

Golden 61

Chapter Sixty-One Bathhouse

Liu Chuan booked a standard double room. Zhuang Rui originally just wanted to take a shower in the bathroom, but Liu Chuan dragged him out of the hotel, saying he wanted to show him the nightlife of Chengdu.

Regarding the origin of the name Chengdu, according to the records in the Taiping Huanyu Ji of the Northern Song Dynasty, it was borrowed from the historical process of the Western Zhou Dynasty establishing its capital. The name Chengdu was derived from the fact that "the Zhou king moved to Qi and the place became a settlement in one year, a town in two years, and a city in three years". During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, Meng Chang, the emperor of Later Shu, loved hibiscus flowers and ordered the people to plant hibiscus trees on the city walls. When the flowers bloomed, Chengdu was "a tapestry of brocade for forty li". Therefore, Chengdu was also known as Hibiscus City, or simply "Rongcheng".

It's late February now. Back in Pengcheng, people still had to wear thick cotton-padded clothes when they went out, and sometimes it would even snow like peach blossoms during this season. But as soon as Zhuang Rui arrived in Chengdu, he felt the breath of spring. He had already taken off the sweater under his jacket at the hotel, but he didn't feel cold at all. The night breeze was gentle, and he felt much more refreshed.

Liu Chuan didn't drive out. According to him, the place to eat wasn't far from the hotel where he was staying, so Zhuang Rui was too lazy to ask. This guy was like a local tyrant wherever he went, so he just followed behind him. He had long heard that Sichuan was known for its beautiful women, and Zhuang Rui's eyes were now scanning around. He could now control the spiritual energy in his eyes very well, and he no longer had to be as cautious as he used to be when looking at people.

Zhuang Rui had heard this saying before: You only realize how low your official rank is when you get to Beijing; you only realize how bad your stomach is when you get to Guangzhou; you only realize how little money you have when you get to Shenzhen; you only realize how bad your health is when you get to Hainan; and you only realize how early you got married when you get to Chengdu.

He was just walking the streets of Chengdu when he deeply understood that last sentence, because his eyes were already overwhelmed by the sights.

Zhuang Rui's first impression of the Chengdu girl was her fair skin, as delicate as jade, so smooth it seemed to melt at the touch. Although she was a bit shorter than girls from the north, her curvaceous figure and exquisitely beautiful face completely overshadowed this flaw.

It was only the beginning of spring, but most of the girls on the street were still wearing skirts, exuding a youthful and healthy vibe. Although Zhuang Rui had seen many beautiful women while strolling around Nanjing Road in Zhonghai, when it came to locally made products, Chengdu was definitely the place to go.

Zhuang Rui had often seen the saying "Yangzhou first, Yizhou second" in some unofficial historical anecdotes, meaning that the most beautiful women in the world came from Yangzhou, followed by Yizhou, which is now Chengdu. Now that he has seen it with his own eyes, he knows that the above two statements are not exaggerated at all.

"What's wrong? Are you seeing things? Come in."

Before they knew it, they had arrived at the entrance of a hot pot restaurant. Liu Chuan was looking at Zhuang Rui with a wicked grin, wondering if he should take the guy's virginity here. He noticed that Zhuang Rui seemed to be much more interested in women lately than before, something Zhuang Rui had never done before.

This is actually quite normal. Zhuang Rui is just a young man in his early twenties, the time when his hormones are at their peak. He used to be single and working hard in another city, and the pressure of life was quite high. In addition, his personality is too rational and introverted, so after ending a relationship in college, he has not dated again. However, since the spiritual energy appeared in his eyes, it seems that he no longer needs to worry about making a living. With his mother's urging, Zhuang Rui has also begun to seriously consider this issue.

However, Zhuang Rui had no intention of seeking one-night stands. While a woman's first time is important, a man shouldn't be so casual either. Lately, when Zhuang Rui occasionally recalled the girls he knew, he realized that his past twenty-five years had indeed been somewhat of a failure. Aside from his college girlfriend, buried deep in his memory, the person who appeared most frequently in his mind was actually Qin Xuanbing, with whom he had always had some disagreements.

After shaking his head and banishing the unrealistic thoughts from his mind, Zhuang Rui realized that he was already sitting in this hot pot restaurant.

Zhuang Rui had no objection to eating hot pot. He had loved spicy food since he was a child and had long wanted to try authentic Sichuan hot pot. This restaurant did not disappoint him. In a time when electric hot pots were all the rage, they were still using charcoal hot pots. Moreover, after the hot pot was served, a chef in a white coat added the hot pot base to the broth on the spot. Zhuang Rui knew that this was probably a form of self-redemption that many hot pot restaurants were trying to do to attract customers after the exposure of gutter oil and swill oil scandals.

