

Golden 107

Chapter 107 First Hearing About Stone Gambling

"Xiao Zhuang, I've framed this painting. Come pick it up here in about two weeks.

It seemed that peeling back the layers of the painting had taken a lot of effort from Old Master Fang, as he looked exhausted and his voice was not as strong as before.

"Thank you, Grandpa Fang. I have 30,000 yuan with me. Consider it as the cost of materials."

Zhuang Rui was overjoyed. After learning about the man's identity from Song Jun, Zhuang Rui understood that his painting would be even more beautiful and valuable after being framed by Master Fang.

"No need for that much, just leave ten thousand yuan. This old man is almost in his grave, and to be able to see this authentic work by Tang Bohu is quite a treat. Alright, you guys go back now. I'll call Song when it's framed."

The old man waved his hand, indicating that the two could leave. Zhuang Rui respectfully left 10,000 yuan and then bid farewell to Song Jun.

Back in the Mercedes, Zhuang Rui pushed aside the little white lion that pounced on him and asked Song Jun, "Brother Song, since Grandpa Fang is handling the framing, the materials he used must be of high quality. Is ten thousand yuan enough?"

"Nonsense, of course it's not enough. I reckon the old man will use old rosewood for the scroll ends, which is quite expensive. But his disciples and grand-disciples are generous with their gifts, so these materials won't cost much. Brother Zhuang, believe it or not, if you take the painting away today and don't frame it for him, the old man will probably pay you to keep it."

Song Jun had by now recovered from the shock of seeing Tang Bohu's original work and was joking with Zhuang Rui while driving.

"How could that be? The old man is no stranger to the world. He has framed countless famous paintings. There's no need for him to lower himself to me, a junior, just for a painting."

Zhuang Rui, however, was skeptical of Song Jun's words. Having lived to the age of Old Master Fang, he had long since reached a state of equanimity, unmoved by external gains or losses; how could he possibly lose his composure over a painting?

"Hey, Xiao Zhuang, don't you believe me? How about we make a bet? Go back and get that painting back right now, and see how that old man reacts. But let me make this clear first: if I guess right, once your painting is framed, you have to sell it to me first. How about it? Want to bet?"

At this point, Song Jun's true colors were revealed; it turned out he had his eye on the painting all along.

Seeing Song Jun's expression as if he were coaxing a child, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but laugh and said, "Brother Song, don't worry, I've been investing all my funds in the mastiff kennel lately and I'm short on cash. Once the old man has finished framing it, you can name your price, but I have one condition that you have to agree to."

"Just tell me what you need. If it's something I can do, I'll definitely help you. If it's something I can't do, I'll ask my father to help you."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Song Jun was overjoyed and immediately patted his chest to vouch for it, even mentioning his own father, which showed how much he valued the painting.

"Actually, it's nothing. Just don't tell outsiders that this painting came from here. I've been feeling incredibly lucky lately, so I don't want to cause any trouble."

Zhuang Rui knew that the news of Liu Chuan selling the sandalwood root carving to Manager Lü would surely reach Song Jun's ears, so he simply said that he was lucky, so that others would not suspect anything.

Sure enough, Song Jun laughed upon hearing this, looking at Zhuang Rui approvingly, and said, "You're young, but you're much more reliable than Da Chuan. You know the saying 'The tallest tree in the forest is the first to be felled by the wind.' Not bad, not bad at all. I agree to these conditions. But you're really

lucky. Some people spend their whole lives in this business and might not even find a good deal, but you've found one after another, and they're all good stuff. I'm even envious. No way, next time we go to Pingzhou, you have to come with me.

Pingzhou? What place is that? Is it known for its antiques?

Zhuang Rui was somewhat confused by what Song Jun had said.

"No, there are no antiques there. It's a jade gambling market. Playing with those things is much more exciting than playing with antiques, and luck plays a big part. There's not much skill involved."

Song Jun knew that Zhuang Rui had only been in the business for a short time. Although the jade gambling industry had been around since the 1990s, it had only become popular in recent years after the international jade market saw a rise in prices. Generally, people who were not in the jewelry industry or professional speculators had no idea about the term "jade gambling".

"Jade gambling?"

Zhuang Rui couldn't help but think of the two stones he owned that contained jade.

"Yes, it's jade gambling, Xiao Zhuang. There's a lot to it. From the Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China, there was a trade term in the jewelry industry called 'gambling shop.' The so-called 'gambling shop' refers to the discerning eye of jewelry players who go to jewelry shops to find jade. Jade trading, especially raw stone trading, relies entirely on luck for success. It's like gambling or lottery, investing in the future. That's what jade gambling is."

