

TALISMAN EMPEROR

Chapter 12 - Spirit Chef

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“Oh, that’s Qiao Nan, and that’s Pei Pei.”

Bai Wanqing extended her hand to point at the man and woman, then turned to face the skinny old man, and introduced to Chen Xi in a low voice, “This is old man Ma, the senior brother of Qiao Nan and Pei Pei. The three of them are all 3 leaf spirit chefs.”

Chen Xi nodded and bowed. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, seniors.”

Slosh! Slosh!

No one paid any attention to Chen Xi, and only the sound of cooking delicacies within the woks echoed out continuously.

Since he was born, Chen Xi had experienced countless occasions similar to this, and he’d long since tempered his disposition to be exceedingly tenacious. Thus he didn’t feel embarrassed.

Bai Wanqing, however, couldn’t take it. She directly walked over to old man Ma and suddenly snatched away the iron ladle in his hand as she said fiercely, “Old man Ma, can’t you see I’ve come to recommend a disciple to you?”

Old man Ma fiercely glared and was about to flare up when he noticed Bai Wanqing glaring back at him without letting up in the slightest. He knew he couldn’t do anything against this girl and could only say in grief, “Little Bai, stop causing trouble. This is a plate of high-quality sliced chili spirit roe-deer meat!”

As he spoke, his palms that were skinny like bamboo held up the iron wok, then tilted the wok to pour the entire dish that revealed a bright lustre of fresh chili onto the plate. The broth was oil-red with meat cubes matched with seasoning of various colors that were delicate like silk. An exquisite fragrance suffused the air from this dish that was both pleasant to the eye and smelt good.

“Old man Ma, open your eyes wide and look! Chen Xi’s skilled in crafting talismans, and possesses both nimble control of his wrist strength and acute perception. He’s at the Congenital Realm as well. Could it be that even such natural talent isn’t worthy of being your disciple?”

Bai Wanqing had long since lost her modest and calm demeanour, she pursed her cherry lips as she said savage and unreasonably, “I don’t care, you must accept Chen Xi today!”

Old man Ma was startled and seemed to have recalled something as he let out a peculiar laugh. “Chen Xi? It couldn’t be that jinx right?”

Qiao Nan and Pe Pei who were busy before the stoves stopped all their movements upon hearing this and gazed at Chen Xi with strange expressions.

Bai Wanqing’s body trembled, as she was extremely furious. She truly wished for nothing more than to strangle this damned old man to death for touching such a tender spot. “How can you speak like that?”

Her heart was extremely perturbed as she looked over at Chen Xi. But what she noticed was Chen Xi lightly pucker his lips and said calmly, “It isn’t important whether I’m a jinx or not; what’s important is I never expected that Senior Ma turned out to be so conventional. Aunt Bai, let’s go.”

“Oh.” Bai Wanqing said, feeling slightly ashamed for bringing Chen Xi here.

“Wait.” The two of them were just planning to leave when old man Ma yelled in rage. “Who the fuck is conventional? Who cares if he’s villainous without any

redeeming features, or greatly merciful and compassionate? As far as I'm concerned, it's all fucking rubbish!"

The more he spoke, the louder his voice became until he was practically roaring. "What I'm accepting is a disciple, so long as he can inherit all my culinary arts, who's so free to care about all that?"

Bai Wanqing said in pleasant surprise, "Then you plan to accept Chen Xi as your disciple?"

Old man Ma's face froze, hesitant and indeterminate.

Qiao Nan secretly winked at Bai Wanqing and spoke with a serious expression. "Senior brother, accept him. I believe in a person that pretty Lady Bai looks favourably upon!"

Pei Pei's gaze lingered on Chen Xi for a moment as she covertly shot Chen Xi a seductive glance. Only then did she plead to old man Ma with a pitiable expression. "Yeah, senior brother. Chen Xi looks young and steady, and he's skilled in crafting talismans. Accept him."

Chen Xi was startled and kept his silence, but a trace of hope arose within his heart.

He'd refused earlier because old man Ma mocked him to his face. If he were to humble himself and plead the old man, then even if he'd successfully taken old man Ma as his master; if he still had to constantly suffer old man Ma's mocking, then he would rather not have this opportunity.

Moreover, after hearing old man Ma's roars, he'd understood that old man Ma wasn't as terrible as he'd thought, and that little bit of anger in his heart vanished without a trace.

It wasn't terrifying when one was cast aside, mocked, or held in contempt. What was terrifying was when one didn't have self-esteem, dignity, and lacked

persistence! What was terrifying was when one was indiscriminate between good and evil, black and white, and unable to discern between true and false!

