

Golden 50

Chapter Fifty: Bao Gong Fish, Cao Cao Chicken (Part 1)

There are two routes to choose from when driving from Pengcheng to Tibet. One route goes through Henan and Shaanxi provinces to Xi'an, then takes the expressway to Chengdu, Sichuan, and finally from Chengdu to Tibet. However, once you enter Shaanxi province, the roads become quite difficult to navigate, with many winding mountain roads.

Considering Zhuang Rui's driving skills, Liu Chuan rejected this route. Zhuang Rui was a little disappointed, as he had originally planned to visit his college roommate, Lao San, in Xi'an on the way. They hadn't seen each other for almost two years since graduation.

The second route is to enter Anhui Province, and after arriving in Hefei, take the Shanghai-Chengdu Expressway directly. It passes through Hefei, Lu'an, Wuhan, Jingmen, Wanzhou, and Nanchong before reaching Chengdu. The total length is about 1,600 kilometers. This route is the fastest and has the best road conditions, making it suitable for people like Zhuang Rui who have obtained their driver's licenses but haven't driven much to practice.

"You rascal, why don't we just find somewhere to eat and be done with it? Where are you going with all this winding paths?"

Zhuang Rui saw Liu Chuan driving around the streets of Hefei, passing several restaurants without stopping, and asked him curiously.

"Hey, no rush. I'll take you to eat some local Hefei snacks. You can rest well this afternoon, and I'll drive all night while you sleep. You can drive all day tomorrow, and we'll be in Chengdu soon..."

Liu Chuan was clearly familiar with Hefei. After driving for about 20 minutes, he pulled the Hummer into the parking lot of a hotel that looked quite luxurious. He got out of the car, entered the hotel, and then did something that left Zhuang Rui completely bewildered: after checking into a room, he dragged Zhuang Rui away from the hotel.

"Hey, where are you going? You were so anxious before we arrived, but now you're not in such a hurry anymore. Aren't we going to eat here?"

Zhuang Rui hadn't expected that Liu Chuan had come to this hotel just to rest in the afternoon, rather than to have a meal here.

Upon hearing this, Liu Chuan curled his lip and said, "Only an idiot would eat at a hotel like that. The food is expensive and the price is steep; they rip you off without you even seeing the blood. The place I'm taking you to is not only reasonably priced, but you can also eat authentic Hefei cuisine. Just come with me."

The place Liu Chuan mentioned wasn't far, only a five or six-minute walk from the hotel. The restaurant occupied a considerable area, a two-story building, but the entrance wasn't large. Above the entrance hung a simple sign that read "Local Cuisine Restaurant." When Zhuang Rui went inside, he found the business to be surprisingly good. The hall, which was about four or five hundred square meters in size, was completely full of people, and more than a dozen waiters were bustling between the tables serving dishes. If he had only looked at the restaurant from the outside, Zhuang Rui would never have believed that the business inside was so good.

"What are you standing there for? Let's go." Liu Chuan pulled Zhuang Rui, who was still stunned, and walked towards the second floor.

The second floor of the restaurant had the same layout as the first floor, except that it was divided into small private rooms. Liu Chuan did not call the waiter, but led Zhuang Rui down to the rooms one by one. When they arrived at the door of a private room, they stopped and pushed the door open and went in.

The private room wasn't big, probably only able to seat seven or eight people at most. The soundproofing didn't seem to be very good; the laughter and conversation from the next room could be heard very clearly. However, the room was very warm. After Liu Chuan went in, he took off his thick coat and looked at Zhuang Rui smugly, saying, "How about that, buddy? I'm pretty good at this, aren't I? I can tell this room is empty just by listening."

Zhuang Rui suppressed a laugh, nodded in agreement with Liu Chuan's statement, and then said, "Your ears are good. I think we shouldn't go to Tibet. Let's just go back from here. When we get back, you can just lie in Brother Song's villa all day and be his Tibetan Mastiff."

As he spoke, Zhuang Rui burst into laughter. He had noticed earlier in the corridor that all the private rooms had signs that said "occupied" hanging on the handles. Liu Chuan must have chosen this room because he saw that the sign was flipped over. This guy was actually bragging about that, so Zhuang Rui naturally had to put him down.

"You're the Tibetan Mastiff, you can't say anything nice, can't you let your buddy show off a little..."

Liu Chuan retorted angrily, but before he could finish speaking, the door to the private room was pushed open from the outside.

The waitress who came in was a young girl. She poured tea for the two of them and then took out the menu. Liu Chuan waved his hand and said in an affected tone, mimicking the Hefei dialect, "No need for the menu. Bring a large plate of 'Cao Cao Chicken,' a 'Bao Gong Fish,' and 'Li Hongzhang Stew.' Also, one serving each of the four kinds of snacks: sesame seed cake, baked rice cake, 'cun jin' (a type of pastry), and boiled white slices. Okay, bring them on."

Liu Chuan quickly ordered the dishes without ordering any alcohol. Although he and Zhuang Rui both had a good tolerance for alcohol, they were out of town and had to drive, so Liu Chuan knew his limits.

There are some differences between Hefei dialect and Pengcheng dialect. Apart from only knowing the 26 letters of the English alphabet, Liu Chuan is very good at learning local dialects. At least the girl in front of him did not realize that Liu Chuan was from out of town. Seeing that the dishes he ordered were famous local specialties, she agreed, refilled their water, and then went out.

"Hey rascal, what kind of dishes did you order? Are we having a big feast today?"

Zhuang Rui was currently quite confused by the names of the dishes Liu Chuan had ordered. Cao Cao, Bao Gong, and Li Hongzhang—these names all sounded rather sinister. Only the desserts ordered later were somewhat normal.

Liu Chuan gave Zhuang Rui a disdainful look and said, "You're so ignorant, aren't you? Let me tell you, the dishes I ordered are all local specialties of Hefei. You can't find them anywhere else. Take this 'Bao Gong Fish' for example. It comes from the Bao River, the moat around the Bao Gong Temple. The crucian carp from this river have black backs, which look a bit like Bao Heizi's black face, so people call it Bao Gong Fish..."

"What's the origin of Cao Cao Chicken?" Zhuang Rui listened with fascination, amazed that a dish could have such a legend.

"Speaking of 'Cao Cao Chicken,' it is a traditional famous dish that originated in the Three Kingdoms period. Legend has it that during the Three Kingdoms period, Hefei was a strategic location due to its location at the border of Wu and Chu. After Cao Cao unified the north, he led an army of 830,000 south to fight against that guy named Sun. When he arrived in Hefei, this young man was so busy with military and political affairs that he overworked and suffered from a headache, and was bedridden."

At that time, Cao Cao's chef followed the prescription left by Hua Tuo, selected local chickens from Hefei, and carefully cooked them with Chinese medicine to make medicinal chicken. Cao Cao found the taste delicious and liked it very much. Gradually, his illness was cured and his body recovered quickly. After that, he ate this chicken with every meal.

So, brother, what we're eating today is all about. If Cao Cao were in the Three Kingdoms period, he'd be practically an emperor.

To be honest, Liu Chuan is quite the foodie. He never passed his history exams from junior high to high school, but now he can actually quote classical texts, which has made Zhuang Rui look at him with some new respect.