

Culinary 141

Chapter 141: The Food Mother-in-Law Likes! [Extra for coming and going in ashes]_2

「In the restaurant.」

After resting enough, Shen Jiayue rubbed her stomach and stood up, ready to go back to the audit office. Although her stomach was still a bit full, she knew her colleagues were still hungry. She couldn't let them wait too long.

Just as she slung her bag over her shoulder, Lin Xu came over with a takeout portion of black bean sauce steamed chicken.

"This is Uncle Tan's favorite black bean sauce steamed chicken. Take it to him."

"Okie dokie!"

After Shen Jiayue left, Grandpa Gao also got busy with his live stream.

With his phone in hand, Lin Xu stepped to the door and used the time before customers arrived to call his mother, Chen Meijuan, to tell her about meeting the parents.

As soon as she heard that her son had met the parents, Chen Meijuan immediately asked, "How do you feel about Yueyue's parents, son? Did they look down on you for being an outsider?"

"No, Uncle Shen and Aunt Han are both very nice. Yesterday they even bought me a whole bunch of clothes. Those short-sleeved shirts cost over a thousand yuan each; I'm hesitant to even wear them to work..."

Lin Xu hadn't expected his mother-in-law's clothes to be so expensive. People from different social classes really do have different views on spending.

Hearing that the prospective in-laws treated her son well, Chen Meijuan finally felt relieved, "That's good, that's good. Did you thank them? You were always shy as a child, and now that your parents aren't by your side, remember to be sweet-mouthed and not to offend them..."

Lin Xu didn't know when it started, but he felt his mother had become more and more nagging.

Someone once said, "When you find your parents nagging, it means you have grown up and need to protect them from the elements."

Lin Xu felt this was very true.

He talked about making Almond Tofu yesterday, and Chen Meijuan immediately grew unhappy, "They bought you clothes, and you just made Almond Tofu? That won't do! Ask Yueyue in secret what her mother likes to eat. Make something for your future mother-in-law. If there's anything you're not sure about, ask your master or me..."

After listening to his mother's nagging, Lin Xu reminded her and his father to take care of their health. The temperature difference between day and night in the mountains was large, so he told them to keep warm.

It was only when Panda came to pick up his boxed meal that he hung up the phone.

「Back in the restaurant.」

Lin Xu sent a message to his schoolmate Shen, "I really liked the clothes your mother bought yesterday. Does she have any favorite foods that she usually likes? I'd like to make something to thank her."

Soon, Shen Jiayue sent a message back on WeChat, "Anything I secretly keep in my room, she likes!"

Lin Xu: ????????

Can't you give me some constructive advice?

He then asked, "What does my mother-in-law like to eat at home?"

"Probably fresh meat wontons. She loves Aunt Liu's fresh meat wontons the most; she has to eat them at least two or three times a month. Sometimes when she gets off work late, my dad will even bring them to the hospital in a thermal container."

Fresh meat wontons?

If it were any other dish, Lin Xu might not have been able to make it. But this was simple. Because he now possessed Excellent Level Dough Mixing Skill, Excellent Level Filling Skill, and Excellent Level Filling Skill. With these three skills combined, making a simple fresh meat wonton was easy peasy.

Lin Xu planned to start preparing once the lunch rush was over, so that by the time his mother-in-law came in the evening, he could cook her a bowl and let her taste his craftsmanship.

It wasn't long after Panda left with his boxed meal that customers began to arrive for lunch one after another.

"Boss Lin, is there a new dish recently?" Yue Liyue, eating his bowl of braised pork rice, curiously asked Lin Xu. Yesterday, when he came to eat, he had smelled the savory scent of chicken and thought he'd be able to try it today. But it turned out not to be available. The restaurant still had the same few dishes, not even the trial service meals for regular customers.

Lin Xu said, "There will be a dish of black bean sauce steamed chicken this afternoon, but there's a limited quantity. If you want to try it, you should come early."

"Steamed chicken? With black bean sauce? I must come and try it!" Yue Liyue had no resistance to such dishes, especially one made by Lin Xu. He was even looking forward to it so much that he seriously set a reminder alarm on his phone.

「At three o'clock in the afternoon.」

After a rest, Lin Xu arrived at the restaurant. He began to prepare the fresh meat wontons his mother-in-law liked.

Fresh meat wontons are a family dish suitable for all ages, made all over the country, characterized by their savory soup and smooth skin with a fragrant filling.

In order to make the filling taste better and more flavorful, Lin Xu specifically went to the dry goods store at the market and bought a jar of premium large dried shrimp. These were a special type, larger than ordinary dried shrimp. In coastal regions, dried shrimp are made by shelling sea shrimp, then curing and drying the meat. Among these, the largest ones with a more vibrant red color are considered a superior grade—the kind Lin Xu had purchased. They are the choicest among all dried shrimp. The savory flavor of these premium large dried shrimp is more intense, and it's better for making fillings than fresh shrimp or frozen shrimp.

Lin Xu took a handful of the large dried shrimp and soaked them in clear water.

Next, he started to mix the dough. He added half a teaspoon of salt, two eggs, and a bit of baking soda to the high-gluten flour, then stirred it with warm water to form dough flakes before kneading it into a ball and letting it rest in a dough basin. The purpose of adding baking soda was to make the dough wrapper softer and smoother.

While the dough was resting, Lin Xu chopped some Scallion and Ginger strips into a large bowl, poured in some cool boiled water, added a small spoonful of salt, and then squeezed them several times, allowing the essence of the Scallion and Ginger to seep into the water. This would yield scallion and ginger water, a necessary ingredient for wonton filling.

Chapter 142: The Favorite Dish of the Mother-in-law! [Extra for ash comes and goes]_3

Moreover, using Scallion and Ginger water allows those who dislike eating scallion and ginger to avoid consuming the minced herbs.

「At the same time.」

In the Longqi Mountain Scenic Area of Yinzhou City.

Chen Meijuan looked at her husband, Lin Hongqi, and asked, "Yueyue's parents have met Lin Xu. Old Lin, don't you think I should also go to Beijing to meet them? If we don't show any concern, wouldn't that be impolite?"

Her son had been approved by his fiancée's parents, and she was truly delighted. But she was also worried that her son might only be sharing the good news and hiding any troubles. So she felt uneasy and wanted to go to Beijing to see for herself, and perhaps sit down for a meal with Shen Jiayue's parents.

If it were possible, she even wanted to arrange for the two kids to get engaged if they could find the time. Yueyue and her son had been university classmates for four years and were already as familiar as could be. If they could get engaged, it would put both sets of parents at ease.

Lin Hongqi took a sip of water brewed with Wild Mountain Tea picked from the hills. He said, "Ever since Lin Xu called, you've been anxious. Let's go have a look then. Should we bring some of our mountain specialties? Their family might be wealthy, but they may not have had the chance to try our local delicacies."

After Panda brought more than a thousand students and teachers last time, they bought up all the mountain goods. This inspired the people in the scenic area to harvest with great enthusiasm. They harvested not only in the scenic area but also ventured into nearby mountains during their free time. So, before long, the supply of mountain goods in the scenic area had increased once again.

"Let's take some. Lin Xu can only make a few toppings for his hand-pulled noodles. This time, I plan to bring more wild mushrooms and teach him how to make wild mushroom broth noodles. I'll also show off my cooking skills to my future in-laws," she said.

Unable to compete with them financially, she would make up for it with her culinary skills.

「In the restaurant.」

After Lin Xu prepared the Scallion and Ginger water, he took a piece of pork shoulder and sliced it thinly. Then, he retrieved the soaked dried shrimp, drained them, and placed them on the pork slices to begin chopping the filling. The dried shrimp didn't need to be fully soaked; just slightly softened was fine. This

way, their umami flavor wouldn't be lost, and the resulting filling would be more delicious. Chopping the dried shrimp with the pork allowed the umami flavor to permeate the pork, giving the filling a rich taste.

Once the meat filling was chopped, it was placed in a basin to start seasoning. Into the basin, he added Light Soy Sauce, Dark Soy Sauce, pepper powder, and a small spoonful of Sesame Oil. Since the dried shrimp and Light Soy Sauce both contained salt, there was no need to add extra. Moreover, salt would be added to the soup when the wontons were cooked, so the filling should be kept relatively light.

