

Culinary 171

Chapter 171: Winning the Championship! Xiao Xu, can you come to the real estate trading hall?

The three dishes in the finals each had their unique characteristics.

The Gulao Meat exuded a rich sweet and sour aroma, accompanied by the distinctive fresh fragrance of pineapple.

The lightly fried meat chunks and the interspersed pineapple pieces looked very appetizing at first glance.

It could be said that this was a perfect dish.

Upon seeing this dish, I'd order two bowls of rice and devour it all! Lin Xu thought.

Anyone who liked sweet and sour dishes would find it completely irresistible.

The Fried Pork made by Wei Qian also had an excellent presentation.

The meat slices, stir-fried until slightly caramelized and delicately wrinkled, had taken on the standard "lantern" shape.

The Doubanjiang, used for flavor and fragrance, was so finely minced that one could only smell its aroma without seeing any trace of the paste itself, further enhancing the dish's visual appeal.

The meat slices, paired with garlic scapes, not only gained an added vibrancy in color but also a rich garlic aroma.

Just as they were admiring it, Wei Qian came over, smiling, and said, "Lin Xu, your skills are truly impeccable. I'm thoroughly convinced and impressed."

Guo Xinghai also expressed his agreement, "I really didn't expect you to have mastered the White Jade Lotus Root Strips from Building Two. If I'd known you were making this, I would have let loose and made Big Plate Chicken."

Lin Xu was speechless. A Cantonese cuisine chef known for delicate dishes making Big Plate Chicken? Isn't that a bit too incongruous?

He laughed and said, "Then you should have! I could have rolled out some wide noodles to go with it. Big Plate Chicken with belt noodles—a perfect match!"

For the others, the judges' scoring was the most crucial moment.

But for Lin Xu and the other two, the competition was already over.

The three of them stood to the side, sipping tea provided at the venue and chatting casually.

Shen Jiayue stood up from her seat in the audience, earnestly observing the White Jade Lotus Root Strips on display.

The last time Xie Baomin made it, it was just for them to eat, so there wasn't much emphasis on plating. It was casually served, finished off with some hot Seasoning Oil drizzled with green Sichuan peppercorns.

But today, being a competition, and with Lin Xu having redeemed an Excellent Level plating technique, the dish's presentation had reached a new level.

In the center of a high-end, gold-trimmed porcelain plate, the lotus root strips were neatly stacked into a mound approximately ten centimeters high.

The mound was square, and from afar, it resembled a neatly arranged pile of white jade.

Never mind eating it; just looking at it was like admiring a piece of art.

Compared to the last time Senior Brother made it in the restaurant, this could sell for several times the price. Shen Jiayue thought.

Shen Jiayue had never imagined a dish could be refined to such a degree.

No wonder that as soon as she saw Lin Xu choose lotus root, her senior brother's smile hadn't faltered, while the head chef from Building Ten looked as dejected as a frostbitten eggplant.

So that's how amazing this dish is!

Not far away, Guo Xinghai, looking at the White Jade Lotus Root Strips on the table, was also filled with emotion.

When he lived with his grandfather in Yangcheng, the two of them had also attempted to make the White Jade Lotus Root Strips.

But the knife skills required were exceptionally difficult.

He had nearly cut his hands several times while practicing the slicing.

To avoid losing his fingers prematurely, Guo Xinghai decisively gave up on the dish and diligently learned Cantonese cuisine from his grandfather.

This time, upon returning, he had hoped to clinch another championship for a perfect ending.

But then he ran into the unexpectedly formidable Lin Xu.

From the first round to the finals, all the contestants, including himself, had been consistently overshadowed by Lin Xu.

Facing such an opponent, even the most ambitious person could only resign themselves to fate.

"How about we find a place and grab a drink tonight?"

After this competition, Guo Xinghai truly understood the saying "there's always someone better out there." He planned to return to Yangcheng the next day to continue honing his culinary skills.

Before leaving, he wanted to have a drink with Lin Xu, partly to make a friend.

If he had the chance in the future, he would return to Beijing to spar with Lin Xu again.

As soon as Guo Xinghai finished speaking, Wei Qian chimed in, "Yes, yes, let's have a drink together tonight! I'm off today and don't have the night shift, so it's a perfect chance to relax."

Lin Xu responded to their suggestions with a wry smile, "I still have to work at my restaurant this afternoon. How about you two go to my place to eat first? I'll join you for drinks after I'm done."

