

Golden 53

Chapter 53 Three Hands

A huge iron incense burner stood before the main hall of the City God Temple, filled with incense sticks offered by devout men and women. Inside the hall, an incense table was set up, with a statue of the City God enshrined on the altar in front of it, and behind it a "Hundred Children Picture" depicting children in various expressions. It was during the Spring Festival, a time of folk celebration, and the entire City God Temple was bustling with activity, filled with the sounds of friends and family calling out to each other.

The Sihui Tower is an open-air structure, unlike typical pagodas. From each floor, you can see the surrounding scenery. After Zhuang Rui and the others went up to the fifth floor, they looked around and had a panoramic view of the surrounding landscape. In the distance, there were shopping malls surrounding the tower and a central square that looked to be quite large.

On the northwest side of the pagoda is Zhuang Rui's destination, the City God Temple Antique City. Standing on the high ground, the entire antique city has streets in the tower and shops in the streets, with a very clear hierarchy. Because of the distance between them, the crowds in the antique city look like ants, a dark mass.

Looking at the time, it was already nearly 1:30 pm. He was leaving Hefei around 5 or 6 pm, so he didn't have much time left. Zhuang Rui hurriedly walked down from "Sihui Building" and headed towards the antique market next door.

From the ground, the City God Temple Antique Market doesn't appear very large, consisting of only four-story buildings forming a courtyard. If Zhuang Rui hadn't viewed it from the air, he wouldn't have known it had such a grand interior. The market's entrance was also inconspicuous. However, passing through the parking lot, Zhuang Rui saw many luxury cars—several Mercedes-Benzes and BMWs, and even a Rolls-Royce Phantom, a rare sight in China. This filled Zhuang Rui with anticipation for the City God Temple Antique Market, which is touted as one of the top ten antique markets in China.

Since it was only a short time after the Lunar New Year, people still had some holidays, so the antique market was packed with people. Like the Pengcheng Antique Market, there were many stalls here, and these stalls were the most lively. In contrast, the regular antique shops with storefronts were deserted, with few tourists.

The reason is actually quite simple: the things at street stalls are cheap, which in the trade is called "hot goods," and there are quite a few good ones among them, it just depends on each person's eye. However, Zhuang Rui knows that those shops have some regular customers and don't care much about these casual shoppers who want to find bargains on Taobao.

During his time in Pengcheng, Zhuang Rui frequented the antique market quite often. He knew that those who often wandered around the antique market were generally of two types. One type was mostly elderly people who came here to cultivate their minds and bodies. If they came across genuine items, they would certainly buy them; if they didn't, they could appreciate their artistic style. These people had high taste and often looked around more than they bought.

Another type of person, like Zhuang Rui, came here to shop. Of course, Zhuang Rui's primary goal was to replenish his spiritual energy; as for shopping, he defined it as a byproduct of absorbing spiritual energy.

People who come here to hunt for treasures can be divided into two types: one type buys items because they like them and mostly keep them for collection and play, rarely reselling them; the other type are industry insiders, like the Mr. Wang whom Zhuang Rui knows, who specializes in buying and selling antiques to make money. In their eyes, all items are for sale, as long as you offer a reasonable price.

Zhuang Rui was pressed for time and didn't have any specific goal. He followed the crowd, moving from stall to stall, only stopping to observe the stalls selling calligraphy and paintings. He just glanced at the other stalls, but he still learned a lot. The variety and quantity of antiques here were obviously more than in Pengcheng Antique Market. However, the dazzling array of small jade items, casually displayed on the stalls, looked much lower in quality.

As Zhuang Rui walked along, he unexpectedly found a lot of comic books, cigarette boxes, matchbox labels, and various tickets and certificates at a street stall. These were all common items in the 1980s, which evoked memories of Zhuang Rui's childhood.

When he casually asked about the price, he was surprised to find that it was not cheap. An early comic book could sell for over a hundred yuan, and a complete set was even more ridiculously expensive, ranging from several hundred to several thousand yuan. Zhuang Rui never expected that these things would have survived to this day and become antiques.

“When I was a kid, my family had boxes of these things. They were only a few cents. You’re selling them for such a high price.”

Zhuang Rui squatted on the ground, examining the trinkets on the stall, and muttered something unpleasantly to the stall owner wearing a baseball cap in front of him.

The stall owner looked to be in his forties, with a kind and honest appearance. He wasn't angry after hearing Zhuang Rui's words, and said with a smile, "Young man, that's not how you put it. Twenty years ago, a few cents could buy a lot of things. Now, you probably can't even find a few cents in bills or coins. Even buying vegetables at the market isn't done by the cent anymore, don't you think, young man..."

"Brother, you're right. Back then, a cream popsicle only cost one cent, but now you can't even buy one for dozens of times that price. This stuff gets more expensive every year..."

Although he was rebuffed, Zhuang Rui wasn't angry. The street vendor's words were indeed reasonable. Putting aside everything else, in the early 1980s, the term "ten-thousand-yuan household" was synonymous with wealth and the envy of everyone. But if it were today, everyone on the street would be a ten-thousand-yuan household. Even Zhuang Rui a few months ago, if he included all his assets, he would be a twenty-thousand-yuan household. In the early 1980s, a ten-thousand-yuan household was probably at least comparable to a multi-millionaire today.

"Yes, young man, you're right. What are antiques? They're things that have stood the test of time. Anything that has survived to this day is an antique. See that?"

The stall vendor was quite talkative. Pointing to a red tin thermos at his feet, he said, "This thing, in five hundred years, it will be an antique, of course, if it hasn't been broken."

Zhuang Rui found the man's words amusing and burst into laughter. What he said wasn't wrong; hadn't you seen those broken bricks on the ancient city wall of Xi'an? They've all become treasures now. Just as Zhuang Rui was about to make a few jokes with the man, he suddenly heard a commotion ahead. The Chinese people's love of watching a spectacle was on full display at this moment. As soon as Zhuang Rui heard the noise, there were already three or four circles of people gathered in front of him.

Zhuang Rui is only 25 years old this year. Although he is mature and steady, he is also curious. He stood up and was about to squeeze in to take a look when the stall owner stopped him.

"Young man, it's fine if you want to watch the show. Once the market management staff arrive, they'll disperse. You can watch then..."

The street vendor was clearly acting out of kindness, because when Zhuang Rui followed his gaze into the crowd, he was shocked to see someone's hand taking a wallet out of their pants pocket. However, the hand taking out the wallet did not belong to the owner of the pants.