All the seasonings were stirred until evenly mixed. Then he poured in the Scallion and Ginger water and stirred the meat filling in one direction. While stirring, he repeatedly picked up the filling and slammed it against the bottom of the basin. This would make the meat bind and become sticky, resulting in a better texture.

Once the meat filling was ready, he placed it in the refrigerator to marinate.

By then, the dough had proofed enough. Lin Xu took it out and began rolling out the wonton wrappers with a rolling pin. The process for making wonton wrappers was almost the same as for hand-pulled noodles, the only difference being the addition of lye water. He rolled the dough into a thin sheet, then wrapped it around the rolling pin. Using a kitchen knife, he sliced along the pin, transforming the single large sheet of dough into several wide strips. He then cut these strips into even squares. The square wonton wrappers were ready.

"Boss, are you making wontons?" Che Zai asked curiously, having finished preparing the ingredients for several noodle toppings.

Lin Xu nodded. "My mother-in-law likes small wontons, so I'm preparing to make some for her to try."

Che Zai suggested, "At the shop where I used to work, we liked to add Lotus Root to the wontons. It makes them crunchy and delicious. Do you want to try adding some?"

Che Zai's suggestion made Lin Xu's eyes light up.

Right, why didn't I think of adding some Lotus Root? The texture of a meat-only wonton filling can be a bit monotonous. With crunchy Lotus Root, it should be delicious, right? Moreover, the natural sweetness of Lotus Root can enhance the umami flavor of the filling.

But would my mother-in-law like it?

After thinking it over, Lin Xu grabbed his phone and sent a message to his dear Shen Jiayue, asking.

Shen Jiayue, who was idling at the audit office, saw the message. She secretly swallowed. With a TAP TAP TAP of her keyboard, she replied: "Sure, my mom absolutely loves them. Just go ahead and make them, and remember to make plenty!"

After sending the message, she muttered to herself, "I like to eat them, so Mom should like them too, right? But even if she doesn't, it's no big deal. I'll just have to make a little sacrifice and eat them all myself..."

Upon seeing Shen Jiayue's message, Lin Xu immediately grabbed a Lotus Root from the storage room. After peeling it, he finely chopped the Lotus Root into mung bean-sized pieces. He then rinsed them twice in water with a little White Vinegar added to remove surface starch, before mixing them evenly into the meat filling.

He took out the prepared wonton wrappers and began to wrap the wontons. The method for wrapping small wontons is quite simple. Just place a bit of meat filling in the center of the wrapper, then casually scrunch the dough together. The key is to be unceremonious. Wrapping large wontons, however, is more elaborate. There are shapes like ingots and boats, among others; there are four or five different wrapping methods alone.

It wasn't dinnertime yet, so Lin Xu placed the wontons in the freezer. This would prevent the wrappers from becoming sticky and also lock in the freshness of the filling.

At four-forty in the afternoon, when everyone came from work for dinner, Lin Xu took the frozen wontons out of the freezer and started to cook them. Once the water was boiling, he prepared several bowls. Into each, he added some soaked seaweed, a small handful of dried shrimp skins, a pinch of salt and pepper, and finally, a small spoonful of lard. This fresh meat small wonton dish, with both its filling and the seaweed and dried shrimp skins, was designed to maximize umami. The savory flavor was quite

prominent. Therefore, lard was needed to balance it with a rich aroma. Only then could it achieve a delicious, irresistible flavor.

When small bubbles began to rise from the bottom of the pot (indicating the water was hot but not yet at a rolling boil), he added the frozen wontons. Once the water returned to a boil, the wontons were nearly cooked. Lin Xu first ladled some of the hot cooking water into each bowl to dissolve the seasonings. Then, using a slotted spoon, he transferred the cooked wontons from the pot to the bowls and topped them off with another ladleful of the soup.

This bowl of fresh meat small wontons, intensely aromatic and flavorful, was now ready.

Not far away, Han Shuzhen, having finished her day's work, watched the kitchen with a satisfied expression.

Having such a thoughtful son-in-law really made a difference! She had only bought him a few clothes the day before, and here he was, secretly making fresh meat small wontons to thank her.

Although her daughter Yueyue could be unreliable, her judgment in picking a partner was excellent.

And the girl even knew that she liked fresh meat small wontons.

That showed some filial piety, at least.

Unlike a few days ago, when Yueyue was spouting all sorts of thoughtless nonsense, making one seriously wonder if they'd brought the wrong baby home from the hospital.

Soon, the wontons were served.

"This smells so fragrant and savory! Thank you for your hard work, Xiaoxu," Han Shuzhen said, finding the aroma tantalizing and eager to taste them.

Lin Xu replied, "Yueyue mentioned you like wontons with Lotus Root filling, so I added some. Please try them and see how they taste."

Lotus Root?

I'm not particularly fond of wontons with Lotus Root.

The only one in our family who likes them is Yueyue.

Could it be that little minx...

Han Shuzhen glanced at her daughter, who was enjoying the wontons with a contented expression, and sighed softly in her heart.

She had just been praising the girl for being considerate.

But now it seemed...

Maybe they really did bring the wrong baby home from the hospital after all!

Chapter 143: Yueyue's First Date! Pan-fried Bun Technique!

"Wow! These wontons are so delicious!"

Shen Jiayue scooped up a wonton with her spoon. Its thin skin was almost translucent, clearly revealing the meat filling inside. Carefully blowing on it a couple of times, she waited until it wasn't too hot before popping it into her mouth.

The skin was smooth yet resilient. The filling inside had clumped together into a small meatball. It tasted fresh and delectable. Occasionally, she chewed on bits of diced Lotus Root mixed in the filling; its fresh and crisp texture added a refreshing lightness to the slightly greasy wontons.

Delicious!

So tasty!

Seeing her silly daughter enjoying the food so earnestly, Han Shuzhen, who had initially been wary of the heat, also scooped up a wonton, blew on it, and put it in her mouth.

Her son-in-law was indeed an expert at making hand-rolled noodles. The skin was rolled as thin as paper, yet it surprisingly didn't break. It slid smoothly down the throat without needing much chewing. Han Shuzhen loved eating wontons precisely for this feeling of drinking the skins down with the broth. A bowl of wontons, broth and all, made her feel entirely content.

But today, she discovered that adding some crunchy diced Lotus Root to the wonton filling was also very delicious. It not only enhanced the umami but also introduced a different texture.

So delicious! Her son-in-law's skills were truly impeccable. Everything he made was incredibly delicious.

She took another sip of the broth. It was also very delicious. Especially the aroma—it was something she could never get at home. At home, their cook, Sister Liu, was also skilled in making wontons, and the umami was very rich, but compared to her son-in-law's skills, it always seemed to lack a certain fragrance.

"Lin Xu, what did you put in the wontons? Why do they smell so good?" Han Shuzhen decided to find out exactly what he used. When she returned home, she would tell Sister Liu to use this method in the future.

Lin Xu said, "I added some lard to it."

The flavor was so rich; lard was essential to achieve it.

"Lard?" Han Shuzhen looked with some surprise at the oil floating in the bowl.

No wonder the aroma is so rich and mellow! So it's the lard! This reinforced her determination to write a paper on lard. Such a tasty fat, yet so misunderstood by people for so many years, with many even fearing the mention of it! It's time to correct everyone's mistaken dietary ideas.

"If you like this lard, I'll give you a jar later. The lard rendered at home probably isn't as tasty as what I make here..."

The stove at home has less firepower, and the quantity rendered each time is also smaller. Unlike at the store, where the stove's firepower is sufficient for making a large batch. Plus, after rendering, Scallion and Ginger are added to enhance the flavor. That's what makes the lard here even more delicious.

"Okay, okay, Guofu, don't forget to take it when we leave."

With the lard made by my son-in-law, it'll be even more convenient to study its uses in everyday life.

Lin Xu ate a small bowl of wontons. Then he picked up the hand-rolled noodles made by Niu Chuan and started eating them with the dishes on the table.

The training task was proceeding methodically. Niu Chuan could now make hand-rolled noodles twelve to thirteen times a day, easily meeting the goal of one hundred times in ten days.