Your restaurant? Wei Qian asked curiously, "You've opened a restaurant, Lin Xu? How big is it, and where is it? Is it far from the Fishing Platform?"

Lin Xu said, "It's Lin Ji's Food, at 34 Yingchun Street. It's not a big place, but business is decent. If you're ever bored, feel free to come by and hang out."

"That's great! I don't have many friends in Beijing. When I'm not busy, I'll come find you all the time."

Wei Qian was quite a homebody. During his days off, aside from playing on his phone in the dormitory and napping, he would just wander around the vicinity aimlessly.

His colleagues had initially been on good terms with him. This was especially true when Master He, the former head chef of Building One, had considered taking Wei Qian as his apprentice; everyone would flock around him daily back then.

Later, Master He dropped the idea, finding Wei Qian too obstinate and willing only to cook pork dishes. Thus, the apprenticeship never materialized.

His colleagues' attitudes cooled towards him after that.

Wei Qian didn't seem to mind and continued to go his own way.

Now that he had met Lin Xu, he felt he finally had a place to go after work.

「At the competition venue.」

The judges were tasting the dishes.

They gave high praise to the Gulao Meat and the Fried Pork.

However, when they tasted the White Jade Lotus Root Strips, the judges became somewhat silent.

The dish was delicious.

Its faint fragrance was apparent even before it entered the mouth.

Upon tasting it, the first sensation was a slight numbness, followed by sourness, sweetness, saltiness, and even the subtle spiciness of ginger juice.

Chapter 172: Winning the Championship! Xiao Xu, can you come to the property transaction hall?
[Request for Monthly Ticket]_2

In this interplay of varied flavors, the most prominent was still the crispness of the Lotus Root.

That crisp texture made it hard to believe it was made from Lotus Root.

After tasting it, there was a refreshing aftertaste, with a lingering longing for more.

"Some dishes score a 10 because their taste and texture deserve it, while others score a 10 because 10 is the highest score you can give," Geng Lishan said.

After Geng Lishan said this, he raised his hand and wrote a 10 on the score sheet.

Seeing this, the other judges also gave the White Jade Lotus Root Strips a perfect score.

Thus, Lin Xu won first place in this year's Fishing Platform State Guesthouse Cooking Competition with a perfect score.

Guo Xinghai scored 9.8, securing second place in the competition.

Wei Qian also took third place with a score of 9.7.

Right after the announcement was made, Lin Xu heard the system's notification tone:

"Congratulations, host, for winning the cooking competition championship, completing the side quest 'Win The First Place,' and earning one special Experience Card and one Perfect Level Boiled Dish Prize Draw. Would you like to draw now?"

Boiled dish recipes had always been something Lin Xu coveted.

For instance, he had been particularly envious of the Boiled Large Shrimp made by Guo Xinghai today.

Unfortunately, he didn't have a Cooking Learning Card on him at that moment, or he would have definitely learned that dish.

After the awards ceremony, the competition officially came to a close.

"Spectacular, just spectacular!"

"Although Boss Lin was leading throughout, Guo Xinghai and the chubby Wei Qian also performed quite well."

"It's a pity they met Boss Lin at the wrong time."

"Congratulations to Boss Lin for winning the culinary competition championship!"

"Well deserved indeed!"

"It's a shame I couldn't be there, or I would've definitely squeezed onto the stage to taste those dishes."

"..."

The fans in the live stream celebrated with virtual flower throwing.

As a result of today's twists and turns in the competition, Lin Ji's Food discussion became the third top trending topic in the Yanjing Region culinary rankings.

It was only a few thousand points away from second place.

And less than fifty thousand points away from the first place, Yanjing Food Sharing.

Topping the charts was no longer out of reach.

As for the overall Yanjing Region rankings, they were now just a step away from the top twenty.

With a little more effort, accomplishing the main quest had become easily attainable.

After the award ceremony, Lin Xu checked these rankings, then took a photo of the trophy and medal with his phone and casually posted it to Lin Ji's Food topic:

"Thanks to the fans and friends who supported me all along. I didn't let you down and secured the championship at the Fishing Platform culinary competition. I'll film and cook all the dishes I competed with when I'm less busy."

As soon as he posted this, netizens began commenting:

"Boss Lin, I want to learn how to slaughter pigs!"

"I want to learn metalworking and welding!"

"I want to learn fruit salad!"

"I want to learn snack processing!"

"..."

Seeing these comments, Lin Xu couldn't help but laugh.

