. The nozzle of the bottle was extremely fine, and the water that came out was basically in the form of a mist. When the water came into contact with the painting, it immediately blended into it. However, Zhuang Rui and Song Jun, who were watching closely, noticed that the water only adhered to the surface of the painting and did not penetrate into it at all.

"Alright, you two go wait outside..."

Seeing that at the crucial moment, Old Master Fang gave them the order to leave, which greatly disappointed Zhuang Rui and Song Jun. It was like watching a football match where the power went out just as the striker was about to shoot into an empty net, leaving them feeling restless and uneasy.

However, the secrets of the craft are not to be passed on to just a few people. These old craftsmen are extremely particular about the transmission of the skills from master to disciple. The skill of peeling layers is also very easy for some unscrupulous people to exploit. Since Song Jun and Zhuang Rui are not his students, they naturally cannot let them see the core techniques of peeling layers. You should know that in today's society, there are very few people who still have such skills.

Before liberation, some craftsmen would do things like peeling off layers of paper to make a quick profit.

As everyone knows, Xuan paper is extremely easy to absorb ink from; almost every layer can be soaked with the ink of calligraphers and painters. After forgers peel off the layers, a painting can become two or three paintings. However, the more layers are peeled off, the lighter the ink becomes in each painting. Forgers then use several more layers of Xuan paper to mount the painting and add more ink to the areas where the ink is lighter. After this process, the deceptive effect is even better, and it is almost impossible to distinguish between the real and the fake.

The technique of peeling back layers from a painting has existed since ancient times. If the painting or calligraphy being mounted is of average quality, or if the mounter's skill is mediocre, they will not or dare not attempt to forge it. However, if a famous painting encounters a master, the risk of having its layers removed increases significantly. Therefore, many calligraphers and painters do not entrust their valuable works to mounters but instead mount them themselves.

Grandpa Fang did not pass on this skill to outsiders. Even among his few favorite disciples, only two or three were taught it. Therefore, although Zhuang Rui and Song Jun were outsiders, Grandpa Fang did not want them to see it.

The two waited in the living room for about half an hour. During this time, Zhuang Rui ran back to the Mercedes-Benz and let the two little ones out for a while. After the tea was served three times, the old man finally opened the door to the framing room. He looked very tired, but his eyes were bright and he seemed quite excited.

"Xiao Zhuang, you've hit the jackpot."

The old man's first words after he came out left Song Jun and Zhuang Rui puzzled, but Zhuang Rui's expression was obviously an act.

"Come in with me."

Grandpa Fang didn't explain, turned around and walked back. Zhuang Rui and Song Jun followed closely behind. As soon as they entered the room, they saw two paintings pasted on the smooth wall.

Clearly, Tang Bohu's "Li Duanduan" painting, which had been hidden for half a century, has finally revealed its true form. Zhuang Rui stepped forward and carefully compared the two paintings. The content of the two paintings was naturally the same, but the difference could be seen at a glance in the subtle details of the figures' expressions. The figure in one painting was stiff and lifeless, and the painting had cracks, while the lady in the other painting was radiant and had a lifelike expression, as if she was about to step out of the painting.

"This...this, how is this possible, Grandpa Fang, how is this possible?"

Unlike Zhuang Rui, who simply stood in front of the painting to appreciate it, Song Jun held a magnifying glass and practically pressed his face against it. When he finally put the magnifying glass down, he was so surprised that he could barely speak.

Song Jun, a connoisseur of calligraphy and painting, could naturally distinguish the authenticity of the two paintings before him. Looking at the several bright red bell seals on the exposed "Li Duanduan Picture" and the famous figures represented by each bell seal, with Song Jun's professional level after years of immersion in calligraphy and painting, he could almost conclude that the painting was an authentic work by Tang Bohu.

"What's impossible? Are you trying to say that the 'Li Duanduan Picture' is in Nanjing now? Humph, I saw signs of forgery on that painting back then. Although it was painted by someone from the Ming Dynasty, it's not a genuine work by Tang Bohu. Once this painting comes out, I wonder where those people will put their faces, haha."

Grandpa Fang seemed quite dissatisfied with the person who appraised the "Li Duanduan" painting in Nanjing, and he was laughing heartily at the moment, while Song Jun looked at Zhuang Rui with an incredulous expression on his face.

"Brother Song, is there another painting in this picture? The two paintings look quite similar."

Zhuang Rui feigned innocence and asked Song Jun.

"You...you, that's almost too good to be true. I'm telling you, kid, how come you have such good luck? You stumbled upon Wang Shizhen's manuscript, went to the black market and bought a fake painting that everyone else didn't want, and found a genuine piece hidden inside. I, Song Jun, have been in this business for twenty or thirty years, how come I've never found such a bargain before?"

Song Jun looked at Zhuang Rui and shook his head repeatedly. However, he did not doubt that Zhuang Rui could tell the authenticity of the painting beforehand. After all, the painting had changed hands several times and had been appraised by many people. Its professional level was far beyond what Zhuang Rui could match. Even someone like Old Master Fang would not have been able to discover the hidden secrets if he had not started from the mounting.