However, eating these hand-rolled noodles too often can get monotonous. I should consider adding some different toppings, even if it's just for Niu Chuan's task. It's a pity Mom isn't here. She knows many noodle toppings; if she were here, she could whip up a delicious one in minutes.

While they were eating, Dou Wenjing walked in. After a busy afternoon, she had finally managed to transform Lin Ji's Food from an individual proprietorship into a catering company.

"Tomorrow, I still need to take the old business license to exchange it for a new one, and other permits also need to be updated."

"You've really gone to a lot of trouble, Wenjing. Come, try the wontons I made."

Smelling the wontons Lin Xu handed her, Dou Wenjing, who had looked somewhat tired, suddenly perked up. These wontons smell different from those sold outside!

Just as she was about to sit down to eat, she realized President Shen's family was sitting nearby—even his wife, the doctor, was present.

This... Would it seem impolite of me to just plop down?

"Go ahead and sit down to eat. It's a good chance to taste Lin Xu's cooking. These wontons really aren't easy to find outside."

Han Shuzhen's amiable demeanor warmed Dou Wenjing's heart. Does this mean I've broken into Madam Han's family circle? Their harmonious family is so enviable. Unlike me, I only go home once a year for Spring Festival, and even then, I have to deal with the blind dates arranged by relatives back home. My parents also nag endlessly, always acting as if they can't hold their heads high in front of the neighbors if I don't get married. SIGH! I must work hard and earn money! Once I buy my own house in Beijing, I won't have to care about what those relatives back home think anymore.

Dou Wenjing tasted a wonton. Her worries were instantly dispelled by the delicious taste.

"Wow, these wontons taste so good! They're both fragrant and fresh. How can they be this delicious?"

Before eating, she had already planned to praise them lavishly, no matter what. But after taking a bite, she realized the compliments she had prepared were utterly inadequate. These wontons are much tastier than I ever imagined!

"Isn't it delicious? My Lin Xu added lard, making it both aromatic and savory," Han Shuzhen said, warmly praising her son-in-law.

Shen Guofu had also explained to Han Shuzhen the purpose of Dou Wenjing's visit to the store. Hearing that the young woman was helping her son-in-law change the business's legal status, Han Shuzhen became even more enthusiastic.

"You've really worked hard in this hot weather. Just tell us whatever you want to eat. We might not have everything, but we have plenty of food."

Chapter 144: Yueyue's First Date! Pan-fried Bun Technique! _2

"Thank you, Auntie, I'll just grab something quick to eat. I have other things to do later."

Dou Wenjing had originally planned to deliver the documents and then leave work. But the enthusiasm from Director Shen's family gave her an inexplicable urge to work overtime.

It was too late to go to the Administrative Service Hall now, but she could visit the property management company for the shop units to get the landlords' phone numbers. She planned to call them during dinner to test the waters. If they were willing to sell, she would proceed directly to negotiations. If they weren't selling, or if their stance was ambiguous, she would need to devise alternative strategies. Regardless, she had to acquire those shops as soon as possible to complete the task assigned by Director Shen.

Dou Wenjing came quickly and left just as fast. She ate a small bowl of wontons and a small bowl of hand-rolled noodles before hurriedly grabbing her bag and leaving the restaurant. Even though she wanted to eat more, this rare opportunity to make a good impression was more important; she couldn't miss it.

"This young lady seems very capable," said Han Shuzhen, watching Dou Wenjing's departing figure.

Shen Guofu replied with a smile, "Indeed, she's not only shrewd and capable with strong business skills, but she also possesses good management experience. Among the several departments under the Finance Department, the tax office she's in charge of is the best managed and the most assertive. The other department managers in Finance are all scared of her."

Now that Lin Ji's Food had established a company, it would inevitably expand into a larger restaurant in the future. There would be too many things to deal with then. For instance, with online marketing, you couldn't expect chefs to cook and simultaneously use their phones to post promotional articles online, could you? There would also be employee attendance assessment, maintaining relations with major clients, wage distribution, social security payments, and so on. All of it would require someone to oversee everything. This person was Dou Wenjing. In time, she would become the general manager, taking charge of the overall situation. His son-in-law could then focus on his culinary research in the kitchen, without being troubled by petty matters.

Of course, these were just his personal thoughts. He wouldn't interfere with how Lin Xu managed the store. He was simply planning ahead, wanting to introduce his son-in-law to a trustworthy managerial talent early on.

「After dinner.」

Shen Guofu's family took a can of lard home with them. Lin Ji's Food, meanwhile, welcomed the first wave of customers for the evening.

Yue Liyue and his roommates were the first to come over. They ordered today's new dish, Black Bean Sauce Steamed Chicken, and a portion of Stir-Fried Chicken Chunks, as well as Black Bean Sauce Chicken Feet and Tomato Egg Noodles.

"Wow! Delicious, delicious! This is the exact flavor I was looking for!"

"Indeed, it's really tasty, on par with the Stir-Fried Chicken Chunks."

"I thought only our Zaozhuang spicy chicken back home was delicious. I didn't expect steamed chicken to be this good."

"If we're talking delicious, it has to be our Northeastern Braised Chicken with Mushrooms. Eat the meat first, then soak some rice in the soup. I can eat two big bowls by myself!"

Watching these guests devour their food, Lin Xu curiously asked, "What's with you guys and chicken today?"

Yue Liyue replied, "We didn't draw the phoenix in the card draw, so we're eating chicken to vent our frustration... Boss Lin, do you know of any powerful temples in Beijing? We're thinking of going to pray. We've tried drawing hundreds of times and still haven't succeeded. The fans in today's live stream were laughing their heads off!"

Go to a temple to pray? Your idea is quite unique.

Lin Xu pointed to Dundun and said, "Just pray to Dundun here; Dundun is a fortune cat that can bring good luck."

"Really? Don't mess with me, Boss Lin!"

Just as Yue Liyue finished speaking, Geng Lele, swinging her mushroom haircut, walked into the store. She bowed her head in earnest and touched her forehead to Dundun's, muttering to herself, "Holy flame, ever so bright, holy flame, ever so shining, all my disciples, MEOOW MEOOW MEOOW MEOOW... Dundun, our mid-month assessment results are being announced soon. You need to ensure I'm number one in the whole school!"

Yue Liyue said with a grin, "With all these superstitious activities instead of studying hard, be careful you don't even make the cutoff for a first-tier university in next year's college entrance exam."

After rubbing Dundun's big head, Geng Lele replied, "What do you know? Dundun can bring good luck."

Just as she said that, her phone rang. Pulling it out, she saw it was her homeroom teacher on the line.

"Hello, Teacher, did you need something?"

A middle-aged woman's voice came through the phone, "Geng Lele! Did you forge my signature to skip class again?"

The girl with the mushroom haircut opened her mouth to concoct an excuse when the homeroom teacher's voice came again, "Come back early. You got first in the whole school in this practice exam, scoring over ten points higher than the last one and nearly ten more than the second place... The principal wants to talk to you during the evening self-study session, so don't forget the time..."

WOW!!!! Really number one?

Geng Lele immediately responded, "Alright, Teacher, I'm going to have a bowl of noodles and then I'll be back. Don't lock your office door later; I'll bring you some Chicken Feet that I guarantee you've never tasted before!"

"My goodness, child, you giving me less trouble would be better than any treat you could bring!"

After hanging up the phone, Geng Lele hugged Dundun and gave him several kisses.

"I told you it would work! I got first in my grade! You all should praise me for being smart... No, no, no, you should praise Dundun for being effective. Our Dundun is the Holy Master of the Meow Meow Sect!"

Everyone looked at the girl with amazed eyes. For more than half a month, she had been forging her homeroom teacher's signature to skip classes. Even when she hadn't been skipping, she wasn't really attending class. Lately, she had been teaching herself design software, helping the restaurant design a full set of tableware, and had even used her hacking skills to expose one of Grandpa Gao's online alts.

Chapter 145: Yueyue's First Date! Pan-fried Bun Technique! _3

This girl, who didn't seem to have any scholarly achievements, actually scored first place in the entire school. And it was in a key high school among the top ranks in Yanjing. This was simply unacceptable.

