

AS A FATHER, I JUST WANT TO WATCH YOU ACHIEVE IMMORTALITY

Chapter 3: Nine Sons Embracing the Lotus, the Method of Inner Strength

Xu Ji's Wood Carving Shop was among the top-ranked wood carving shops in the Outer City, often receiving orders from the Inner City, which had a tremendous demand for various types of wood carvings.

Whether carving landscapes or statues of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, or even images of gods that Li Che had never heard of before.

For a laborer, transporting both the wood and the finished statues meant receiving a fixed piece rate pay, which wasn't much to begin with, and it was backbreaking work.

However, if one could become an official wood carving master, carving a finished product could earn at least ten silver coins!

Even more, Li Che had heard that Master Chen once carved a "Thousand-Armed Guanyin Woodcarving Statue" that took almost a month to complete and earned him a Gold Leaf, which was equivalent to one hundred taels!

Such craftsmanship could make ordinary people extremely wealthy!

Li Che was tempted. In the past, he wouldn't have dared to dream so far.

Wood carving skills needed to be nurtured from a young age, and they tested talent as well as artistry. Many apprentices in the wood carving shop were sent there by their families at the age of five or six in exchange for silver.

When Li Che started working in the wood carving shop, he was already thirteen and had missed the appropriate age.

He once had the idea of self-learning and becoming successful, but after trying for a few days, he gave up.

How could he, with just a few days of self-study, beat others who had toiled for almost their entire childhood?

Moreover, carving wood was one thing to watch, but quite another to actually put into practice.

"I'll find an opportunity to try... The Dao Fruit of the Immortal Artisan might really have given me a talent for wood carving?"

A sense of anticipation couldn't help but arise in Li Che's heart.

The cold wind brushed by, helping Li Che regain some clarity of mind. He buried the thought of becoming a wood carving master in his heart for the time being and focused on his work.

Transporting finished wood carvings was different from transporting raw timber, requiring much more care to prevent damaging the carvings.

He wrapped them in cloth and tied them with hemp rope to avoid abrasion damage from the rope during carrying.

Carrying the Six-Eyed Bodhisattva Statue on his back, Li Che walked cautiously toward the inner room.

Upon reaching Master Chen's workshop, Li Che set down the statue, removed the cloth, and after ensuring there were no signs of rubbing, breathed a sigh of relief.

"Master Chen, I brought in the Bodhisattva Statue. Shall I fetch you a larger piece of the Flowering Curved Willow now?" Li Che, relaxing his shoulders, said with a smile.

Master Chen was already sitting on his work stool, sharpening his carving knife on a whetstone.

"Yes, hurry up. This time I need to carve a 'Nine Sons Embracing Lotus,' and it's a tedious process. Besides, the Inner City is in a rush for it."

After inspecting the sharpness of his carving knife, Master Chen said.

Li Che returned to the courtyard where snow was drifting down and was about to move the Flowering Curved Willow timber he had picked.

But the moment he touched the wood, he felt the Dao Fruit of the Immortal Artisan pulse slightly, giving him an inexplicable sensation.

"This piece of Flowering Curved Willow doesn't seem quite right for the 'Nine Sons Embracing Lotus Statue,'" Li Che murmured softly.

Most of the time, wood carving masters would pick the timber themselves, but of course there were exceptions. Some were confident enough in their skills that they couldn't be bothered to pick timber personally in the cold winter snow.

However, if a laborer chose unsuitable timber...

If the wood carving master was easy-going, it wouldn't be a big deal, but if they had a bad temper, they might deduct money for the transport.

If that occurred, not only would one need to move the timber multiple times, but they would also be docked pay... a big loss.

Li Che abandoned the "Flowering Curved Willow" and began to pick another piece from the timber pile, touching them with his palm until he chose one that, influenced by the Dao Fruit of the Immortal Artisan, felt just right.

Carrying the slightly heavier piece of "Flowering Curved Willow," he returned to Master Chen's workshop.

"Hmm? Not bad at all, Li. You have a good eye. This timber you picked is perfectly suitable!" Master Chen was pleasantly surprised because the piece of wood matched the image of the "Nine Sons Embracing Lotus" he had in mind almost exactly!

With just a few strokes, he could sketch out the rough outline, saving a lot of the time usually needed for pondering and conceptualizing.

Li Che smiled but said nothing to take credit.

After praising him, Master Chen continued working on the carving preparations.

"Little Li, help me move this timber onto the frame. I heard your daughter was born... I'll pay extra for this job," said Master Chen, standing up with a smile.

Li Che's eyes lit up at his words and he promptly agreed. After slipping on the rope, he started to lift the heavy "Flowering Curved Willow" onto the metal frame.

"The Inner City is in a hurry, and recently they've been demanding a lot of child wood carvings, definitely related to the recent buzz about the 'Spirit Infant Master.' The fancies of the Inner City nobles... really, they change every so often."

Master Chen shook his head and muttered.

"They want it in five days, and my old bones... seems I'll be busy enough falling apart."

"But they're paying well, hehe, Li, guess how much the client is offering for this job?" Master Chen rubbed his hands together, striking up a conversation with Li Che while approaching the Flowering Curved Willow dampened by the heavy snow.