In addition to a table full of beef, mutton, vegetables, and other side dishes, Liu Chuan also ordered a bottle of Langjiu liquor. Drinking some alcohol after a long drive is a good way to relieve fatigue.

The charcoal fire burned brightly inside the exquisite copper pot, and the broth in the hot pot quickly boiled. Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan put the side dishes on the table into the pot and briefly cooked them before starting to eat heartily. Neither of them had had a proper meal in more than 20 hours. In no time, the two of them had devoured all the side dishes on the table, along with their drinks. Although their mouths were numb and tingling, their stomachs felt warm and comfortable.

After dinner, Zhuang Rui originally thought Liu Chuan would go to a sauna, but to his surprise, the guy took him to a large public bathhouse. He didn't expect that in an era where hotels and saunas were everywhere, Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province, still had public bathhouses. This surprised Zhuang Rui, because for many people, including himself, going to a public bathhouse had become a kind of sentiment.

When you go to a public bathhouse, you can see naked, white bodies. It's an unguarded world where there's no distinction between rich and poor. To take a bath, you have to take off your clothes and be completely naked. In this way, all traces of social status disappear. You strip naked and shed all the pretense of the mortal world.

In the bathhouse, everyone becomes the same. What he has, you have too. Everyone treats each other with sincerity. There is no scheming or deceit. Our social hierarchy is eliminated, and the professional gap is bridged. Familiar faces and strangers get along with each other. Laughter, anger, and scolding are unrestrained. All we want is to feel good!

Nowadays, there are very few old bathhouses left in Pengcheng, either because of serious losses or because of regional demolition. This is indeed a transformation of bathing culture. Zhuang Rui has not been to a bathhouse for many years, but a few years ago he watched a movie called "Shower", which brought back a lot of memories for him.

When they were kids, Zhuang Rui and Liu Chuan often had breath-holding contests and water fights in the bathhouse. Although they always ended up getting a couple of slaps on the bottom from Liu Chuan's dad, those memories were still fond in Zhuang Rui's heart. He figured Liu Chuan must have felt the same way, which is why he brought him here.

This bathhouse is very popular. The storefront isn't big, but once inside, it feels exceptionally clean and bright, with a flat floor. The lobby is lined with wooden planks along the walls and railings, and there are large pools that could easily accommodate more than twenty people bathing at the same time. There are people constantly calling out their wares, serving water and green radishes to customers who have finished bathing, and occasionally wiping towels for them. Zhuang Rui felt a sense of warmth and comfort at first glance.

The pool in the lobby was shrouded in mist. Before even taking off his clothes, Zhuang Rui could already feel the rising steam. He immediately asked for a small lock, found a locker, and quickly stripped off his clothes before entering the pool. A wave of heat immediately hit him. Although it was a bit stuffy, it felt great, a truly exhilarating experience. He could hear the sounds of people stirring the water, the "plop plop" of back massages, and the dripping water from the ceiling, all of which seemed to be playing a beautiful melody.

The essence of bathing in a public bathhouse lies in the word "soak." As the saying goes, "In the morning, the skin wraps the water; at night, the water wraps the skin." Taking a hot shower with a showerhead can induce sweating in a short time, but this only temporarily raises the skin's surface temperature and expels sweat from the epidermis. Only by slowly immersing oneself in hot water can blood circulation be promoted, causing the whole body to sweat, opening pores, pushing dirt and oil to the surface of the skin, and softening the stratum corneum. This allows sweat to carry away old waste and toxins from the body.

The two soaked in the pool for most of the hour, sweating profusely several times. They then called a bath attendant to scrub their bodies before getting out of the pool. Immediately, someone handed them two large towels. Zhuang Rui wrapped himself in them, took the scalding hot towels thrown to him by the attendant, and applied them to his face. Instantly, a wave of heat penetrated his pores. When he could no longer breathe, he lifted the towels, and the feeling of comfort was indescribable. All the fatigue from the past few days of travel disappeared.

Ordering two cups of tea and four slices of green radish cut into strips, Zhuang Rui lay comfortably on the wooden communal bed. It seemed as if he had returned to the old bathhouse in Pengcheng more than ten years ago, and his thoughts began to drift.

"Hey Wood, I have something to tell you, but don't get angry with me..."

A somewhat ethereal voice reached Zhuang Rui's ears. He looked up and saw Liu Chuan, who was chewing on a radish while mumbling incoherently.