

Golden 44

Chapter 44 Self-Inflicted Humiliation (Part 2)

"Let me tell you about the two items Xiao Zhuang appraised...

Xu Wei, who was feeling extremely ashamed, found the words of Old Master Lü to be like heavenly music. The old man's words did indeed divert everyone's attention from Xu Wei. Old Master Lü also wanted to help him out of the predicament, since he had brought this person with him and it would be difficult for him to save face.

Grandpa Lü picked up the wooden Guanyin statue and examined it carefully for a few moments. He said with great emotion, "This object is called the Water-Sprinkling Guanyin Wooden Standing Statue. I found it five years ago when I was strolling around Panjiayuan in Beijing. At the time, I saw that this wooden carving, in terms of its patina, style, shape, and carving, looked like an old object from the Ming Dynasty. I bought it for 30,000 yuan."

At this point, a hint of embarrassment appeared on Mr. Lü's face, but he continued, "Later, I asked a few old friends who specialize in Buddhist sculptures to take a look and found out that this Guanyin statue was just a modern imitation that had been artificially aged. I can say that I paid for this lesson. The reason I've kept it all this time is to always remember this lesson."

Grandpa Lü had come to terms with it and became more and more frank as he spoke. In this line of work, who hasn't made mistakes and paid their dues? It's not really something to be ashamed of.

"Mr. Lü, this wood carving looks like an antique to me. Perhaps your old friends have misjudged it?" Although Xu Wei's words were directed at Mr. Lü's friends, everyone present could hear the sarcasm in his tone, and they couldn't help but secretly despise him.

When Xu Wei heard the first half of what Grandpa Lü said, he was overjoyed, thinking that although he had made a mistake in his appraisal, Zhuang Rui had also made a mistake, so the two were even. Who knew that the old man's tone would suddenly change, which meant that Zhuang Rui had guessed correctly again. The reason for using the word "guessed" was that Xu Wei would never believe that Zhuang Rui could tell the authenticity of the wood carving just by looking at it.

Grandpa Lü was secretly furious. He had already pointed out the mistake, and this kid was still rubbing salt into his wounds. It was unethical. He snorted and said, "The carving and aging of this wood carving are top-notch. It's just that the person who made the forger didn't know much about the Water-Sprinkling Guanyin. The Water-Sprinkling Guanyin, also known as the Dripping Water Guanyin, is depicted holding a bottle in one hand as if pouring water, and making a mudra with the other hand, or holding a willow branch. But did you see this Water-Sprinkling Guanyin? She is holding a vase in both hands. Such an error would be impossible for people in ancient times to have such reverence for Guanyin. I didn't notice this detail at the time. I'm ashamed, I'm ashamed..."

After finishing his sentence, Old Master Lü ignored Xu Wei and picked up the snuff bottle, saying, "This snuff bottle looks brightly colored, like a modern craft, but it's actually an antique, made for the imperial palace. Its full name is 'Copper-bodied Enamel Snuff Bottle with Figure and Floral Design,' made during the Qianlong reign of the Qing Dynasty. There aren't many in existence, probably only thirty or fifty. I've seen one exactly like this in the Palace Museum. A Kangxi enamel snuff bottle, which was auctioned two years ago and was in better condition, fetched 350,000 yuan. This Qianlong one I have should be worth around 200,000 yuan."

At this point, Old Master Lü became excited, all his frustration from buying that lousy wood carving vanished, and his voice even rose a few octaves. He continued, "I found this in old Tianjin thirty years ago. Guess how much it cost?"

The old man paused here, leaving everyone to guess, and after several people had offered a price, the old man held up a hand, shook it back and forth, and said, "Five yuan, and not even cash, but five yuan in grain coupons. The person who sold this thing was a descendant of the Eight Banners, who stayed in Tianjin after the fall of the Qing Dynasty. This thing was left by his ancestors, and that spendthrift had no idea of its value. I bought it with five yuan in grain coupons. Xiao Zhuang, what do you think? When I was young, my eye for quality wasn't any worse than yours, was it...?"

Grandpa Lü was beaming with pride, his face glowing. He had completely forgotten about the hole he'd made in the wood carving. In fact, all his old friends knew the story of this snuff bottle. This great bargain had been touted by the old man for over a decade. In recent years, he had grown older and lost much of his competitive spirit. In addition, Song Jun and his men were a generation younger than Grandpa Lü, so they had never had the chance to see this snuff bottle.

"How come this person is so lucky? Does he really know so much?"

After listening to what Grandpa Lü said, Qin Xuanbing's impression of Zhuang Rui changed somewhat. It's possible to find a bargain once or twice by being lucky, but to appreciate antiques, one needs

extremely profound theoretical knowledge and rich practical experience. Zhuang Rui's performance obviously cannot be explained by simply saying that he was lucky.

"So, old man, I really guessed right about these two things? I'm really lucky..."

Zhuang Rui seemed quite happy as he spoke, emphasizing the word "Meng" and glancing sideways at Xu Wei, the meaning of which was self-evident.

Zhuang Rui was originally a very calm person. Although he had a lot of ideas, he was not the kind of person who was shallow and unforgiving. He was also quite broad-minded. However, he was indeed annoyed by this pretty boy named Xu Wei today, and his words became impolite.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Xu Wei, who had just had a livid face, actually laughed. He was quite capable to hold a high position in a family company with complex relationships; at the very least, his ability to change his expression was something that Zhuang Rui and the others could not match.

"It seems I'm the ultimate loser in today's treasure appraisal event. No doubt about it, I'm paying for the bet. I'll treat you all to today's guests, please do me the honor..." Xu Wei appeared very magnanimous, displaying the demeanor of a successful person. If a naive young girl saw him, she would definitely be very fond of him.

"Since Mr. Xu has brought something with him today, how about I take a look at it as well?"

Qin Xuanbing spoke unexpectedly, her eyes fixed on the jewelry box that Xu Wei had already put away.

"Of course! This was designed by a famous jewelry designer I hired from the UK at a high salary. It's the most popular style in recent years and is most suitable for a beautiful lady like Miss Qin."

Hearing Qin Xuanbing speak to him first, Xu Wei couldn't help but feel a little smug. He didn't believe that there was a woman in this world who wouldn't be tempted by jewelry. He used to be able to pick up girls with this trick in the past, and he was always successful. As he handed the exquisite jewelry box to Qin Xuanbing, Xu Wei was already fantasizing about this beautiful girl being pleased by him.