

Golden 99

Chapter Ninety-Nine: The Unlucky One (Part Two)

In Pengcheng Flower and Bird Market, there were always some idlers who initially relied on their thick skin and cunning tricks to extort money from honest stall owners, making a meager living. However, after the market was regulated, these people lost their way and switched to setting up stalls themselves. But old habits die hard; they still cheated and swindled, only now targeting customers.

A few years ago, Da Xiong hung out in the flower and bird market before it was expanded. When Liu Chuan first opened his pet shop, Da Xiong and Monkey came over. After a few words, they smashed one of Liu Chuan's glass doors. Liu Chuan had only recently graduated and was used to being arrogant in school. He hadn't yet adapted to the rules of the underworld. He immediately grabbed a large wrench that the workers had forgotten to take with them during the renovation and smashed Da Xiong and Monkey's heads. It is said that Liu Chuan chased them for dozens of meters and made them beg for mercy on their knees before he stopped.

Although Liu Chuan acted rashly, his father cleaned up the mess afterward. However, after this incident, Liu Chuan became famous in the antique and flower market. The idlers who were close to him would greet him warmly as "Da Chuan," while those who didn't have much contact would call him "Boss Liu." Fewer people tried to trip him up. After all, in this world, the ruthless fear the reckless, and the reckless fear the reckless. But Liu Chuan hadn't met anyone reckless yet. With his father's connections, he naturally thrived in the flower and bird market.

Perhaps they were scared by Liu Chuan, Da Xiong and Monkey disappeared for a while. When they reappeared, they set up a stall on the antique street. However, they usually avoided Liu Chuan. Even after they found out that the cricket gourd they sold to Zhuang Rui was real, they didn't dare to cause trouble. But today, for some reason, they actually came to the shop and sat down properly.

"Hey, Da Chuan, you're finally back! We've been waiting for you for ages!"

Upon seeing Liu Chuan enter the store, Da Xiong and Monkey immediately stood up from the sofa, beaming as they greeted him.

"Hey, Xiong Ge, Monkey, I didn't keep you waiting. Our shop is too small to fit two great masters like you. Just say what you need, I have to go out in a bit." Liu Chuan was too lazy to waste words with them and got straight to the point.

The monkey felt a chill run down its spine upon seeing Liu Chuan. It touched the scar on its head and took a few steps back. Da Xiong, who used to be considered a big shot in the market, was also afraid of Liu Chuan, but he didn't care about that now.

"Da Chuan, it's like this, last time your buddy got a gourd from Liu of Sanhe from me..."

"Hey, wait a minute, Xiong-ge, you've been in this market for more than just a year or two, you know the rules better than I do. What's up? Here to settle scores with my brother?"

Before Da Xiong could finish speaking, Liu Chuan interrupted him, his expression turning grim. He had thought the matter was long over, but these two dared to cause trouble again; they really didn't learn their lesson.

"No...no, Da Chuan, let me finish. We're not here to settle scores, it's just like this..."

Seeing Liu Chuan raise his eyes and look like he was about to turn hostile, Da Xiong waved his hands repeatedly and said something that made Liu Chuan, Zhuang Rui, and the others realize what was going on. They looked at each other and couldn't help but find it funny.

It turns out that after Zhuang Rui snagged a bargain from Da Xiong and sold it for a sky-high price of 150,000, the news spread throughout the entire antique market in just a few days. Da Xiong was filled with regret and slapped himself several times. However, he knew he couldn't afford to offend Liu Chuan, so he didn't dare to go looking for trouble and could only swallow his anger.

Afterwards, Da Xiong was filled with resentment and frustration. Tens of thousands of yuan had slipped through his fingers just like that; anyone would be furious. After much thought, Da Xiong remembered that he had bought the item in Tianjin. He vaguely recalled that when he found it there, the stall also had many cricket gourds. Maybe if he went back, he could find one.

Once the idea took hold, Da Xiong was restless, like being scratched by a cat. He couldn't stay still for even a day. He immediately found Monkey, and the two of them pooled all their savings, along with some relatives and cronies, and scraped together 30,000 yuan. Da Xiong then took a train straight to his uncle's house in Tianjin.

Speaking of old Tianjin, during a special period in the Republic of China era, the prosperity of the antique market far surpassed that of Beijing. This was because many remnants of the Qing Dynasty lived there. These descendants of the Eight Banners had no survival skills and could only sell the old objects left by their ancestors, which led to the development of the Tianjin antique market at that time.

Even today, more than half a century later, the antique craze in Tianjin is still thriving. Da Xiong wandered around the Tianjin antique market for several days, but he didn't understand ceramic and bronze antiques. He knew that most of the calligraphy and paintings by famous people were fake. He knew the tricks better than anyone else. After several days, he still couldn't find a single item he liked.

