

The Master Wood Carver 班门弄斧 by Tak Cheung

Last Christmas, John attended a birthday party at the lobby of an upscale hotel, and in the lobby there was a piano. John had been taking piano lessons for many years, having plans to become a pianist one day after he completes his musical training in a local university. One of the guests was invited to play the piano for the audience, and he was a well known pianist in the area, giving an amazing performance and receiving admiring applause from the audience. After his playing, John was asked to play on the piano next by his friend who knew that John is also a pianist. John quietly declined the invitation because in his mind, he remembered the Chinese chengyu story "The Master Wood Carver" that his Chinese grandmother had told him about not showing off in front of the master. The situation caused him to quietly repeat the story in his head.

Once there was a great sculptor in ancient China, his name was Lu Ban, and his carving was so good that he once carved a phoenix, and the legend was that the phoenix came to life and flew in the sky before turning back into wood again. In a remote village, there was a young man, who had practiced the art of wood carving since he was a little boy, and he became an expert carver, creating lifelike animals only with a few swings of his ax. People in his village told him that he is a better carver than Lu Ban, and he decided that he is going to visit Lu Ban and to show off his carving skills. When he arrived at Lu Ban's house, Lu Ban was not at home, and the young man decided to hold a demonstration outside his front door. He was carving different kinds of animals with precise execution, creating lifelike statues, attracting a large crowd of onlookers, yelling his name with admiration, and applauding each time when he completed an animal sculpture. A short while later, Lu Ban returned with two of his disciples, after working on a large sculpture at the royal palace, greeted the young man, examined the sculptures that had been carved, and watched how the young man expertly wielded his ax. Lu Ban turned to one of his disciples and noticed that he had a thin patch of fine saw dust on the tip of his nose, waiting to be wiped off. He took out his ax, and in a quick motion, he waved the ax over the head of this disciple and came down sharply over his face. In this extraordinary moment, the ax passed over the nose of his disciple, the patch of saw dust was gone. Lu Ban had used his ax to wipe the saw dust off the nose of his disciple without the slightest scratch of the skin. The onlookers burst out in wild applause, amazed by the extraordinary skills of Lu Ban. The young man felt ashamed to show off his skill in front of the master, packing up his tools and sculptures, and quietly walked away, realizing that he had made a fool of himself in front of the master's house. He recognized that he still had a lot of work to do before he would dare to compare himself to the master again.

After the party, John went home and told his grandmother of how her chengyu story has helped him to make a decision in preventing him from facing embarrassment in showing off in front of a master.

The End

Tak Cheung's Wok With Tak YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCP5IL4yyiwYxKZUyZEeyRlg>

Oportuno Podcast - Audio of this Story:

<https://pnc.st/s/oportuno/6bfa4e93/036-story-time-the-master-wood-carver->