"Don't look at me like that. The students in the genius classes at Tsinghua University and Beijing University are much stronger than me. I'm just an ordinary, cat-loving girl."

TSK TSK...

Lin Xu was about to say she wasn't being modest when he saw Yue Liyue get up and run to Dundun, pressing his forehead to Dundun's head without explanation, and turning to ask Geng Lele, "What's the Spell again?"

"That's a sacred phrase from our Meow Meow Sect, and since you're not part of the Meow Meow Sect, you can't use it," Geng Lele, the High Priest of the Meow Meow Sect, said seriously.

"Can I still join now?"

"Sure, just kiss Dundun's right front paw, and you'll become a member of our Meow Meow Sect."

All for the sake of drawing cards!

Yue Liyue, with a look of righteousness, grabbed Dundun's right front paw and kissed it.

"And then?"

"Then you hold Dundun's right front paw and recite the sacred phrase with me."

"Why are you pressing your forehead against it?"

"Because I am the Meow Meow Sect's High Priest, and I have the privilege... Are you ready?"

"Ready!"

Lin Xu watched the two fools earnestly, laughing so hard his stomach hurt.

In fact, it was enough to simply touch Dundun; there was no need for such a hassle.

After a series of complicated and ritual-free procedures, Yue Liyue took out his phone to draw a card.

"This is the last card. If I don't draw the Phoenix, I'm deleting my account!"

He tapped the card draw page in the game. The card spun twice. Then the animated effect of the Phoenix appeared on the phone screen.

"Wow, damn! I actually drew it!" Yue Liyue was thrilled.

He hadn't expected that praying to Dundun would actually work. In his urgency, he too wanted to kiss Dundun's head like Geng Lele, but the little guy disdainfully dodged and then leapt into Song Tiantian's arms.

"Hey, hey, hey, why won't you let me kiss? Playing favorites?"

Geng Lele rubbed Dundun's head and said, "Our Dundun is a boy. Would you like being kissed and touched by another guy?"

Yue Liyue: "..."

It seemed there was some logic to that.

He continued to eat. But in his mind, he had already made a decision. The next time he drew cards, he would definitely come over and touch Dundun's right front paw again before drawing.

And so, Dundun gained yet another devout follower.

The black bean sauce steamed chicken introduced today was very popular. More than twenty portions of chicken sold out in less than half an hour. There was even a customer who paid in advance for tomorrow just to taste the chicken but was refunded by Song Tiantian. The restaurant did not engage in prepaid orders, nor was there any need for such measures. They would always sell out anyway; first come, first served, fair and square.

At eight o'clock in the evening, when business in the store was winding down, Lin Xu made sure everyone tidied up the kitchen utensils and took Dundun home from work early. Tonight, he had a date with Shen Jiayue, so he left a bit earlier.

After placing Dundun at home, he strolled with Shen Jiayue hand in hand along Yingchun Street. Now that their relationship was public, there was no need to hide it any longer.

Shen Jiayue had come back home after working out and showering, her body smelling sweet. Smelling her fragrance and then his own scent of cooking fumes, Lin Xu regretted not showering before coming out.

"Why aren't you talking?" Shen Jiayue's voice came from beside him.

He remembered when they were in school, they often went running on the track. Back then, both Lin Xu and Shen Jiayue seemed to have endless topics of conversation, talking about games, classmates, rumors about roommates, and so on. Now that they were together, he somehow didn't know what to say.

Lin Xu said with a smile, "I'm afraid this is a dream and that I'll wake up as soon as I speak."

Huh... He's actually flirting with me! Do you think I'll fall for it?

Shen Jiayue, with her arm through Lin Xu's, said, "Don't worry, it's not a dream, and even if it were, I'd still be right here with you because you are my Xu Bao, and I won't let go of you."

As they walked along, the two arrived at the prestigious high school where Geng Lele studied. There was a Shengjian Bun shop near the school gate. It wasn't very big, but there was still a line at this hour, indicating the food must be good.

"You must be tired from working out, want to eat something?"

The reason Lin Xu gave left Shen Jiayue with no comeback. "Okay, let's just buy a little to taste. I actually prefer the food you make. It might not be as delicious as yours."

How could it be delicious if I can't even make it...

Just as Lin Xu thought of this, he suddenly remembered he still had an Excellent Level Cooking Learning Card.

Since Shen Baobao wanted to eat his cooking, why not just learn the Shengjian Bun technique?

He said, "Then I'll sneak a peek for a bit and see if I can learn it. If I can, I'll make it for you tomorrow."

"Okay, okay, thank you for being so good to me!" Shen Jiayue rested her head on Lin Xu's shoulder, feeling incredibly happy.

As their turn was approaching, Lin Xu focused his gaze on the master making the Shengjian Buns.

He silently mused to himself, "Use the learning card!"

The system's notification immediately sounded in his mind: "Learning target: Wang Ziqiang. Current Skill: Shengjian Bun Technique, proceed with the learning?"

Oh? Success on the first try?

Lin Xu immediately chose to learn.

"Consumed one Excellent Level Cooking Learning Card, acquired Excellent Level Cooking Technique—Shengjian, congratulations to the host."

Technique acquired.

But Lin Xu did not immediately leave. Instead, he bought a serving of Shengjian Buns to taste. The Shengjian Buns were delicious, soft on the outside with a crispy, flavorful crust underneath. Biting into them, the hot and fragrant soup squirted out, nearly splashing onto him.

"Wow, it's truly delicious, no wonder people are queuing up to buy them!"

After tasting a couple, Lin Xu found them quite delicious. He was just about to send Geng Lele a message, asking her to pick up a serving from the shop tomorrow. Then, he suddenly remembered he had already learned the technique. He might as well make them himself.

It would be a good chance to compare with the shop's and gauge Master Wang's skill level.

This made him yearn for that special item called the Eye of Discrimination. If he had the Eye of Discrimination, the levels of these Shengjian Buns would surely be clear at a glance. In the future, whether buying ingredients or snacks, he would never be deceived again. It was just that earning 1,880,000 points wasn't so easy. He could only continue to work hard to earn money.

After finishing the Shengjian Buns, the two of them went to a nearby dessert shop and each bought an ice cream, strolling around until nine o'clock before returning to the shop front. By this time, Niu Chuan and the others had long since locked up and left. Lin Xu watched as Shen Jiayue drove away, and he himself went upstairs to rest.

「The next day.」

After coming back with groceries, Lin Xu was just about to make some Shengjian Buns to try his hand when the owner of the neighboring supermarket, Uncle Yu, suddenly burst in: "Boss Lin, there's trouble! A mysterious tycoon is buying up all the shops around you, it seems they're up to no good!"

Chapter 146: It's Over, the Piglets at Home Have Been Kidnapped! [Add 300 Monthly Tickets]

Old Yu is probably about sixty this year.

Medium build, a little chubby—he's pure old-school Yanjing, every sentence dropping an 'er,' speaks Beijing slang smoother than even Master, Senior, or Shen Guofu and those guys.

He's a regular at the shop, too.

But this old fella doesn't eat anything else, only Noodles with Braised Eggplant and Pork Sauce, and he won't touch the kind that's been rinsed in hot water. Just likes 'em straight outta the pot, piping hot.

The Beijingers call it guotiao'er—straight from the pot.

And he insists on eating with whole garlic cloves. Says only this way is really authentic.

Looking at Old Yu coming over to give him the heads-up, Lin Xu asked curiously:

"How does someone buying those shops mess things up for me?"

Old Yu said:

"Kid, you're still too green. What if they open up some fancy restaurant, also called Lin Ji's Food? Wouldn't all your customers flock over there? Worst case, they buy out all these shops, in the future you want to expand, there's no place left for you..."

Lin Xu knew all that.

But if someone wants to buy, we can't exactly stop 'em, right?

He looked at Old Yu and asked:

"Between our two shops there's only a bakery in the middle. Did that mystery tycoon buy up your supermarket too?"

Old Yu let out a long sigh:

"I wanna sell, for sure—even called 'em up myself to ask. But they're only interested in shops around Lin Ji, don't even glance at anywhere else... You haven't pissed anyone off lately, have you?"

Lin Xu smiled.

Who could he possibly offend, cooking in the shop day in day out?