This was something his grandfather said, and Chen Xi adhered to it firmly since he was young until it was branded into his marrow.

Old man Ma snorted coldly, then gazed at Chen Xi and said, "This being the case, I'll give you a chance. There's an azure tassel bamboo shoot, cut it into slices."

The entire azure tassel bamboo shoot was a verdant green like jade and contained within it was strands of spirit energy, yet it was one of the ordinary fruits and vegetables.

Chen Xi moved to the stove. Placed before him was a shiny kitchen knife and a nearly 2/3m long azure tassel bamboo shoot.

"Knife skill is one of the important methods to judge and evaluate the standard of a spirit chef. 30% stove, 70% chopping board; a dish can't be made without a knife. Old man Ma wants to test your knife skill, do your best." Bai Wanqing explained in a low voice, her clear eyes filled with an encouraging expression.

Chen Xi nodded. He picked up the azure tassel bamboo shoot and looked at it for a moment before swiftly swinging his knife!

Chop! Chop! Chop!

Dense and closely woven sounds of the knife slicing on the chopping board echoed out like a rhythmic drum. Chen Xi's wrist was steady like a coiled pine tree, and the shiny and sharp kitchen knife was precisely controlled by him to slice out snow white bamboo shoot slices that were as thin as a cicada's wing.

Five years ago, Chen Xi had replaced his grandfather to frequently cook at home, thus he was naturally extremely familiar with using a kitchen knife. Couple that with crafting talismans throughout the year, the strength of his

wrist and his precision were both outstanding. At this moment, when he put his heart and soul into it, not only were his movements smooth and precise, even his speed was extremely fast.

In next to no time, an azure tassel bamboo shoot transformed into a row of neatly arranged snow white bamboo shoot slices.

In the distance, old man Ma didn't even spare a glance as he said indifferently, "Steady wrist strength and precise knife skill, but unfortunately the thickness differs. Only half achieved the state of being as thin as a cicada's wing, barely slightly better than an average person."

"The slicing of ingredients stresses upon uniform thickness, to be as thin as a cicada's wing. Only in such a way would it allow the infusion of taste within the dish to be balanced, the cooking time to be the same, and its shape to be pleasing to the eye. If the size, thickness, and length weren't equal, it would cause the same dish to have defects such as varying taste, varying degrees of doneness and texture, and being unpleasant to the eye."

Pei Pei's beautiful eyes rippled with extraordinary splendour as she praised while smiling happily, "Little brother Chen Xi, your knife skill isn't bad."

Old man Ma glared at Pei Pei, then raised a request with a stiff tone. "Slice it into threads!"

Chen Xi took a deep breath, then once again concentrated on the chopping board as he sliced it into threads. Obviously, the demand towards the degree of precision was even higher, thus he didn't care be careless.

Chop, chop, chop...

The kitchen knife was like mercury spilling on the ground, as it descended down at a higher frequency that was finer and closely woven, and bamboo shoot threads that were extremely thin like hair flew out.

Chen Xi felt as if he was crafting a talisman. The kitchen knife had become the talisman brush, the bamboo shoot slices had transformed into the talisman paper, and every bamboo shoot thread had become a talisman marking that was perfectly straight like a sharp sword.

The drawing of talisman markings strives for the evenness of the ink marks, and every single detail had to be accurate and detailed, as it represented the entire talisman as a whole.

Slicing the bamboo shoot slices into thread was similar as well, as it strived for similar length and thicknesses, and the skill of one was obviously shown between the swift movements of the knife.

Strictly speaking, the difficulty of slicing the pieces into threads was far lower than drawing talisman markings, as the talisman markings drawings varied beyond a straight line and had different levels of strength applied to each marking. The drawing of talisman markings fully utilized the Dao of variation and shifting, and was far from being so singular like the movement of slicing slices into threads.

Thus, after he'd completely grasped the degree of strength and precision, the speed Chen Xi chopped abruptly increased, and the kitchen knife seemed as if it'd come alive, dancing a joyous rhythm as it swiftly moved forward.

"His movements weren't fluid in the beginning, but halfway through he completely grasped the essence of it. Could this kid be the same as me, a genius in the culinary Dao?" Qiao Nan held his chin and pretended to be pondering.

"Fuck off! You shameless fellow!" The nearby Pei Pei rolled her eyes, then gazed at Chen Xi with an infatuated gaze and muttered. "An earnest man is the most handsome. Little brother Chen Xi, big sister is waiting for you to come love me, I'll love you more dearly than little sister Wanqing..."

