

Golden 51

Chapter 51 Bao Gong Fish, Cao Cao Chicken (Part 2)

As the two were talking, the 'Bao Gong Fish' was actually ready. A waiter pushed a small cart, bringing the 'Bao Gong Fish' along with several plates of braised pork with peanuts and other side dishes to the table. Only after seeing the 'Bao Gong Fish' with his own eyes did Zhuang Rui realize that it was actually a cold dish.

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Actually, this dish is a traditional cold dish from Hefei. It was created by researching and restoring the Bao family cuisine and is a testament to Bao Zheng's incorruptibility and simple lifestyle. The dish uses small crucian carp from Baohe River, lotus root from Baohe River, scallions, ginger slices, soy sauce, rock sugar, vinegar, Shaoxing wine, sesame oil, etc. as ingredients. The ingredients are sealed with lotus leaves, covered and boiled in a pot over high heat until dry, then simmered over low heat for about 5 hours. After cooling completely, it is inverted onto a large plate and drizzled with sesame oil. 'Bao Gong Fish' is considered a signature dish of this restaurant, and many customers always order it. Therefore, even though it is made in advance every day, there are never any leftovers.

The lotus root served as a side dish in Baohe is also unique, as it is all broken and without fibers, which is said to be a symbol of Bao Gong's "iron face and impartiality".

Zhuang Rui had only eaten some steamed buns and fried dough sticks early in the morning, and he was already starving. Since he wasn't drinking, he started eating right away. He picked up a crucian carp and put it in his mouth. A delicious taste immediately traveled through Zhuang Rui's taste buds to his brain. Moreover, the fish, which had been simmered over low heat for more than five hours, was already cooked until the bones were soft and the meat was tender. It melted in his mouth and had a faint fragrance of lotus.

"good!"

Zhuang Rui couldn't help but praise it, his chopsticks moving non-stop as he picked up another fish and put it in his mouth. Liu Chuan, who had wanted to hear more praise from Zhuang Rui, was surprised to find that half of the 'Bao Gong Fish' was gone in the blink of an eye. Liu Chuan hurriedly grabbed his chopsticks and started fighting with Zhuang Rui over the leftovers.

The second dish served was "Li Hongzhang's Mixed Stew." When it was served, it looked reddish and glossy, and smelled delicious, making the two men's mouths water. By this time, the "Bao Gong Fish" had already been eaten by the two men. Having learned his lesson earlier, Liu Chuan started eating voraciously as soon as the dish was served. Zhuang Rui originally wanted this guy to continue explaining, but seeing Liu Chuan's actions, he knew that the Nationalists were very cunning and would not fall for it.

After grabbing the last piece of shiitake mushroom and putting it in his mouth, Liu Chuan smacked his lips, looked at Zhuang Rui triumphantly, and said, "Let me tell you about this dish now, buddy. Damn, if our history teacher had treated us to a meal every day back in school, would I have failed my history exam?"

Zhuang Rui: "..."

The dish "Li Hongzhang's Stew" also has a story behind it. Legend has it that when Li Hongzhang went to Russia to attend the coronation ceremony of Nicholas II and made a stop in Europe and America, he ate Western food for all three meals a day, which he found very unaccustomed. Upon arriving in Europe and America, Li Hongzhang instructed his accompanying chefs to cook locally purchased vegetables, meats, and other ingredients in one pot, following Chinese cooking methods.

Once this "one-pot stew" was cooked, it was delicious and palatable, suitable for both drinking and eating with rice. It also prevented Li Hongzhang from being distracted by the tedious process of frying, stir-frying, boiling, and deep-frying, which would delay his official business during his overseas visits. Li Hongzhang simply ate this every day. Sometimes when he entertained foreigners, when they asked him the name of the dish after the meal, Li Hongzhang would casually say "mixed stew". From then on, many people in Europe and America knew that there was a famous Chinese dish called "mixed stew".