Besides, these folks around him—Master, Senior, the father-in-law, even Uncle Tan—they're all successful people. Even if he did tick someone off, it wouldn't be such a big deal to smooth things over.

"Thanks, Old Yu. I'll ask the landlord about it later... How come you're up so early today?"

He remembered the contract had a landlord's phone number.

He'd call later, see what's up.

But with the system's over-the-top planning, his own shop should be safe.

After all, it even managed to affect March campus recruiting.

Lin Xu even suspected that last fall's job fairs were also the system's doing.

Just so he'd become a chef.

Killed off what could've been a finance prodigy!

Old Yu pointed outside and said:

"Warehouse delivery just came, gotta count everything. Later let's grab some bean juice, my treat. That place's bean juice has been passed down for generations, tastes proper local. This early, there's already a line."

If it were any other breakfast,

Lin Xu might've gone with Old Yu.

Perfect chance to buddy up with the neighbor, have him bring in some rare ingredients.

But if it's bean juice, nah, he's good.

He grinned and said:

"Bean juice, I really can't get used to it. I'm about to make some Shengjian Buns—Old Yu, why not eat here, yeah?"

"What's so special about Shengjian? Bean juice—now that hits the spot, especially paired with two fried rings, nothing better."

Old Yu wasn't interested in Shengjian Buns.

Shook his head and left the shop.

After he went.

Lin Xu took the few pieces of pork skin he bought this morning, tossed 'em into a pot, added scallion, ginger, and liquor, and prepared to blanch them for some pork skin aspic.

Good Shengjian Buns are seven parts pork, three parts aspic.

Chop the pork skin jelly fine and mix into the pork filling; when heated, it melts into that juicy filling that everyone loves and hates—one careless bite and bam, soup all over your shirt.

But really, it's that soup—so tasty—that makes Shengjian Buns a crowd favorite.

Let the fresh Shengjian cool a bit, bite a tiny hole, then sip those still-hot juices—nothing like that flavor sliding right down your throat.

Carefully finish the soup.

Then eat up the bun, crispy-bottom soft-top, loaded with meat—the satisfaction's unreal, feels like life is complete.

If you manage to eat the whole thing without spilling a drop, the sense of achievement is wild, like you just pulled off some big feat.

After the water boiled in the pot,

Lin Xu gently skimmed the scum off with a spoon.

Then he scooped out the pork skin, dropped it on the cutting board, and while it was still hot, scraped off the greasy bits and stubble—so only a half-transparent, springy skin remained.

He scraped, then washed the pork skin twice in hot water.

Trying to get rid of any leftover grime on the surface.

Then, tossed all the pork skin in the pressure cooker, added some water, threw in scallion, ginger, and liquor again, sealed the lid, and set it to cook.

When it comes to pork skin aspic, as long as the skin's cleaned well,

the rest don't matter all that much.

If he didn't need it quickly for Shengjian Buns, Lin Xu wouldn't even bother with the pressure cooker.

While the pork skin was cooking, he mixed some flour with cold water and a bit of yeast.

For Shengjian Buns, you want "half-open" dough.

That means dough that's starting to rise, but not all the way.

This way, the buns won't puff up too much and squeeze out the filling, but won't be too dense and tough like dead dough either.

Buns made with half-open dough are soft and just right, sizing up nice and even.

Skin thickness comes out perfect, too.

Once the dough was rising,

Lin Xu dug out the rental contract from the cash register drawer.

The contract was drafted with a real estate agency—no info on the landlord, just a phone number for renewing after the lease is up.

It's still not even six, way too early to call.

He figured he'd save the number to his phone first.

Contact after breakfast.

As he punched in the landlord's number, Lin Xu was about to save it—turns out it was Old Gao's number.

Both numbers were exactly the same.

No way!

No wonder Master was coming by as soon as the shop opened.

Turns out he's the landlord.

This system's got a sense of humor, alright.

Chapter 147: It's Over, the Piglets at Home Have Been Kidnapped! [Add More with 300 Monthly Tickets]_2

Even if Master doesn't come to eat, I'll still meet him when I pay the rent in three months. They're really going all out to ensure the old grandpa leaves. Such meticulous arrangements. Then there should be no problem with that shop.

But to be cautious, Lin Xu still sent a WeChat message to his Master: "Master, I heard that someone has been buying up stores near Lin Ji these past few days. Have you heard anything about it? Has anyone called you?"

Soon, a message appeared on his phone: "Your master isn't awake yet. I'll let him know when he wakes up."

What in the world? Good heavens, has even his WeChat been taken over? Such a domineering woman is indeed terrifying. Compared to her, our own Shen Baobao is much better. But Master really needs someone like this to keep him in line. If the Shifus from previous generations had wives who could have managed him like this, holding him firmly in their palms, he might already have grandsons old enough to run errands.

When the Pork Skin in the pressure cooker was thoroughly boiled and soft, Lin Xu carefully fished out the Pork Skin along with the Scallion and Ginger. At this point, the Pork Skin was so tender it seemed like it would split if lifted. He cooled the Pork Skin in cold water to firm it up slightly, then used a kitchen knife to casually chop the large pieces into smaller ones before putting them into a food processor to grind them up.

The filling for Shengjian Buns couldn't have any Skin Residue; otherwise, the texture of the Shengjian Buns would be poor. So, the Pork Skin had to be completely crushed, ensuring the resulting aspic would be pure gelatin without skin fragments, making it more suitable for adding to the filling.

The crushed Pork Skin needed to be returned to the broth it was cooked in and then simmered on low heat. Right before it came to a boil, foam appeared again. Lin Xu carefully skimmed off the foam with a spoon and simmered it for about ten more minutes. Once he was sure no more foam was being rendered out, he turned off the heat. He poured the crushed Pork Skin and the broth into a tray and then placed the tray into the freezer to speed up the aspic's setting process.

While waiting, Lin Xu took a piece of pork shoulder and chopped it into mince. He peeled the Large Shrimp, deveined them, and diced the Shrimp meat, adding it to the mince. He didn't waste the shrimp heads and shells either. Lin Xu put them into a pot, added some fat, and simmered them on low heat to extract shrimp oil. He added some of this shrimp oil to the minced meat, and its umami flavor was instantly enhanced considerably.

Next, into the mince, he added Light Soy Sauce, Dark Soy Sauce, and pepper powder, mixing well. After that, he whipped the mince until springy using Scallion and Ginger water in which salt and sugar had been dissolved.

Sugar needed to be added to the meat filling for Shengjian Buns. However, adding white sugar directly could cause uneven sweetness and saltiness. Therefore, the white sugar and salt had to be dissolved together in the Scallion and Ginger water. This way, it mixed more evenly, and the flavor of the minced meat would also be better.

Once the Pork Skin aspic in the freezer had cooled, he took it out, chopped it into pieces, and mixed it with the meat filling. He then drizzled in some more shrimp oil and sprinkled a generous amount of chopped Scallions. After mixing it all together, it was ready to be wrapped into the buns.

Scallions are an indispensable ingredient for Shengjian Buns, perfectly showcasing the Shanghai people's preference for Scallions in their food.

Once the filling was ready, Lin Xu poured the risen dough onto the cutting board and kneaded it before dividing it into small portions. He kneaded each small portion again, rolled it out, then cupped it in his palm, filled it with the prepared mixture, and sealed it like a baozi, trying to pinch off any excess dough

at the closure. The filled buns were placed seam-side down on a tray to proof. This was because placing them seam-side down made the finished buns look nicer and more complete.

After preparing a tray, he set a flat-bottomed pan on the stove. Once it was heated, he oiled the bottom and then placed the proofed buns, seam-side down, into the pan. First, he seared them a bit, then poured in a flour-water slurry, and drizzled in some more cooking oil. Covering the pan with a lid, he started to cook them.

This method of making Shengjian Buns is almost the same as that for water-pan-fried buns. However, water-pan-fried buns use fully leavened dough, resulting in a thicker skin, and the preparation method is generally rougher.

While he was busy, Uncle Yu walked in again. "Xiao Lin," he said, "I called that mysterious buyer again just now. Guess what? They don't even want my supermarket at a ten percent discount; they're only interested in the shops around you. They're truly targeting you. Be careful."

