

Golden 34

Chapter Thirty-Four: Tea Tasting (Part 1)

The private rooms at Jingmingxuan are quite unique, featuring small lattice doors and windows. There's a lattice-covered bar near the entrance, and the walls are mostly lined with antique shelves displaying ceramic jars. In the center of the room is a long, square pearwood table surrounded by six chairs made of huanghuali wood, giving the entire room a Ming and Qing dynasty architectural style.

The private room was quite spacious, easily seventy or eighty square meters. Near the bar by the entrance, there was a small living room area with a circle of bright red leather sofas surrounding a glass coffee table. On the wall opposite the sofas hung a large 70-inch high-definition LCD TV. Inconspicuous small speakers were placed in every corner of the room, creating a setup somewhat like a movie theater, yet it blended well into the overall room. This could be considered a combination of old and new, East and West.

At the doorway stood a shrine to Guan Yu, with three sticks of sandalwood incense burning. Wisps of smoke drifted gently through the room, filling it with a soothing fragrance. The addition of the guzheng music created a truly tranquil and pleasant atmosphere.

"Hehe, this private room of Xiao Song's is not a place that ordinary people can enter. Just these tea tables and chairs are worth at least a million or two. He usually doesn't let us sit here. And this incense is also special. You don't know, do you? This is the best sandalwood that Xiao Song went to Dafosi Temple to get every year on the first day of the Lunar New Year. It has to be burned until the fifteenth without stopping."

After entering the private room, Manager Song took a leisurely sniff, then ignored the items on the antique shelves. Instead, he walked to the square table and carefully stroked the chairs and table that Liu Chuan and the others found unremarkable, his face showing obvious affection.

Zhuang Rui's heart stirred. Ever since the spiritual energy in his eyes turned orange-yellow, he could see through the wood to a thickness of about one centimeter. Since Manager Lü was so proud of these chairs, could they be antiques? Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui followed the example of Old Master Lü and carefully examined the rosewood chair beside him.

Wearing glasses, Zhuang Rui wasn't afraid of being stared at. In the instant he lowered his head, he released the spiritual energy in his eyes. The spiritual energy quickly seeped into the delicate patterns

on the surface of the golden chair back. Although it couldn't penetrate completely, Zhuang Rui still felt a very faint aura merging with the spiritual energy as it entered the rosewood.

The aura was so faint that it was almost imperceptible, much weaker than the spiritual energy he absorbed from the Liu gourd in Sanhe yesterday. If Zhuang Rui hadn't been so focused, he wouldn't have been able to sense it. It wasn't until Zhuang Rui looked at the second rosewood chair that he truly felt the amount of spiritual energy in his eyes had indeed increased slightly.

After making this discovery, Zhuang Rui disregarded everyone else and pretended to be very interested in these antique chairs. He circled the square table, examining all six chairs and absorbing all their spiritual energy. The amount of spiritual energy absorbed from the six rosewood chairs was roughly the same as the amount absorbed from the cricket gourd yesterday. Clearly, the spiritual energy contained in these antiques is not determined by their size.

"Grandpa, please don't make me uncomfortable. How about we go to your residence sometime and let these younger generation broaden their horizons? Oh, Brother Zhuang, are you also interested in Ming and Qing furniture?" Boss Song was greeting everyone with a smile and asked when he saw Zhuang Rui circling around the table as soon as he entered.

"I've often heard that antique huanghuali furniture is valuable, but I've never actually seen any. I'm about to sit on something worth hundreds of thousands, so I have to take a good look now..."

Zhuang Rui raised his head, feigning a greedy expression, which made everyone burst into laughter. He then prepared to sit down, but after some polite polite exchanges, he allowed Old Master Lü to take the seat of honor, with Song Jun accompanying him in the main seat. Everyone else sat down, but there were still two seats short.

The group of people who entered the teahouse with them left after placing their belongings on the square table. However, if you include Xu Wei, Lei Lei, and Qin Xuanbing, who arrived uninvited, there were still eight people in the private room, and the six rosewood chairs were not enough.

"Leilei, let's sit on the sofa. What's the point of that broken chair? It's so cold, sitting on that thing is uncomfortable..."

Seeing that Qin Xuanbing and Xu Wei had unceremoniously found a chair and sat down, Liu Chuan pulled Lei Lei to the sofa and sat down, chatting intimately. The two of them weren't interested in the antiques and manuscripts; if Qin Xuanbing hadn't insisted on coming, they wouldn't have joined in the fun.

After everyone was seated, Song Jun waved to the door, and two slender and pretty waitresses came in. One carried a tea set and placed it on the square table, while the other carried a small red clay stove and placed it on a round wooden stool next to the square table. The red clay stove was long and about six or seven inches high. The charcoal inside was already lit, and the stove also had a lid and a door. It was very well made.

