7. Luo Yuanling

My name is Luo Yuanling, 40s, from Yunnan. My mom gave me this name. It means “all good wishes come true.”

I’ve been a fan of antiques and vintage since six and became even more obsessed as time went by. As a teenager I apprenticed to an old local antique peddler. He taught me how to recognize antiques with real value, how to hunt for them, and where they might be buried.

I didn’t care the least bit about school, all my mind was on antiques. I would hide in a cave for half a day doing nothing but looking at an antique object. I was so bad at school that I didn’t get to continue after junior high, but started visiting here and there to collect antiques.

I’ve been to so many nowhere places for harvesting antiques—deep into the mountains and forests, to isolated temples and abbeys.

Often, all sorts of thoughts would come to me during those trips. Whenever I had thoughts, I made them into poems. I used to have pen and paper with me to write on. But I lost most of them. Now I just write poems and keep them recorded in my cell phone. I never try to write in rhymes. I think the rules just stop me from freely expressing my inner voice.

I’m a thinker. I always think about life. But I wasn’t born smart, so it usually takes me several hours to think something over, sometimes even days. Other people would rush to find a shelter when it rains, but I pretty much always do the opposite—standing in the rain to think. I would keep standing in the rain like a wooden stick until I think I’ve got the answer. Sometimes I don’t get the answer until my damp clothes are dry again.

I like getting wet in the rain. I think rain can clean people’s souls. There was that time in the mountains I spent a whole day in the rain watching how spiders maintain their webs.

Another time, I walked across a mountain on my way hunting for antiques, and there was this beautiful waterfall. I was suddenly struck by a wave of strong feelings. But I couldn’t put into words what exactly the feelings were. So I stopped and sat by the waterfall to think. I drank water from the falls when I was thirsty, caught fish when I was hungry, until several days later when I thought I’d gotten the answer.

All of my knowledge, I don’t get it from any teachers. Mountains, rivers, flowers, and trees, they are my teachers. They are what always make me think and give me enlightenment. When I see a majestic mountain, I get the idea that we should be as strong and persevering as mountains; when I see rivers and seas, I get the idea that we should be encompassing just like the ocean.

My shop has been here for over a decade. People who come in are from various walks of life, some are collectors, antique dealers, and archaeologists. The Palace Museum even bought two antiques from me for an exhibition.

Was there any client who left a deep impression? There was! I remember this guy, he was shabbily dressed and had an awful grimace, but I was very impressed by his rich knowledge about history. I therefore deeply believe that we should never judge a book from its cover. Sometimes behind an ugly face there’s a great soul.

I used to hold on to my stuff, I liked it all too much so I didn’t want to sell it. But after my dad passed away a few years ago, I awoke to the realization I can’t just live in my own fantasy, because life isn’t just about myself. I put my whole collection up for sale afterwards, in the hope to make enough money, get married, and take good care of my mom and my siblings.

I want to go back to my hometown once I find someone to marry, and start a small farm there. I want a wife. I don’t care if she’s good-looking or not; I don’t care if she doesn’t own a penny. All I want is to find someone that is caring and mannered. If she could have a skill of some kind, that’d be even better. That’s not too much to ask, right?

Edited by David Huntington