Lin Xu nodded. "Thank you, Uncle. I'll ask around when I'm not busy today... Have you eaten?"

"I have. A bowl of bean juice with two fried dough rings, and then I had a sugar-browned pastry. It's such a pity you can't get used to such good bean juice."

It's no pity at all, Lin Xu thought. He actually quite liked pungent dishes. He could happily eat stinky Gu fish and stinky tofu, and as for Snail Noodles, he always needed a big bowl to feel satisfied. But when it came to bean juice, he just felt like he was going to throw up his own bile.

About ten minutes later, when the water in the flat-bottomed pan had completely evaporated and the sizzling sound of frying could be heard, Lin Xu lifted the lid. The Shengjian Buns had expanded slightly, their skins a bit moist from the condensed steam, and they were now touching each other. Taking advantage of this moment, he sprinkled some Black sesame seeds and a handful of chopped Scallions over the buns; the moisture on the skins helped the sesame seeds and Scallions adhere firmly. He covered the pan with the lid once more, letting them cook on low heat for another two to three minutes to bring out the fragrance of the Scallions and allow some of the steam in the pan to dissipate.

It was time to take them out. Lin Xu carefully lifted the Shengjian Buns out of the pan with a spatula. The buns had white, fluffy, and soft skins, sprinkled with sesame seeds and bits of Scallion, while their bottoms were pan-fried to a crispy golden brown, featuring a visually tempting, lacy, frost-like pattern.

"My," Uncle Yu exclaimed, "these Shengjian Buns look really good! You could even open a shop with these."

Chapter 148: It's Over, the Piglets at Home Have Been Kidnapped!

It was too early for the supermarket to be open, and it was a bit late to go back to catch up on sleep, so Uncle Yu simply sat in the shop and took the opportunity to chat with Lin Xu.

He had not expected Lin Xu's Shengjian Buns to be so good.

He kept praising them profusely. That Lin Xu is really impressive!

Not only is his cooking great, but even these small snacks are as good as those sold in the Shengjian Bun stalls on the streets. Having such great skills but running such a small eatery really is selling himself short. He should be running a big restaurant.

Lin Xu scooped two Shengjian Buns onto a plate and handed them to Uncle Yu. "Uncle, please give me some feedback. Be careful, they're hot. There's soup inside."

"How can I critique your work, Lin Xu? Today I've really been blessed... Oh, they are pretty hot. I'll have to wait a moment before eating."

It was almost time for Niu Chuan and the others to start work.

Lin Xu scooped all the Shengjian Buns out of the pan, ready to make another batch. He wasn't in the habit of preparing a separate meal just for himself. Since he made them, he might as well let everyone have a taste.

At half-past six, Niu Chuan and his team hadn't arrived yet, but Dou Wenjing came by taxi instead.

"How come you're here so early, Wenjing? Doesn't the administrative service hall open at nine?"

Dou Wenjing patted Dundun's head and said with a sigh, "Don't mention it. I was sleeping soundly this morning when a phone call woke me up. I just decided to get up then."

Uncle Yu, who was eating Shengjian Buns, interjected, "Some people really have no manners these days. It's hard enough for young people to get some sleep, and then they get woken up by phone calls. What can't wait until after they wake up?"

Dou Wenjing: "..."

Uncle, unless I misheard, wasn't it you who made the call about the supermarket?

She thought Shen Guofu bought the shop as a surprise for his son-in-law, so she didn't explain the situation and instead asked while yawning, "Boss Lin, do you have anything to eat now?"

Before Lin Xu could reply, Uncle Yu said, "Yes, yes, yes, you have to try Lin Xu's Shengjian Buns. This flavor! Even if you searched every street in Shanghai, you wouldn't find a shop with better skill than Lin Xu's."

This made Lin Xu rather embarrassed. "It's not that serious, not that serious. I just made a little because my girlfriend was craving them."

Uncle Yu was just about to praise him some more when suddenly, a bit of soup splashed from the Shengjian Bun in his hand. He didn't have time to continue his praise and quickly stuffed the remaining bun into his mouth. This delicious soup, this tasty Shengjian Bun, must not go to waste!

Lin Xu served a few Shengjian Buns to Dou Wenjing, boiled some water, and took out the leftover wontons from yesterday to cook some more.

Shengjian Buns with wontons. Today, we are all Shanghainese!

Soon, the wontons were ready.

Lin Xu served two bowls. He offered one to Dou Wenjing, who was helping him with his affairs, and one to Uncle Yu, a veteran member of the praise group.

"Oh wow, there are wontons too! Boss Lin, this is really generous."

Although Uncle Yu's tone had the exaggerated flair typical of Beijing natives, he was meticulous with his affairs. Without further ado, he scanned the payment QR code at the cashier's counter and paid twenty yuan.

"You've been busy all this time; I can't eat for free. Otherwise, I'd feel embarrassed next time you come to the supermarket to shop."

Lin Xu exchanged a few pleasantries with him and went back to making Shengjian Buns.

Meanwhile, Dou Wenjing, while eating, started to plan her work for the day. Yes, even if she wasn't in the office and didn't need to clock in, she still needed a detailed plan for her daily tasks—it was her longstanding work habit.

The landlord for the upstairs unit was settled. The shop had been vacant for over half a year; now that someone was interested, he was naturally eager to finalize the deal. The clothing store's landlord was also inclined to transfer the lease, but the price needed a bit more negotiation. As for the bakery's landlord, he practically had 'opportunistic price hike' written all over his face. He kept stalling, using the excuse that the bakery's lease hadn't expired. How ridiculous. What does the tenant's unexpired lease have to do with transferring the shop's ownership? Today's main tasks are to complete the deal for the upstairs shop, settle the price with the clothing store owner, and handle the transfer of the business license and other documents. As for the neighboring bakery... I'll let him stew for a day and see.

When the Shengjian Buns had cooled down enough to handle, Dou Wenjing set aside her plans and began to enjoy the day's meal.

Holding a Shengjian Bun in both hands, she carefully bit a small hole. A rich fragrance immediately burst forth.

"Doesn't this smell amazing?"

She leaned into the broken skin and gently sucked. A mouthful of hot, savory soup was drawn into her mouth.

WOW! This soup is truly exquisite! It was aromatic and savory, with a subtle sweetness in the savoriness, and within that sweetness, the distinct umami of Large Shrimp.

Originally, Dou Wenjing was still a little annoyed about Uncle Yu's call. But now... thank goodness he called! Otherwise, I would have definitely missed this breakfast.

She blew on it, then took another small sip. The soup tasted even more delicious.

Paired with the delicious Shengjian Buns, she took another bite of a wonton. It made one feel like strolling along the Bund.

I wonder if Boss Lin will add Shengjian Buns and wontons to the menu. If he does, these two could make a Shanghai-style combo...

Enjoying the tasty Shengjian Buns and wontons, Dou Wenjing's mind wandered, and she even began to think of names for the combos in the shop.

Before long, Niu Chuan and his group arrived.

Seeing that the shop was making Shengjian Buns today, all of them looked surprised. "When we just got out of the subway station, we saw a place selling Shengjian Buns and were thinking of buying some to try. We didn't expect you to have already made them here, Boss!"

"They smell delicious."

"Boss, can we try some?"

Lin Xu smiled and said, "Quick, wash your hands and eat! I made a bit extra today, so everyone dig in. There's plenty!"

Without further ado, they washed their hands, each filled a plate, and started eating, pairing the Shengjian Buns with freshly made wontons.

At seven in the morning, the Shen family of three pushed open the door and walked in.

As soon as Shen Jiayue entered, she reached out and started rubbing Dundun's big head. Dundun whimpered pitifully and immediately jumped into Han Shuzhen's arms.

"You naughty girl, treating Dundun's head like dough, aren't you?"

"I'm just playing with him. Dundun really likes it."

"I can't see Dundun enjoying it that much; rather, it seems you like it... Wait until you're married, and see how your mother-in-law disciplines you!"

"My mother-in-law is really nice to me, nothing like you!"

Han Shuzhen: "..."

Maybe we should just have the wedding tomorrow, even if I have to pay for it. I don't want to see this daughter for another day!