The tea set was also exquisite, a Yixing purple clay teapot, about the size of a fist, in an antique iron chestnut color, with six small teacups distributed around the four sides, white as jade and as thin as paper. Zhuang Rui was quite suspicious that if he picked it up and used a little more force, he might be able to crush it.

"There are no outsiders here. To be honest, even though I run a teahouse, I actually brew my tea in a large teacup. I'm not that particular about it. I recently found some top-quality Tieguan Yin from Anxi, so let's try some of the popular Kung Fu tea from Guangdong today."

While greeting everyone, Boss Song gestured to the two waiters to boil water and brew tea. Since tea tasting and antique appraisal were to be done first, everyone present except Zhuang Rui was a seasoned and shrewd person who had been in the business for many years. No one was in a hurry to touch the antiques that they had brought to the square table. They all watched the two waiters brew tea with great interest. Only Zhuang Rui was a little impatient, but he was immediately drawn to the waiters' tea-making activities.

Although the small red clay stove was tiny, the fire burned very brightly. In no time, the water boiled. After the water boiled, a waiter picked up a small kettle, and another waiter immediately placed another kettle on it, explaining to everyone: "The water we use to brew tea in our teahouse is all taken from the natural spring water on Yunlong Mountain. Su Dongpo once said, 'Living water must be boiled with a living fire,' which means that the spring water in the kettle must be boiled with a strong fire."

The waiter first used a teaspoon to take an appropriate amount of tea leaves and place them on the tea appreciation tray. Then he served them to everyone to taste and introduced the origin of Tieguan Yin. After everyone had looked around, the waiter did not put the tea leaves into the Yixing teapot. Instead, he picked up the kettle and poured boiling water into the empty teapot. According to the waiter, the

purpose of this action was to warm the teapot, which is called "warming the teapot" or "Mengchen Linlin".

After "warming the pot," the waiter uses a teaspoon to scoop tea leaves into the Yixing teapot, starting with the finer leaves, then moving to the coarser ones, and finally the tea stems. This is called "Oolong Entering the Palace." Then, water is poured into the pot, stopping when the water reaches the rim. The waiter then uses two fingers to lift the lid and scrape off the foam from the rim. After that, the lid is replaced, and boiling water is used to rinse off any remaining foam on the top of the pot. The movements are extremely elegant and pleasing to the eye.

According to the waiter, this process is called "rinsing the pot." The purpose of rinsing the pot is twofold: first, to clean the pot, and second, to heat the pot inside and out, so as to facilitate the release of the tea's aroma.

Zhuang Rui's nose twitched. He could already smell the rich aroma of tea at the tip of his nose. He thought, "Now I can finally drink it, right?" But to his surprise, the waiter poured all the water out of the teapot, saying that this was called "washing the tea" to remove the dust from the surface of the tea leaves. Zhuang Rui rolled his eyes at the sight.

When Zhuang Rui worked at the pawnshop, he often drank tea with Uncle De. However, Uncle De was not so particular about tea. His tea set consisted of only a pot and two cups. Unlike now, almost 20 minutes have passed and he still hasn't had a cup of tea.

After pouring boiling water into the teapot again, the waiter used the first brew of tea to scald the cups. He rotated the cups with two fingers, a process called "warming the cups." Naturally, the tea was poured out again in the end, and Zhuang Rui still couldn't drink any.

During the second infusion, the waiter holds the teapot in one hand and pours tea into each cup in a circular motion, keeping the spout of the teapot close to the teacup. This is called "Guan Yu's Patrol," and its purpose is to ensure that the tea in the cups is of uniform strength. Pouring at a low position is also to prevent too much aroma from dissipating. When the tea in the teapot is almost gone, the remaining tea is poured into each cup. This is the essence of the entire pot of tea and should be poured out drop by drop, hence the nickname "Han Xin's Troops."

At this point, the entire process was demonstrated. At Mr. Song's instruction, the first cup of tea was served to Mr. Lü.

The second cup of tea was offered to the lady. Qin Xuanbing accepted it without ceremony, holding the rim of the cup with her thumb and forefinger and supporting the bottom with her middle finger. Instead of drinking it directly, she first brought it to her nose to smell it before taking three sips and slowly drinking it. The whole process was smooth and natural, leaving Zhuang Rui stunned.

"Good, it takes three sips to appreciate its flavor, and three times to truly appreciate it. Young lady, you are indeed a connoisseur of tea. I misjudged you yesterday."

After seeing Qin Xuanbing's actions, Grandpa Lü praised her repeatedly. His previous dissatisfaction with Qin Xuanbing vanished. After all, tea ceremony is a traditional Chinese culture, but nowadays not many young people understand it. Just like Liu Chuan sitting on the sofa, who was happily drinking a bottle of cola.