After Li Hongzhang returned to China, he continued to instruct his family to cook this dish often, and he frequently used it to entertain guests. Subsequently, "Mixed Stew" became popular throughout the country, and "Li Hongzhang's Mixed Stew" became a signature dish of Hefei.

The final main course was naturally "Cao Cao Chicken." This dish uses high-quality local young chicken as the main ingredient, along with Gujing Gongjiu from Anhui and 18 kinds of appetizing and health-promoting ingredients such as gastrodia elata, eucommia ulmoides, shiitake mushrooms, winter bamboo shoots, Sichuan peppercorns, star anise, cinnamon, fennel, scallions, and ginger. It is nutritious and has the effect of dietary therapy and health care. After Zhuang Rui finished eating, he immediately felt a warm feeling in his stomach, which was very comfortable.

"You rascal, I'm starting to envy you. Putting everything else aside, the food from all over the country is truly as good as it sounds."

Zhuang Rui patted his slightly full stomach and looked at Liu Chuan, saying that these were his true feelings. Just in Hefei alone, one could find such delicious food. Moreover, China is so vast, with its eight major cuisines—Shandong, Guangdong, Sichuan, Jiangsu, Fujian, Zhejiang, Hunan, and Anhui—each having its own strengths. Only someone like Liu Chuan, who travels around all the time, can taste these authentic regional specialties. Although there are restaurants serving various cuisines in some big cities, the taste is ultimately different.

Just like Quanjude Peking duck in Beijing, its branches have spread all over the country, but when people go to Beijing, they still prefer to eat at the original Beijing store. The reason is simple: to eat the original flavor.

"Alright, wood, stop making fun of me. You see me driving around every day, looking quite comfortable and carefree, but you have no idea how hard it is to go out. Like last time when I drove to Kunming, one of the four major police dog bases in China, to buy a puppy, my car broke down on the mountain road, and there was no cell phone signal. I was completely helpless, without food or water for a whole day and night."

Liu Chuan still felt a bit emotional when he talked about the past. That time, he took a shortcut and drove on a side road, but after his car broke down, he couldn't flag down any passing cars. He listened to the howling of wolves all night in the desolate mountains, which scared him quite a bit. This time, he asked Zhuang Rui to join him on his trip to Tibet, hoping to gain some courage.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui understood why Liu Chuan had packed so much food in the Hummer; it turned out this guy had suffered psychological trauma.

The portion of Cao Cao Chicken was quite generous. After the two finished eating, they couldn't eat any more of the desserts that followed, so they simply asked the waiter to pack them up to take on the road. When they paid the bill, the meal only cost a little over a hundred yuan. Zhuang Rui even considered packing up a few more portions of the dishes to take away.

"Waiter, are there any large private rooms upstairs? Our boss, Mr. Zhao, is treating us today, so please prepare one quickly."

After Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan paid their bill, they had just reached the top of the stairs on the second floor when they were greeted by seven or eight people. They seemed to be regular customers, and the waiter was greeting them with a smile.

"Boss Zhao, you've really struck gold this time! You'll make at least 100,000 or 200,000 yuan this time. Don't forget your brothers when you make your fortune!" The man who had called the waiter earlier said to a middle-aged fat man surrounded by the crowd.

"Finding a bargain?"

These words reached Zhuang Rui's ears as they passed by, immediately catching his attention. Ever since the spiritual energy appeared in his eyes, he had paid much more attention to the antique trade.

After leaving the restaurant, Zhuang Rui said to Liu Chuan, "You rascal, did you hear what those guys were saying? Looks like I'm not the only one who's lucky; there are plenty of others like me."

"Of course! Don't you see where this is? That's Sihui Tower. All the antique dealers in Anhui gather here. Every day, some people get ripped off, and some people make a fortune. It's all very normal here."

Liu Chuan pointed to a five-story pagoda that was tens of meters tall not far away and replied dismissively.