Shen Guofu looked at Lin Xu busy in the kitchen and said, "We originally didn't plan to come today, but Yueyue said you were making Shengjian Buns, so I came with your aunt to taste them... Wenjing, have you eaten?"

"I have, Mr. Shen. Boss Lin's Shengjian Buns are truly exceptional."

After Dou Wenjing finished eating, she used her mobile phone to book an appointment at the real estate transfer center online, planning to handle the ownership transfer for the upstairs shop today.

Upon seeing Shen Guofu, she quickly went over and gave him a brief report in a soft voice. Shen Guofu didn't have much to say about it. "Just handle it. Contact me when it's time to make the payment. We won't go through the company's account for this."

Using the company's account for the transaction would involve company assets and be troublesome, and as Shen Guofu was someone who disliked hassle, he simply decided to pay out of his own pocket. Later, whether it was transferred to his daughter or son-in-law after the wedding, it would be very convenient.

Seeing his in-laws arrive, Lin Xu quickly served the prepared Shengjian Buns and wontons, added two side dishes, and then started having breakfast with the Shen family.

"Wow! Delicious, delicious! I always said your cooking was great!"

Shen Jiayue tasted a Shengjian Bun and, despite it scalding her tongue slightly, still felt that her Lin Xu made them even tastier.

Shen Guofu and Han Shuzhen also thought the taste was indeed good. Even if one were to eat them locally in Shanghai, this would likely be the standard to expect.

While the family of four was eating, a taxi slowly pulled up at the door.

Chen Meijuan, carrying large and small bags, got out of the car. She hadn't opted for the high-speed train. Instead, she'd bought a sleeper ticket, boarding at 10:00 p.m. last night in Yinzhou. This way, she arrived in Beijing after a good night's sleep.

Finally, I can see my son! I wonder how he's been these past few days. Have Yueyue's parents been giving him the cold shoulder?

While lost in thought, she pushed open the shop door and immediately spotted her son eating with Yueyue and a middle-aged couple. Seeing the four of them enjoying themselves so harmoniously, Chen Meijuan's heart sank.

It's all over! I was so focused on worrying about my little piglet suffering hardship in Beijing. Who knew they'd already broken into the pigsty... and stolen my pig!

Chapter 149: Son, When Are You Planning to Get Engaged? The Cooking Competition Begins!

MEOOW~

As Chen Meijuan was looking around, she noticed a chubby little cat rubbing against her pant leg and brushing against her with its tail, like a child begging to be held.

She remembered her son mentioning it in a social media post before. He had picked up a stray cat from the greenbelt in the neighborhood and kept it in the store as a fortune cat. At that time, she had reminded her son not to let the cat enter the kitchen or get on the dining table, as some customers might dislike it. After all, for everyone who likes cats, there's someone who doesn't. You can't impose your own preferences on others.

That little stray he picked up must be this cutie, right? she thought. He really is adorable.

Seeing that he was clean, Chen Meijuan bent down and picked up the chubby little fellow, expecting him to resist. To her surprise, he seemed to enjoy being held, even rubbing his large head against her arm.

Wow! This little guy is really something else!

"Mom?"

The noise at the door startled Lin Xu. He hadn't expected his mother to arrive at this hour. Even if she took the earliest high-speed train, she wouldn't have arrived in Beijing until after eight, right? Did Mom arrive yesterday?

He hurriedly put down his chopsticks and went to the door. He saw his mother holding Dundun like a baby, and the little guy was curled up comfortably in her arms.

TSK... Are you treating Dundun like your own grandson now?

Lin Xu thought.

"How can such a beautiful cat be a stray?" Chen Meijuan's heart ached at the thought of such an adorable little fellow wandering the neighborhood as a stray, scrounging through trash cans for food. Luckily, he met my son.

Lin Xu picked up the various bags from the floor and placed them on the cashier's counter, asking curiously, "When did you get here? Are there high-speed trains to Beijing this early in the morning now?"

"I got on the train last night," Chen Meijuan explained. "I bought a sleeper ticket. I woke up just as we were about to arrive, went to the restroom to freshen up, and got off the train feeling refreshed with my things. It's much more comfortable than taking a high-speed train."

While mother and son were chatting, the Shen family of three came over to greet them.

"Auntie, I've missed you so much!" Shen Jiayue clung to Chen Meijuan's arm, acting cute, which made Han Shuzhen inwardly exasperated.

This daughter of mine, always siding with outsiders! I'm so fed up with her! Now that the other mother-in-law is here, maybe we should just get the wedding arrangements settled today! Han Shuzhen fumed internally.

"Auntie misses you too, Yueyue," Chen Meijuan said warmly. "I brought a lot of wild vegetables and mushrooms from the mountains this time. I'll cook something delicious for you for lunch today."

"Yay!" Yueyue cheered.

After speaking with her future daughter-in-law, Chen Meijuan turned her attention to the middle-aged couple. So these are the in-laws, huh?

Just as she was about to speak, Han Shuzhen spoke first, "Welcome to Beijing, Meijuan. Your son Lin Xu's cooking skills are truly amazing. We wish we could eat here three times a day."

So you want to whisk my son away, huh? Chen Meijuan thought with amusement. She smiled and said, "As long as he hasn't caused you any trouble, that's all that matters. My boy can be a bit thoughtless and doesn't always think before he speaks or acts. Please don't take it to heart if he inadvertently upsets you."

Han Shuzhen was left speechless. Lin Xu is such a well-behaved boy, yet you, his own mother, say he's thoughtless and impulsive... The more I hear, the more I feel like you're subtly criticizing my Yueyue, aren't you?

Just as the two women were about to engage in another round of verbal sparring, Shen Guofu interjected, "You haven't eaten yet, have you, Meijuan? Come, come, try the Shengjian Buns your son made. The taste is absolutely divine."

Chen Meijuan agreed with a smile, "Okay, okay, I am quite hungry... Where should I put this cat?"

Han Shuzhen reached out to take him. "Give him to me. Dundun is usually very affectionate with me. Looking at him now feels just like looking at my own grandson."

"He's named Dundun? That really matches his physique," Chen Meijuan remarked.

Dundun treated both his grandmothers the same. Once in Han Shuzhen's arms, he also struck a posture of pure enjoyment, making Han Shuzhen reluctant to put him down.

While Chen Meijuan exchanged a few pleasantries and went inside to wash her hands, Shen Jiayue, curious, poked at Dundun in her mother's arms, asking, "It's so strange. Why does he like you, and my future mother-in-law, and my dad and Lin Xu too, but not me?"

Han Shuzhen shot her daughter an exasperated look. Your future mother-in-law just subtly criticized you, and you're still here wondering about something like this?

She said somewhat irritably, "Maybe Dundun can sense a person's character. He plays with whoever is a good person."

Shen Jiayue looked even more puzzled. "Hmm... then he really shouldn't be affectionate with you either!"

Han Shuzhen was utterly stunned. You wretched girl, you're really asking for a beating, aren't you? Do I have to give you a good thrashing right before your wedding to be satisfied?

Seeing her mother's expression change, Shen Jiayue said with a cheeky grin, "Why are you angry, Mom? You started it. Alright, Director Han, I was wrong, okay? You're the bestest mom in the whole wide world! No one compares to you!"

She certainly knew how to coax someone when she wanted to, but she was also expert at infuriating people.

Han Shuzhen sighed helplessly. What sins did I commit in a past life to end up with a daughter like this? Look at other people's sons – sensible, well-behaved, and so skilled. Simply flawless. Then I look at my own daughter... Ugh, forget it. Just looking at her is annoying!

She placed Dundun on his mat on the cashier's counter.

The mother and daughter returned to the dining table. By then, Chen Meijuan had also washed her hands, and everyone gathered around the dining table again.

"Oh, these Shengjian Buns look delicious," Chen Meijuan exclaimed. "Lin Xu, do you remember the Shengjian Buns I made for you when you were a sophomore? Mine were nowhere near as good as these."

Chen Meijuan bit into a Shengjian Bun, tasting the savory, rich, and slightly scalding broth inside. Her travel fatigue instantly vanished.

Chapter 150: Son, When Are You Planning to Get Engaged? The Cooking Competition Begins!

