

## Golden 58

### Chapter Fifty-Eight: Success

"Brother, you're too kind. I really have to thank you for today. If you like it, keep it. Don't mention money. I just had someone look at it. These family heirlooms are mostly just good craftsmanship; the materials are average. They're only worth a few hundred yuan, nothing special. Please don't be so polite, brother.

When the stall owner heard that Zhuang Rui wanted to buy, he quickly waved his hand. The traitor had just given him 4,000 yuan, which was enough for him to keep his stall running for two months. He refused to take any more money from Zhuang Rui. He had previously suspected that the root carvings left at home might be of good quality. A few days ago, he even took a few to this market to have them appraised by an old man who specializes in miscellaneous items.

The expert's appraisal results left him quite disappointed. The oldest of these items was only from the Republican era, and the materials used were quite ordinary, mostly ash and pine roots. They couldn't be considered antiques and had little collectible value. After receiving this conclusion, he simply put all the old root carvings he had previously been reluctant to sell on his stall today. However, he didn't know that the Maitreya Buddha root carving in Zhuang Rui's hands was exactly one of the ones he hadn't taken for appraisal.

In modern society, sandalwood is an extremely rare and precious tree species. Although this young man inherited the root carving skills of his ancestors, he had never seen sandalwood before. Even his grandfather's generation had never seen it, so he did not realize that his ancestors had left behind such a fine object.

Seeing that the young man refused to accept the money, Zhuang Rui also refused to take advantage of him. He knew he could find bargains through his own skill, but accepting gifts without reason would violate his principles. His mother had always taught him that greed leads to greater losses, but he didn't realize that most people who get scammed in pyramid schemes or other businesses are those who harbor wishful thinking, hoping to gain big with small investments, forgetting the saying, "There's no such thing as a free lunch."

Those swindlers also understand this psychology. Just like Da Xiong and others in the Pengcheng antique market, if Zhuang Rui didn't have a keen eye and a slight understanding of Zheng Banqiao's style, it's hard to guarantee he wouldn't be tempted after seeing that painting.

"Are all the remaining works here yours?"

Zhuang Rui pointed to a bamboo and rattan box the young man was carrying and asked a question, as he had an idea in mind.

The stall owner scratched his head and smiled somewhat embarrassedly, "Hehe, my skills are far inferior to those of the elders in my family. Brother, take a look."

Zhuang Rui found it somewhat amusing. This young man was far too honest, immediately admitting that his goods were inferior. How could anyone do business like that? No wonder he had been setting up his stall for so long without anyone taking a liking to this sandalwood Buddha carving. Zhuang Rui was unaware that this carving was being sold for the first time today. Otherwise, with so many people coming and going in the market, how could he possibly have gotten his hands on this bargain?

"There aren't many people who know this craft now. They all want to save time and just buy from craft factories. To make a piece like this, I first have to think about it repeatedly in my mind, choose a tree root with a specific shape, and then go through several processes such as air drying, baking, oil soaking, waxing, and polishing before I can produce such an item. Although the price is a bit higher, it is much more durable than those made in factories."

The young man took a root carving from the box and handed it to Zhuang Rui. He was pleased to see someone appreciate his work and explained it to Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui took a look and saw that these root carvings were all palm-sized, depicting the monkey stealing peaches from the Chinese zodiac. A lively and cute little yellow-haired monkey was climbing on a large peach, trying to carry it away. The strong contrast between the large peach and the small monkey made the whole picture very interesting. The carving was lifelike, the surface was smooth and delicate, and the feel was excellent.

The characteristic of root carving works is that they are "seven parts natural and three parts carved, naturally interesting". This piece is outstanding in terms of material selection, conception and carving. Zhuang Rui thought to himself that this young man looks a few years younger than him, but his skills are not bad.

"How much do you sell each of these pieces for?" Zhuang Rui asked, fiddling with the monkey carving in his hand.