Song Jun paused for a moment, then said with some resentment, "Brother, I'm unlucky, but I'm pretty good at collecting antiques. Although I've made mistakes and paid my dues, the amounts weren't large. But a while ago, I gambled on a rough stone and lost more than 20 million. Damn it, when we get the chance, we'll go after this one."

Song Jun's words surprised Zhuang Rui. Although he understood what "gambling on stones" meant from Song Jun's explanation, he wondered what the price of jade was, that even an uncut stone could be so valuable.

"Hey, never mind, it's bad luck. I'll tell you in detail when I take you there later. Where are you going now? Are you going home or something? I'll take you."

Song Jun seemed to hold a grudge about the matter and was unwilling to bring it up again, silencing Zhuang Rui's question. This left Zhuang Rui feeling quite frustrated. However, now that he knew about it, he could find out more about it from other sources. It just seemed that the value of his two jadeite stones needed to be reassessed.

"I'll go home. Da Chuan is coming to pick me up this afternoon. We need to go check out the land at the mastiff farm. I'm sorry..."

"The number you dialed is not in service..."

Before Zhuang Rui could finish speaking, his phone rang.

"Hey, is this Brother Zhuang? This is Da Xiong. We've run into some trouble here, and we can't find the boss anywhere. Can you get in touch with him?"

As soon as the call connected, Da Xiong's voice, who had just joined Liu Chuan's pet shop yesterday, came through. It sounded like something urgent, and he was quite loud; even Song Jun, who was driving, could hear him.

Zhuang Rui looked at the phone number that had called; it belonged to Liu Chuan's shop. He then said to Da Xiong, "Wait a moment, let me contact Liu Chuan first and have him call the shop." After saying that, Zhuang Rui hung up the phone and dialed Liu Chuan's number.

"The number you dialed is temporarily out of service..."

"Where did this kid go? Didn't he go to get the license for the mastiff kennel this morning?"

Hearing the mechanical female voice on the phone, Zhuang Rui hung up helplessly and dialed Da Xiong's number again.

"Da Xiong, I can't get through to Da Chuan on the phone right now. Tell me what happened, and I'll see if I can handle it."

"Brother Zhuang, here's what happened. This morning, when Monkey came back from the park, he pulled a few customers into a pet shop next door. He was wrong to do that. But just now, when Monkey and I were about to go eat, a few policemen came and took Monkey away. They said the shop owner had called the police because a golden arowana had gone missing from their shop and they were sure Monkey had stolen it."

"Brother Zhuang, you have to believe us. Although we've done our fair share of swindling and cheating in the past, we've never been involved in theft or robbery. I just went to the police station, and they said that golden dragon is worth tens of thousands of yuan, which is considered a major theft. They're preparing to file a case, but we can't find the owner. What are we going to do?"

Da Xiong's voice was almost choked with tears. He and Monkey had been brothers for over ten years, sharing a life-or-death bond. Monkey had also taken 10,000 yuan of the money he was cheated out of when he went to Tianjin to buy crickets and gourds. Monkey didn't say anything when the incident happened, but Da Xiong felt very guilty. Now that this had happened, he wished he was the one who had ended up in jail.

"I know those two lads. They're always swindling and cheating, but that's normal in the antique business. They're not bad-looking, and they haven't caused any trouble over the years. How did they end up working at Da Chuan's shop?"

Song Jun owns a shop in the antique market, and there's also a teahouse next to the market. Although he doesn't go there often, he's very familiar with the people and things happening on the street.

Zhuang Rui thought about it for a moment. These two had only arrived at Da Chuan's shop yesterday. Although what they did today was not very reliable, it was clear that the shop owner was also slandering Monkey. Now that they couldn't find Liu Chuan, if he didn't go and ask for help, he would also disappoint these two.

Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui said to Da Xiong on the other end of the phone, "Brother Xiong, don't worry, wait for me at the store. I'll be right there. We'll go to the police station together and ask around. There

shouldn't be any problems. If all else fails, I'll call Uncle Liu. Although this isn't his jurisdiction, he still has influence."

"Okay, okay, I'll wait for you at the shop, Brother Zhuang, thank you."

Hearing Zhuang Rui mention Liu's father, Da Xiong finally felt relieved. He was worried that Liu Chuan wouldn't stand up for him when he and Monkey first arrived, but now that Zhuang Rui had agreed, there was no problem.

In the antique and flower market, there are few people who don't know Liu Chuan's father. Back then, when Da Xiong and Monkey were beaten by Liu Chuan, it was Liu's father who went out to handle it. The old man is clear-headed about important matters, but in trivial matters, he always sides with his relatives and not with the truth. He can only teach his own son a lesson himself. If Liu Chuan hadn't suffered a loss, he would have wanted to go up and kick him a few more times.