This flavor is amazing. I used to think only my son's hand-pulled noodles and Chicken Feet were delicious. I never thought his Shengjian Buns would be so incredible too. I really should let Old Lin come and taste this—this flavor, this texture. Even if it meant squeezing into a narrow bunk on a train overnight, or taking a hard seat, or even standing, it'd be totally worth it. After finishing the broth, eating the bun and the clumped meat filling inside offers a new textural sensation. Of course, the best part is still that crispy, fried crust on the bottom of the bun—crunchy and delicious, mixed with the aroma of the dough and the umami flavor of the filling. One bun down. Then, I take a sip of the wonton. The smooth wrapper paired with the savory filling—delicious! My son's culinary skills are truly impeccable. He can make anything. No wonder that Master Gao took a liking to my son and took him on as an apprentice. If I were a chef and came across a kid with such talent, I'd probably be unable to resist my admiration for such skill, right?

Lin Xu said, "Actually, Shengjian are very simple. Compared to what you made before, I just added some pork skin jelly to them. This makes the broth fragrant and savory, much tastier than fillings without any broth."

Pork skin jelly can be used as filling too? Han Shuzhen had no way to chime in on this kind of topic. It always sounded so novel to her.

Shen Jiayue, who often slacked off at work watching videos, knew a bit about it. "Pork skin jelly isn't only for Shengjian Buns; it can also be used in soup dumplings. Am I right, sweetie?"

"Right, it can be used for soup dumplings... but using pork skin jelly makes them too greasy. So now, many chefs choose to add scallion and ginger water, and Sichuan peppercorn water, to increase moisture."

"Just like with beef, you can also mix scallion and ginger water into pork filling to increase moisture. Compared to beef slices, you can mix more water into pork filling, and it will remain viscous without

leaking, just like a normal bun filling. During the steaming process, the filling firms up and clumps together to form a meatball. The moisture then steams out, creating the broth that fills the soup dumplings. Besides soup dumplings, this technique also applies to Crab Buns and other small soup dumplings."

"Wow, stop talking about it! You're making me crave Crab Buns..." Shen Jiayue was practically drooling.

Then Lin Xu heard the system notification: "Host is passionately engaged in soup bun making, triggering the reward task [Crab Bun]: Please have the host use existing techniques to make an Excellent Level or above Crab Bun within ten days and obtain Shen Jiayue's approval. Upon completion, reward: one Excellent Level seafood dish lottery."

This is possible too? Lin Xu hadn't expected that just by speaking offhandedly, and Shen Jiayue casually mentioning it, they would trigger a reward task. If he had known, he would have steered the conversation toward other dishes—dishes suitable for selling in the store, like braised items or dry-pot meals. Maybe some vegetable dishes would have been good too; the store was currently lacking those. But the system wasn't receptive to Lin Xu's complaints. He grumbled internally for a long time but received no response.

"You want Crab Buns? Wait until I'm done with the competition, and then I'll make some for you to try. I also want to taste how good those soup buns are when you drink the broth with a straw."

"Yes, yes! Then I'll be waiting to eat them!" Shen Jiayue excitedly nuzzled Lin Xu.

YAY! I'm going to have Crab Buns!

After breakfast, the three members of the Shen Family said goodbye to Chen Meijuan and headed off to work.

Just as Lin Xu was about to get busy in the kitchen, his mother pulled him aside. "Son, when do you plan to get engaged to Yueyue? Her parents come to eat here every day, you know. You need to find a chance to arrange it soon. I don't want to miss out on such a wonderful daughter-in-law."

Engaged? Isn't this too fast? We only confirmed our relationship a few days ago. Can't we wait a little longer?

He said to his mother, "There's no rush. I've been really busy recently, with things scheduled every day. Let's wait until my career is a bit more stable. At least, let's wait until the restaurant expands before getting engaged. That way, I'll have some achievements to show for it."

In the next ten days, various main and side quests were approaching their completion dates, and he needed to focus on tackling these tasks. This way, a series of new dishes would be added to the restaurant, and he would also face new quests and challenges. Once he saved enough money to rent the nearby shops and expand the restaurant space, it wouldn't be too late for an engagement then.

Chen Meijuan couldn't win the argument with her son, so she said, "Anyway, I only acknowledge Yueyue as my daughter-in-law. If you lose her, I'll never forgive you."

Such a good daughter-in-law must have many people eyeing her. Why isn't my blockhead son in a hurry?

To prevent his mother from continuing to dwell on this issue, Lin Xu actively changed the subject. "Mom, when are you heading back? In a few days, I have to go to the Fishing Platform State Guesthouse to participate in a culinary competition. Why don't you stay a few more days and go back after watching the competition?"

As soon as she heard about participating in a competition at the Fishing Platform State Guesthouse, Chen Meijuan's attention was indeed diverted. "When's the competition?"

"Next Wednesday. Still five days away."

Hearing there were still five days to go, Chen Meijuan immediately lost interest. She was now fully focused on managing the scenic area back home and had long lost much of her interest in cooking.

"Will there be a live stream online?"

"There should be. Wu Kexin seemed to have made a teaser for it before."

"Then I'll just watch the live stream online. Business at the scenic area is getting better and better. Just the other day, the occupancy rate at the Cliffside Hotel actually reached one hundred percent! I need to go back and keep an eye on things. Your father can't handle it alone."

Business is doing that well? Lin Xu had even planned to bring Dundun back when the new restaurant expanded to help boost the scenic area's popularity. He hadn't expected business at the scenic area to be this good already.

"That was just a fluke," Chen Meijuan said. "Normally, the occupancy rate at the Cliffside Hotel is still around thirty percent. Although it's higher than before, it still can't compare to other scenic areas that are packed every day."

「Noon.」

Panda and Wu Kexin, upon learning of Chen Meijuan's arrival, made a special trip to the restaurant to visit. Then, they each enjoyed a complimentary bowl of wild mushroom soup noodles made by her. A ladleful of topping, made with a variety of wild mushrooms and slices of pork belly, poured over freshly boiled hand-pulled noodles—the flavor was unforgettable.

Lin Xu even regretted learning the Shengjian Bun Technique last night. If only he had learned his mother's wild mushroom topping instead, how good would that have been? If he could solve the raw ingredient supply issue, people would be lining up across the street to eat.

Unfortunately, the supply of wild mushrooms wasn't plentiful; they were just a rare treat. And Lin Xu, without a Cooking Learning Card and not enough wild mushrooms to practice his culinary skills, could only give up the idea.

「In the following two days, business at the restaurant returned to normal.」

Dou Wenjing finally managed to sort out all the procedures for the Tubby Dundun Company and also took care of the overdue invoices from the audit firm. An invoice printer was installed next to the cash register. Customers who needed invoices could now have them printed directly, instead of tearing off fixed-amount invoices as in the past.

Chen Meijuan had a relatively easy couple of days. Besides helping her son tidy up his room and wash his bedding, she also went on a shopping spree for clothes with Shen Jiayue. She had intended to treat her daughter-in-law, but Shen Jiayue insisted on paying each time, so Chen Meijuan ended up acquiring quite a few new clothes for herself. The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law got along like mother and daughter. Shen Jiayue even began to call Chen Meijuan "Mom." This delighted Chen Meijuan so much that when she got back, she again urged her son to get engaged soon.

The acquisition of nearby shops was also proceeding rapidly. Uncle Yu was quite the gossip, and since his supermarket had a constant flow of people, he always brought fresh news every day—for example, the landlord of the bakery next door was asking for the sky, or the landlord of the clothing store urgently needed money to cover his son's online gambling debts, and so on. Uncle Yu, always stationed at his supermarket, was like the chief of an intelligence station; as soon as he walked in the door, there would always be new information or gossip.

"Lin Xu," Uncle Yu said, "the bakery next door was also taken over. When that mysterious tycoon finally shows his hand, you'll have to keep your composure."

Lin Xu found it amusing. Originally, those people were just purchasing shops, that's all. But in Uncle Yu's telling, it always sounded like a storm was brewing, as if there really was a shadowy figure behind the scenes aiming to deal with him. However, he waited several days, and the so-called shadowy figure never appeared.

「And then Wednesday came.」

The culinary competition was about to start!