This time even Bai Wanqing couldn't take it any longer, two rosy clouds appeared on her refined and fair face as she got angry from embarrassment. "Pei! Delusional!"

Nevertheless, she was extremely happy in her heart, as Chen Xi being able to receive the praise of both Qiao Nan and Pei Pei was already far beyond her imagination.

Old man Ma's eyes flashed brightly, but his expression remained indifferent.

In Pine Mist City, so long as your living conditions weren't bad, practically no one's child would cook in the kitchen, as cooking was considered to be engaging in irrelevant work and wasting time that would be better used for cultivating. In truth it was exactly like that, unless one attained the level of skill to be a spirit chef. Ordinary people who worked as chefs were all servants, and as their master, one only needed to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

Thus, after seeing Chen Xi's skill in handling the knife, old man Ma's heart was indeed moved slightly.

But this was far from enough, as his culinary arts towered above all in the entire Pine Mist City, and he himself was a 3 leaf spirit chef. Thus he would absolutely not be hasty when deciding on the person to be his disciple.

Chen Xi put down the kitchen knife. On the chopping board was a pile of delicate azure tassel bamboo shoot threads that were bright as snow. Each thread was fine like a cotton fibre and crystal clear, and were extremely attractive.

"Chen Xi, well done!" Bai Wanqing took the lead in giving praising him.

"Not bad. You have half my ability from all those years ago, but you can already be considered as extraordinarily skilled." Qiao Nan said in all seriousness.

Pei Pei first rolled her eyes at the shamelessly boasting Qiao Nan, then used her fair and slender arms to hold onto her delicate and beautiful face as she muttered infatuatedly, “Little brother Chen Xi, I’ve already deeply fallen in love with your earnest appearance. Oh, could this be a feeling I’m unable to free myself of?”

Although he felt slightly awkward when he heard the praises of the three, but Chen Xi still felt much more at ease as he raised his head to gaze at old man Ma.

“Humph! Your knife skill still has a long way to go.” Old man Ma’s face tightened as he walked forward. His left hand picked up an azure tassel bamboo shoot thread and his right hand picked up the kitchen knife, then his wrist vibrated and a shocking scene appeared.

With the bamboo shoot thread in his left hand as the target, the nearly 30cm long kitchen knife danced swiftly within his hand, as it dispersed out masses of knife afterimages that seemed like snowflakes, his skilful movements both natural and smooth.

Chen Xi’s eyes sprang wide open, but was completely bewildered by what he saw.

“He’s carving a flower!” Bai Wanqing explained in a low voice. “Carving patterns onto ingredients it not only pleasing to the eye, but also allows the taste to more easily enter the dish during cooking. Especially some types of meat that are full of spirit energy, the carving of patterns on its surface allows spirit energy to be more easily absorbed.”

Chen Xi came to a sudden understand, and secretly said to himself, “This old man Ma wouldn’t ask me to do this next right?”

He felt slightly vexed, as the kitchen knife seemed so enormous compared to a bamboo shoot thread that was fine like a cotton fibre, and not to mention

carving a flower atop it, he would probably sever it the moment it came into contact with his knife.

Bai Wanqing grunted coldly. “Humph! It’s just a lousy bamboo shoot thread, what’s the point of carving on it? Don’t worry, if old man Ma really asks you to carve a flower on the bamboo shoot thread, then he’s intentionally making it difficult on you. I’ll absolutely not approve of it!”

“I don’t approve as well.” Pei Pei interjected, and she intentionally shot a glance at Chen Xi as she spoke, with an appearance that said ‘Big sister will stand up for you.’

Qiao Nan held his head high, and said solemnly, “Since pretty lady Bai doesn’t approve, then as a gentleman, I express my disapproval as well.”

Old man Ma’s figure that was whirling the knife froze, then he swung his hand to fiercely throw the kitchen knife away, and stomped his foot in rage as he howled. “Is it not enough that I accept this disciple? All I did was call him a name and all of you gang up on me?”

“You said it yourself!” Bai Wanqing, Qiao Nan, and Pei Pei spoke in unison.

Chen Xi took all this to heart, and a warmth that he’d never felt in a long time flowed within his heart. He knew that with just his level of knife skill, if it wasn’t out of consideration for Aunt Bai, these fellows wouldn’t even bother to spare him a glance.

He couldn’t help but feel a burst of curiosity. Who exactly is Aunt Bai? Not only is she acquainted with Instructor Meng Kong of Pine Mist Institution, but she’s also able to get along with three spirit chefs. She’s entirely not like an ordinary kitchen assistant.