He had thought he might be called the Kitchen God or something, but it turned out he became known as the 'Cross-Discipline King' in the fans' eyes. Perhaps knowing too much isn't always a good thing after all!

Hopefully, it won't be as hard to shake off as Wu Kexin's 'Queen of Mishaps' title.

Although 'Cross-Discipline King' sounds nice, it doesn't quite fit the title of a serious chef.

As he was thinking, Shen Jiayue flung herself at him and hugged him tightly,

"BOO HOO, during the fourth round I thought you would lose. I was so worried sick!"

Lin Xu patted the girl's back,

"How could I? Don't you trust my cooking skills? By the way, do you want to eat that original dish? I'll make it for you when we get back."

"Yes please!"

Shen Jiayue, who had been saying how worried she was, immediately raised her head, her eyes filled with an eager desire to eat.

After speaking, the girl saw the medal on Lin Xu's neck, took it off, hung it around her own neck, then happily took the trophy and went to take photos with Chen Yan.

Lin Xu took the opportunity to scoop up Dundun into his arms.

Finally, I can focus on the prize draw now that the competition hustle is over!

He walked toward the restaurant, which was already preparing lunch, while scratching Dundun's chin.

When the little guy closed his eyes in bliss, he silently said in his mind:

Draw!

Soon, a prize draw wheel appeared on a luminous screen in his mind.

After a brief whirl, the system notification rang in his mind:

"Congratulations, host, for obtaining a Perfect Level Braised Dish — Braised Pork Belly!"

Holy moly!!

It turned out to be this dish. Perfect for the shop.

As expected of my Dundun, always so clutch during the draws!

After the braised dish draw, Lin Xu also drew for the boiled dish category.

He rubbed Dundun's head and, once the prize wheel in his mind was spinning vigorously, he pressed the draw button.

Soon, a system notification echoed in his mind once more:

"Congratulations, host, for obtaining a Perfect Level Boiled Dish — Boiled Chinese Broccoli."

Boiled Chinese Broccoli?

A bit disappointed it wasn't Large Shrimp.

But this dish is also nice.

Lin Xu wasn't too fond of greens, but if it was Boiled Chinese Broccoli, he could eat a large bowl of rice with it.

This dish was light yet didn't lack the delicious freshness of greens.

Not only was it nutritious, but it also went great with rice.

During his university days, he often went to the Cantonese food counter for this dish.

A serving of Boiled Chinese Broccoli along with a serving of Salted Fish Eggplant Stew or Fried Bean Curd Fish Belly Stew would mean not ending the meal without three bowls of rice.

After waiting outside for a while, Shen Jiayue and Chen Yan, who had been taking photos, came running over.

"Look, this is my champion photo, and this is my cousin's champion photo! Aren't we impressive?"

Chapter 173: Winning the Championship! Xiao Xu, can you come to the real estate trading hall?

To take an authentic-looking photo, they had borrowed a chef's hat and were holding the cleaver and spatula from the competition, which hadn't been cleaned yet.

Lin Xu carried Dundun on his shoulder, supporting its hind legs with one hand, while his other hand held Shen Jiayue's. Like a young couple strolling through a temple fair with their child, they walked into the adjacent restaurant.

The tables were already set with food.

Lin Xu went to the table where Wei Qian and Guo Xinghai were sitting.

On the table were dishes like braised miniature pig, pickled cabbage stew with pork belly, red-braised pork knuckle, Four-Joy Meatballs, stir-fried celery with cured meat, braised pork with shredded bamboo shoots, lettuce with oyster sauce, shiitake mushrooms with bok choy, and a small tureen of shredded tripe soup.

It was an eight-dish, one-soup spread.

While the variety wasn't extensive, the portions were generous. Coupled with the fact that they were all hearty dishes perfect with rice, the audience and contestants, who had been hungry all morning, ate with great gusto.

After the meal, Lin Xu bid farewell to Wei Qian and Guo Xinghai.

He prepared to take the Building No. 2 business van back to his shop. He had been away all morning and didn't know how business was doing.

However, just as he reached Building No. 2, he ran into Xie Baomin.

"Junior Brother," Xie Baomin said, "the Dining Department wants Building No. 2 to add that dish you made to our menu soon. But Building No. 2 can't produce many servings of it, and the plating is also quite particular. Could you find some time to come work here for a period? You could teach the kitchen staff and also help me out in this urgent situation."

Work here? Lin Xu thought. Then what about my shop? When customers ask where Boss Lin is, what should the staff say? That he's gone to work at another restaurant?

