6. Wei Jieguang

My name is Wei Jieguang, 62, beijinger. I am now retired and I am obsessed with stones. I was born near Qianmen Dajie, just like my parents.

The small house I’m living in was allotted by the government decades ago. It used to be a coal shed. I heightened the ceiling, added lights to make it my own place. The neighborhood hasn’t changed much over the decades. Most of the families still live in those shabby old houses—look nice from the outside, but terrible to live in.

I’ve been a big fan of stones since I was a kid, to the point of obsession. When I was young and energetic, I traveled around a lot and discovered the special stones in Alxa League in Inner Mongolia, to my great joy. So I visited Alxa often to collect the stones. I also bought the stones from local farmers. Many locals knew me there.

Just look at these stones! They’ve weathered the wind and rain of hundreds of thousands of years. How incredible is that! We human beings are less than dust in front of them. These silent stones are more powerful than us.

Unfortunately, not many prize Alxa stones—they prefer sapphire and agate. But in my eyes Alxa stones are treasures. I want to add more value to them through my creation. Alxa stones are too small for carving, so I use them for rings and ornaments.

I don’t make a living from Alxa stones. They were only a hobby until I retired. I keep all my stuff here. I don’t have a shop, because I’m not a businessman. I don’t want to be one either. Only those who already see the stones’ value have bought my stuff. For those who don’t, it involves a lot of vain explanation.

Is my family supportive? I’ve been doing this for over two decades and yet have earned next to nothing from it. They don’t oppose me at least. My wife isn’t a big dreamer. All she wants is a peaceful life. She often teases me that I’m only amusing myself and digging my own grave. But I think nothing is ridiculous to someone who takes it seriously.

I’m from an ordinary family—both my parents are workers. Plus I’m not intelligent, at least not according to the education system here, so I didn’t go anywhere with my study. That meant a very plain life journey for me so far. I’m regularly overwhelmed with a feeling of self-pity. I’m nobody but an ordinary man, but I want an unordinary life. If only I could make people see the hidden value of these stones as I do, I’d think this life was worthwhile.

That said, my life is actually not that bad. I’ve got my own little world here. I even talk to the stones sometimes. Fooling around with these stones, a day can pass like nothing. And I have nothing but long days now. I might as well enjoy my time, right?

I can see people walking by outside my window, both old and young, men and women. If it isn’t a lively picture. When I lie on my sofa to sleep, I can see the sky, and sometimes I can even see the stars.

Edited by David Huntington

**Note from Kuang:**

The house Wei lives in is less than 10 square meters; you could pass it without a second glance. The small room is lined with nothing but the delicate stone jewelry and ornaments he made. Wei showed me his collection, his eyes lit with childlike enthusiasm.