

Golden 35

Chapter Thirty-Five: Tea Tasting (Part Two)

"You flatter me, senior. My grandfather was quite fond of tea, and I often accompanied him for tea in my spare time. Having observed so much, I only have a superficial understanding. As for tea culture, Hong Kong's tradition originated from the mainland, so naturally, the mainland's tea culture is far more profound and extensive.

Qin Xuanbing smiled slightly and replied modestly, "Actually, Kung Fu tea is most popular in the Guangdong and Hong Kong regions, especially in the Chaoshan region. In these areas, eating breakfast is called drinking morning tea, and there is also noon tea and afternoon tea, which shows the importance of tea in their lives. When Qin Xuanbing was a few years old, she watched her grandfather brew tea every day. If we talk about the techniques of brewing tea, Qin Xuanbing is confident that she is much more skilled than the current tea master."

As the two were talking, the tea master handed out the brewed tea to everyone. Zhuang Rui followed suit, holding the teacup with three fingers, bringing it to his nose and taking a gentle sniff. The refreshing aroma of the tea immediately filled his lungs, and the previous impatience of waiting was swept away, replaced by a clear mind. Even the turbulent thoughts in his heart seemed to have become much clearer.

Forcing himself to gulp down the tea in his hand, Zhuang Rui carefully took a small sip from the rim of the cup. A bitter taste immediately filled his taste buds. He frowned slightly, then took a second sip. The feeling was immediately different; the previous bitterness seemed to have turned into sweetness. By the time he finished the third sip, Zhuang Rui felt a lingering fragrance in his mouth. He couldn't help but close his eyes and savor the experience.

Zhuang Rui disliked carbonated drinks and had loved drinking tea since childhood. However, he had never tasted three different flavors in a small cup of tea like he did today. He had often heard people say that tea is like life, but he didn't understand it then. Now, however, he felt it. The first sip of tea was bitter, which reminded him of the setbacks he had encountered after graduating from university. Wasn't his mood at that time extremely similar to that sip of tea?

The second sip of tea turned sweet and delicious, much like his own experience. Since starting work at the pawnshop, everything had gone smoothly, and the previous robbery was just an accident. The subsequent change in his eyes also gave Zhuang Rui a huge surprise.

The three sips left only a faint aftertaste, which seemed to imply that after the hustle and bustle of the world fades away, true happiness lies in simplicity. Although he couldn't fully grasp the meaning yet, Zhuang Rui's state of mind became much calmer at this moment, and the suppressed and long-dormant desires in his heart didn't seem so intense anymore.

After Zhuang Rui opened his eyes, the waiter had already taken the cup back with tea tongs, rinsed it with boiling water, and started the second brew. Judging from the expressions of everyone at the table, they all seemed to be immersed in the fragrant tea. Even Qin Xuanbing, who was usually indifferent in front of others, had a thoughtful expression on her face.

"Xiao Zhuang, how is my tea? Not bad, right..."

Song Jun's words broke the silence in the room and interrupted everyone's thoughts. Qin Xuanbing frowned slightly, seemingly a little dissatisfied.

"Brother Song, to be honest, I drink tea every day, but compared to the tea I drink now, that's like guzzling it down. It's incomparable. It wasn't until I came here that I learned what tea appreciation is all about. I've truly benefited a lot..."

Zhuang Rui is not afraid to expose his shortcomings; if he doesn't know something, he doesn't know it, and there's nothing to be ashamed of.

Upon hearing this, Song Jun burst into laughter, saying, "I like Xiao Zhuang's character. He doesn't pretend to know what he doesn't. Old Master Lü often says that one should sip slowly and savor the tea, for there is much to appreciate in the process. But I, Old Song, have been drinking tea for so many years, and I still haven't figured out any special flavor. I still prefer your method of guzzling it down like a cow. That's much more satisfying than Old Wang, who's always so particular about all those formalities. Hahaha..."

"That's called tradition. Without following this whole process, how could you enjoy such fragrant tea? I really don't know how your teahouse has even started and is still going strong.

Seeing that Song Jun had brought up the topic of himself, Boss Wang, who hadn't said much until now, laughed and scolded, but he wasn't really angry. It seemed that the two of them were used to joking around.

"The art of tea has been passed down since ancient times. Most people can't appreciate its flavor after only one or two tries. Mr. Zhuang has a very high level of understanding. He understood what tea tasting is after just one cup. Could you tell us about it?"

Qin Xuanbing unexpectedly interjected, surprising everyone. Her words were clearly confrontational. Weren't Xiao Zhuang and his girl friends?

In fact, Qin Xuanbing didn't know why she said those words. As soon as the words left her mouth, she regretted her rashness. However, when she heard Boss Song praising Zhuang Rui, she felt uncomfortable and the words just slipped out involuntarily.