Lin Xu smiled, just about to refuse.

Then, the system's notification sounded in his mind again:

"Host has received an invitation from the Fishing Platform, triggering the side mission 'Work': Please work for at least twenty days at the Fishing Platform State Guesthouse within the next month. Upon completion, you will be rewarded with one Perfect Level sauce-braised dishes lottery draw and one Perfect Level pork knuckle dishes lottery draw."

This... Lin Xu pondered. Does even the system want me to take on an outside job?

He had initially planned to refuse, but hearing how generous the rewards were, he reluctantly agreed. "I'll go back and make some arrangements first. We can discuss the work details in a couple of days."

Xie Baomin immediately grinned broadly. "That's the spirit! When the time comes, properly teach our kitchen staff here. Building No. 2 has too many reserved State Banquet dishes, so there aren't many regular dishes we can sell. We hope to leverage this current popularity to boost Building No. 2's revenue."

You'd be better off hiring Dundun; that would be far more effective than me coming here... Lin Xu muttered inwardly. Just then, the business van arrived.

Lin Xu, holding Dundun, boarded the van with Shen Jiayue. After bidding farewell to Xie Baomin, they headed home.

When they got back to the shop, it was nearly two o'clock, and business was winding down.

Although Dundun hadn't been there, business didn't seem to have been affected. Lin Xu noticed many dishes were already sold out.

"Boss, congratulations on winning the championship!"

"Where's the trophy? Should we display it behind the cash register?"

"Let's hang up the medal too! This is your honor, Boss!"

The staff were even more excited about the win than Lin Xu himself.

After Shen Jiayue took out the trophy and medal, they immediately hung them around their necks and posed for photos, making peace signs.

Once the midday rush was completely over, the chefs from Building No. 2 who had come to help, drenched in sweat, boarded the business van to go back.

When they first arrived, they had thought it was just a small eatery. They figured helping out would surely be a piece of cake.

However, by eleven o'clock, they were so busy their feet barely touched the ground, with no time to even catch their breath.

They had originally thought they were coming for a relaxing time.

But they hadn't expected that the morning's workload would be more than two days' worth at the Fishing Platform.

Is this the true capability of an ordinary roadside diner? they wondered. So scary, so scary!

Not long after they left, Lin Xu rested for a bit. Just as he was about to start preparing dinner, he suddenly received a call from his master, Grandpa Gao.

"Xiao Xu, are you busy right now? Can you come to the real estate transaction hall in Haidian District?"

Lin Xu asked curiously, "What for?"

Grandpa Gao's voice was tinged with pride. "You really brought me honor today, so I've decided to transfer this shop to you. It'll be yours from now on. The paperwork is almost done. Just come over and sign; you don't need to handle anything else."

These words warmed Lin Xu's heart.

However, he felt hesitant to accept such a valuable gift. "Master, you should keep it. I'd be happy if you just let me pay a bit less rent. Transferring it to me so suddenly... I feel uneasy about it."

"What's there to feel uneasy about? Hurry over. When your senior brother got married, I gave him two shops. You're not married yet, so I'm giving you one for now."

With that said, Grandpa Gao hung up without giving Lin Xu a chance to argue.

Feeling helpless, Lin Xu had no choice but to take a taxi to the real estate transaction hall.

When he arrived, his master was already processing the paperwork, assisted by a lawyer. By this point, all the paperwork was nearly complete.

Coupled with his master's persistent urging, Lin Xu had no choice but to follow the transaction procedure and sign his name.

Before long, the commercial property at No. 34 Yingchun Street was registered under his name.

I originally planned to save money to buy a house in Beijing, Lin Xu thought. But I ended up getting a commercial property first. Life is full of disappointments... Oh, wait, no, life is truly full of surprises!

After the transaction was completed, the master and disciple went to the entrance of the transaction hall.

Grandpa Gao handed the documents to Lin Xu and said, "That dish, 'Home,' you made really touched me. I also want to start a family. During this time, I'm preparing to go out and have some fun with your Aunt, do some traveling, and enjoy some time just the two of us. While I'm not in Beijing, take good care of yourself."

Lin Xu: ?????

How can you so nonchalantly start living off a woman, hey?! he thought. I still have two dishes from the mission that I haven't learned yet!

As they were talking, a black BMW 760 pulled up on the opposite side of the road.

Grandpa Gao waved goodbye to Lin Xu, then happily trotted over, pulled open the car door, and got in.