Just as Da Xiong was about to give up and return to Pengcheng, he saw a simply dressed but very clean old man at the antique market. He looked like a retired worker. There were more than a dozen cricket gourds on his stall. Da Xiong took a liking to one of them, which was extremely similar to the gourd from Sanhe Liu that he had sold to Zhuang Rui.

Da Xiong chatted with the old man and learned that the old man was a descendant of the Eight Banners who fled from Beijing to Tianjin during the Qing Dynasty. After liberation, he became self-reliant, got a job in a factory, raised his children, and lived a peaceful life until retirement.

The old man thought he could finally enjoy a few days of peace after retirement, but who knew his children would be so unfilial? Not only did they refuse to provide any support, but they also took his retirement pension every month. Enraged, the old man went to the police station and the neighborhood committee, but they couldn't do anything about his unfilial children. Driven to desperation, the old man remembered some old things his father used to play with. He had someone take a look, and they said they were worth 30,000 to 50,000 yuan. So, the old man set up a stall at the antique market.

Da Xiong himself was a folk singer and had fooled many people in the antique market. However, after chatting with this old man for a long time, no one tried to help him out, so he was already somewhat convinced. Then, when the old man took out a photo of his ancestor dressed in Manchu clothing and pointed to the child, saying that the child was himself, Da Xiong looked at the photo and saw that the child did indeed look somewhat like the old man in front of him. He was now eighty percent convinced.

At that time, Da Xiong pointed out that he wanted the cricket gourd that looked like the one from Sanhe Liu. The old man asked for 50,000 yuan and wouldn't budge on the price. He said it was his father's heirloom and he would never sell it if his children weren't unfilial. Da Xiong haggled with the old man for a long time and even treated him to a good meal at a restaurant. He managed to lower the price to 30,000 yuan and finally got the cricket gourd. Overjoyed, he immediately took the train back to Pengcheng overnight.

The next day, Da Xiong took the gourd to Shopkeeper Lü and asked him to take a look. After examining it for a while, Old Master Lü immediately determined that it was an old imitation, quite old, probably from the mid-1980s. The imitation was quite well made and worth about a hundred or two hundred yuan.

Da Xiong was so angry that his face turned green. He hated the old bastard for his convincing acting and the old man Lu for his hurtful words. It was something from over ten years ago, and he was still saying it was old. But Da Xiong didn't even have the money for a train ticket back to Tianjin. He knew that the old swindler with such a good acting skills wouldn't stay there waiting for him to come after him. Besides, this matter was hard to explain, and even if he found the old man, he couldn't do anything to him.

Da Xiong, who had originally hoped to make a fortune from this item, was completely dumbfounded. Not only had he lost all his savings, but he also owed his relatives and friends several thousand yuan. These were all poor relatives who had lent him the money because they saw him turn over a new leaf. Now that they heard he had lost money in the antique business, they all came knocking on his door, almost wearing down his doorstep. This made Da Xiong even consider robbing a bank.

Finally, the monkey came up with an idea. He had heard rumors circulating in the market these past few days that Liu Chuan had gone to Tibet and bought several purebred Tibetan mastiff puppies, each worth millions. The two of them discussed it and realized that after all these years in the antique market, they hadn't made a penny and were now heavily in debt, while Liu Chuan, at such a young age, had become a millionaire in just a few years.

Da Xiong and the monkey decided to talk to Liu Chuan and ask if he could point out a way to make money, or even work for him. They knew that Liu Chuan was very generous to his own people.

After hearing this convoluted and bizarre story, Liu Chuan was both amused and exasperated, while Zhuang Rui, standing to the side, was gloating. Who told this guy to be so petty? The rumor about a puppy worth millions was probably something he had spread himself.

“Hey guys, I was lucky to run into these two Tibetan Mastiff puppies on my trip to Tibet,” Liu Chuan said, pointing to the two little guys running around happily at his feet. “I’m planning to do some other business, and I probably won’t be coming to this shop as often in the future. How can I take care of you two?”

“Da Chuan, since you came to this market, although we’ve caused you some trouble and been taught a lesson by you, we’ve both respected you. It’s been three or four years now, and we haven’t caused any more trouble. We’ve turned over a new leaf. But now, we’re about to go hungry. Everyone says you’re a kind and righteous brother, so please help us out.”

Da Xiong understood the evasive meaning in Liu Chuan's words, and immediately disregarded his pride, pleading with him. Then he looked at Zhuang Rui and said, "Brother, you bought that gourd from Sanhe Liu. It's just that I was blind. I never thought of getting it back. You have to say a few words for me today."