Li Che wiped the sweat from his forehead and breathed out, "For a five-day delivery... it must be at least fifty taels, right?"

Thinking the Nine Sons Embracing Lotus Statue was less complicated than the Thousand-Armed Guanyin, Li Che made a conservative estimate.

"Fifty taels? Hehe... It's less than that, a Gold Leaf less!"

Master Chen laughed, and then slapped the timber with his hand. The skin on his arm seemed to glow with a red hue, and heat steamed out from his palm into the wood, driving the moisture out of the timber!

The heat was intense, like standing next to a boiling furnace as he stood by Master Chen's side!

Li Che took a deep breath, both astonished that the wood carving was worth a hundred and fifty taels and envious of Master Chen's mysterious skills!

These wood carving masters were not just skilled crafters but also, as the legends say... martial artists!

Those who became wood carving masters were all beings with Inner Strength, capable of using it to dry the wood, saving a good amount of time.

Moreover, the Inner Strength infused into the wood carvings gave them a certain profundity,

It was this profundity that truly made the nobles of the Inner City willingly fork out their money for the wood carving masters' creations.

Master Chen, catching Li Che's shocked and envious gaze, asked with a teasing smile, "Want to learn?"

"If you want to learn, it's going to cost you. Although you won't learn any Superior Internal Strength Techniques, the ordinary Internal Strength Techniques left by Xu Ji in the Outer City are all learnable."

"Another few decades of hard cultivation, and you'll probably be able to manifest Inner Strength."

Li Che's mind stirred slightly, "Master Chen, may I ask how much does an Internal Strength Technique cost?"

"You can't buy a Superior Internal Strength Technique with money; you have to go to Xu Ji in the Inner City to learn, and ordinary people can't learn it."

"For an ordinary Internal Strength Technique from the Outer City, you can learn if you pay; the cheapest... also costs thirty taels. What, are you really considering it?" Master Chen said as he used his Inner Strength to dry the wood, looking at Li Che half jokingly.

"You just had a baby, better save your money... even if you buy the technique, learning it is another matter, and mastering it is yet another."

Master Chen shook his head and kindly advised.

Seeing that Li Che seemed seriously interested.

Master Chen's eyebrows rose, "You're quite meticulous, young man. It's a pity you didn't try to learn wood carving when you were younger. If you want to buy an Internal Strength Technique, come find me. I have one for twenty taels that you can learn."

Li Che heard this but didn't agree right away, only saying with a smile that he would think about it.

He then left Master Chen's workshop.

In the following time, Li Che busied himself again, helping other wood carvers to transport lumber and finished wood carvings.

He also helped the apprentices in the shop move small pieces of lumber to earn his wages.

The shop provided lunch, simple though it was, it was hot, and you could eat your fill to have the energy to work.

In the evening, after receiving today's thirty-five Dajing Cast Copper Coins, Li Che clocked out, exhausted.

With a conical hat on his head, he braved the wind and snow, buying some charcoal on his way home.

By the time he arrived at the crisscrossing alleys, night had completely fallen. However, the dim yellow light of the oil lamp from his earthen house made Li Che hasten his snow-treading steps a little.

"Wife, I'm back."

He quickly opened the door and just as rapidly closed it behind him, keeping the chilly wind carrying the white snow from rushing in and sweeping away the warmth.

After adding some charcoal to the brazier, Li Che tiptoed to the bedside where Xi Xi laid in bed, round-eyed and awake.

Seeing Li Che, Xi Xi even giggled with delight.

Li Che's heart nearly melted as he picked her up and gently rocked her.

Zhang Ya, with a tender gaze, watched this scene unfold and fetched for Li Che his dinner from the pot.

The steaming noodles wafted a fragrance that filled the air.

For the poor households, what luxury is there of maternity leave?

Not having to work the land, simply preparing dinner, for Zhang Ya, that was maternity leave.

After the couple had their dinner, Li Che told Zhang Ya to go rest, and he washed the dishes himself.

Then he took a small piece of wood and a carving knife and returned to the house.

With Xi Xi in her arms, Zhang Ya gently patted and comforted her while curiously watching Li Che.

"Husband, what are you doing?"

In the dim light of the oil lamp, Li Che flexed his ten fingers, creating a cracking sound, and replied with a smile, "I've learned a thing or two at the wood carving shop recently."

"Wife, behold!"

Hearing this, Zhang Ya couldn't help but laugh out loud, "Husband, over the years you've learned quite a few things, but after a few days you always soberly say that putting them aside is also quite good..."

Li Che's lips curved upward slightly, "Wife, don't make fun of your husband. Have you heard of the legend 'thirty years in the east, thirty years in the west'?"

"Your husband is different now; I'm a father!"

Zhang Ya pursed her lips as laughter danced in her eyes.

Does being a father necessarily connect to you learning wood carving?

Li Che just smiled, not saying another word.

He briefly closed his eyes, and the carving techniques and skills of the Six-Eyed Bodhisattva Statue flooded his mind as if squeezing wet cotton, overflowing like water...

Upon reopening his eyes, a glint seemed to flash within his gaze.

Calm and composed, his fingers gripped the carving knife with muscular power as he made the first cut into the wood...