"This thing can be made in three to five days, and it can only sell for a hundred or two hundred. Even at that price, it's not easy to sell. People always compare it with those made by machines."

The young stall owner was indignant but helpless. In a sense, modern technology has gradually eliminated some craftspeople.

"How many do you have in total? Do you have a complete set of the twelve zodiac animals?"

Zhuang Rui really liked these root carvings. These items were suitable as gifts or as decorations for the home. When he returned to Zhonghai, he might as well give a few to his boss as well.

"Yes, there is one set, and a few scattered ones, a total of nineteen."

Although the young man was honest, he wasn't stupid. After hearing Zhuang Rui's question, he understood what he meant. He really couldn't bear to give away so many things, so he didn't say anything like "take it if you like it".

"How about this, I really like these root carvings of yours. I'll take all nineteen of them, plus this Maitreya Buddha root carving. I'll give you five thousand yuan for the whole set. Is that alright?"

Zhuang Rui wasn't trying to show off; he just felt the man was quite honest. Giving him five thousand yuan was a way of compensating him. The sandalwood Maitreya Buddha pendant alone was probably worth dozens of times that amount. You can't call Zhuang Rui hypocritical; after all, this requires a discerning eye. No one could say no to Zhuang Rui's actions.

"Brother, no need for so much. You've helped me so much today, how could I possibly accept so much money from you?"

The young man was somewhat surprised by Zhuang Rui's words and said helplessly that the things he sold were only time-consuming to make, but the cost was not much, only about a hundred yuan for

materials. On a good day, he would only sell three or four items. Now that he heard Zhuang Rui wanted to buy them all, this was a big deal for him.

"That's fine then. I see that the craftsmanship of your root carvings is very exquisite. I'll take them back and try selling them in my friend's shop. If they sell well, I'll come to Hefei again to buy more from you."

Zhuang Rui didn't explicitly reveal the whereabouts of the root carvings, but instead offered a reassuring excuse to the stall owner. In his mind, however, he shamelessly praised himself: "When others buy things, they try to lower the price, but I insisted on giving them money both times. What a noble quality that is!"

Before the young man could refuse again, Zhuang Rui took out the wad of cash Liu Chuan had given him from his jacket pocket, counted out five thousand yuan, handed it over, and said, "Give me this bamboo rattan box too, otherwise I really can't carry it."

The young man took the five thousand yuan that Zhuang Rui handed him, and then felt the four thousand yuan that the traitorous translator had just lost in his pocket. His stall had been smashed, but he had actually made nearly ten thousand yuan. The young man stood there a little at a loss. After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, he quickly opened the box, put the sandalwood Maitreya Buddha pendant and the monkey stealing peaches inside, and respectfully handed them to Zhuang Rui.

This box is very finely woven. It has a handle on the lid and two snap fasteners along the edge. Once fastened, it can be carried in your hand.

"Brother, this is my home phone number. Please call me if you come to Hefei in the future."

The young man borrowed paper and pen from the management office, wrote his name and home phone number on them, and handed them to Zhuang Rui.

"Zeng Mingyi? Okay, I'll make you my friend. I'll definitely bother you next time I come to Hefei. But I'm currently staying in Zhonghai and don't have your contact information. I'll call you when I'm settled. Alright, you don't need me here anymore, Director Wang, I'll take my leave now."

Zhuang Rui took the note, put it close to his body, and said to Zeng Mingyi and Director Wang of the management office that the traitorous translator had completely admitted defeat, and Director Wang was quite good at talking to the foreigners with his mediocre English, so there shouldn't be any more twists and turns. Zhuang Rui looked at his watch and saw that it was almost four o'clock in the afternoon, so he said goodbye to the two of them.

Director Wang also had a good impression of Zhuang Rui. He stood up and saw him to the door before turning back. Zhuang Rui, carrying a bamboo box, had no intention of wandering around anymore. Seeing that it was almost time, he took out his phone from his pocket and dialed the switchboard of the hotel where Liu Chuan was staying.