"Yes, yes, Miss Qin is right. Chinese tea culture has a long history and cannot be understood in a short time. Mr. Zhuang, what insights do you have about the tea ceremony? Why don't you share them so we can discuss them together?"

As soon as Qin Xuanbing finished speaking, Xu Wei chimed in. He said this partly to curry favor with Qin Xuanbing, and partly because he was somewhat resentful about the occasion. Normally, Xu Wei, who was young, rich, and the general manager of Xu's Jewelry East China, would be the center of attention at any event. But today, he was first turned away by a woman, and then his limelight was stolen by this ordinary-looking young man. Seeing an opportunity to ridicule Zhuang Rui, he naturally wanted to add fuel to the fire.

In fact, Xu Wei is not the kind of spoiled brat that everyone imagines. Although he comes from a good family, he is also hardworking enough. After returning from studying abroad, he started as an ordinary shop assistant in a small jewelry store in his family and rose to become the general manager of Xu's Jewelry in East China in just five years. Although his background is related to this, it also reflects his personal ability. He can be regarded as a leader among the younger generation in this industry.

In recent years, Pengcheng, an ancient city in northern Jiangsu, has developed very rapidly, and people's living standards have improved a lot. Xu Wei wants to bring Xu's Jewelry chain stores into the Pengcheng market. Grandpa Lü is not only the president of the Pengcheng Collectors Association, but also the executive director of the Pengcheng Jewelry Association. He has a lot of influence in these two industries. With his word, doing business in the jewelry industry will undoubtedly be much smoother.

Therefore, Xu Wei indirectly befriended Old Master Lü of Jiyaxuan through some connections. He was able to attend this small gathering today because Old Master Lü mentioned it when he invited him to dinner yesterday, and Xu Wei took the initiative to come. Xu Wei is not usually so superficial, but after seeing Qin Xuanbing today, he was amazed by her beauty and his heart was in turmoil.

Zhuang Rui was quite annoyed. He hadn't offended that young lady; he usually kept his distance from her. Why was she tripping him up now, praising his high comprehension? This wasn't flattery; it was downright sabotage. And that Xu Wei—he was a complete scoundrel. Wanting to pick up girls was fine, but he shouldn't have done it by stepping on his buddies.

However, since everyone's attention was now focused on Zhuang Rui, he couldn't avoid it. After thinking hard for a while, he finally spoke up: "The Tang Dynasty poet Bai Juyi once wrote in a poem: 'The room is fragrant with the scent of herbs, and the warm steam rises from the tea basket.' When ancient people appreciated tea, they emphasized four realms: 'beautiful environment, beautiful water, beautiful utensils, and beautiful art.' Brother Song's environment here is beyond words; it is quiet, elegant, and full of ancient charm, truly deserving of the title 'beautiful environment.'"

The water used to brew the tea is spring water from the Yunlong Mountain stream, which has a clear and sweet taste. The tea brewed with it is mellow and rich, like drinking wine, with an endless aftertaste. It perfectly brings out the fragrance of the tea, and the word "beautiful water" is well-deserved.

I don't know much about Yixing teapots, but judging from its shape, this teapot exudes a rustic and dignified elegance, revealing the artist's ingenuity within its simple and robust form. Since Brother Song could produce something like this, it must be something extraordinary.

Zhuang Rui paused here, explaining that he had read these words in some history books. In fact, the quality of Yixing purple clay teapots can be summarized in five words: "clay, shape, craftsmanship, inscription, and function." However, each of these words has profound meaning, which he will not elaborate on here.

Picking up the freshly filled teacup and taking a sip, Zhuang Rui continued, "The most demanding skill is naturally in tea ceremony. The young lady who poured our tea had perfect control over the ratio of tea to water, the temperature, and the timing, which brought out the full essence of the tea. So, although I don't understand the tea ceremony, sitting in this environment, I have also gained some insight into

what Master Lü just said about the three flavors of tea: the first flavor is bitter like life, the second flavor is sweet like life, and the third flavor is bland like life."

I once read a quote that seems to encapsulate the essence of tea: "Brewing a pot of fragrant tea nurtured by the timeless beauty of the Three Mountains and Five Peaks, lighting a stick of sandalwood incense imbued with Zen wisdom and Buddhist tranquility, and sitting with a few close friends to discuss philosophy—that's enough for a lifetime. This is just my personal opinion; I hope you'll forgive my humble opinion."

Zhuang Rui racked his brains and finally managed to piece together the knowledge he had about tea tasting from his memory. If he were asked one more question, Zhuang Rui would probably be speechless with astonishment.

"What's wrong with them?" After saying that, Zhuang Rui noticed that the way the people present were looking at him was a bit strange, even Qin Xuanbing looked at him differently than usual.

"Could it be that everything I said was wrong? And so wrong that it's ridiculous?" Zhuang Rui scratched his head in distress. He had really embarrassed himself.