Soon, the car drove off into the distance.

Lin Xu watched the receding silhouette of the car and sighed softly.

The former King of the Seas has finally come ashore, he mused.

After his moment of reflection, just as he was about to hail a taxi back to the shop, he suddenly received a call from his father-in-law, Shen Guofu.

"Xiao Xu, are you busy right now? Can you come to the real estate transaction hall in Haidian District?"

Lin Xu: ?????

What's going on? he wondered. Why am I so tangled up with the real estate transaction hall today?

Chapter 174: The Right Way to Urge Marriage! Want to eat vegetarian? Then have Braised Pork Belly!

"Uncle Shen, I'm just at the entrance of the real estate transaction hall."

Lin Xu had just finished speaking when he saw a Bentley driving slowly towards them. Just as a parking spot freed up by the roadside, the Bentley decisively maneuvered into it.

HMM... that's very much Uncle Shen's driving style.

The car doors opened. Shen Guofu and Dou Wenjing stepped out from the driver and passenger seats, respectively.

"Xiaoxu, what are you doing here?"

Lin Xu patted the file bag in his hands. "My master transferred the ownership of Lin Ji's Food to me. I had just finished the procedures and was about to call a taxi when you called."

"HEH! What a coincidence, I was also planning to transfer a shop to you."

What? Lin Xu felt somewhat surprised. Why is everyone transferring shops today?

Outside, the sun shone brightly.

Shen Guofu wiped the sweat from his forehead and said, "Let's go inside and talk. Wenjing, didn't you make an appointment? Hurry up, we have several property deeds to go through, and each will take quite a while."

After Dou Wenjing hurried inside, Shen Guofu walked with Lin Xu and said, "That little shop of yours is too small and not suitable for long-term development. I'm worried that Shen Jiayue will suffer following you, so I took the liberty of buying up the shops to your left, right, and upstairs."

Lin Xu: ?????

The mysterious manipulator Uncle Yu was always going on about, like a storyteller, turned out to be my father-in-law? Good thing I didn't join in the cursing back then.

「Back in the real estate transaction hall.」

Dou Wenjing had already started processing at the counter.

"Director Shen, Boss Lin, come here to sign."

Shen Guofu agreed and was about to head over when Lin Xu stopped him. "Uncle Shen, this doesn't seem appropriate."

If we were married, I wouldn't hesitate to take over the real estate from my father-in-law. But we aren't even engaged yet, and suddenly taking so much property seems somewhat inappropriate.

Shen Guofu was pleased with Lin Xu's reaction and said with a smile, "This property isn't free. Wenjing, take out the agreement in your bag and let Xiaoxu sign it first."

An agreement?

Dou Wenjing took out several printed sheets from her bag and handed them over. Lin Xu took a look. It listed several clauses.

The first clause stated that within three days of receiving the property, Lin Xu's Dundun Catering Company had to give Shen Jiayue 30 percent of its shares and Shen Guofu 21 percent.

Dundun Catering is just a shell company at present. Using so much real estate to exchange for 51 percent of a shell company's shares, aren't you losing out a bit, father-in-law?

Lin Xu muttered to himself and continued reading.

The next clause said that once Lin Xu and Shen Jiayue were married, the shares under Shen Guofu's name would be divided into three parts: one part to Shen Jiayue, one part to Lin Xu, and another part would be transferred to a manager of the company.

Seeing this clause, Lin Xu finally understood.

If they didn't get married, the father-daughter pair could dismiss me as the boss at any time. Once married, my original 49 percent of shares, plus an additional 7 percent, would make up 56 percent of the company, giving me absolute control. That's to say, to fully control the whole company, I need to marry the cute Miss Shen as soon as possible. TSK... Both are rushing the marriage. But this way of urging one to marry doesn't elicit any resentment. Rather, it makes one look forward to it. This must be the right way to urge a marriage. But another 7 percent of the shares for the manager? Isn't that too much?

Lin Xu looked at his father-in-law with a puzzled expression.

Shen Guofu immediately whispered, "If people aren't sweetened up, who would work wholeheartedly for you? But don't worry, that 7 percent of shares will be tied to another agreement, ensuring no tail-wagging-the-dog scenarios."

As a wealthy man, the one thing Shen Guofu was never short of was lawyers. Every time an agreement was drafted, the company's legal team would sit together to pinpoint potential risks and then amend the agreement to avert them.

After reading the whole agreement, Lin Xu promptly signed his name and stamped it with his seal. The father-in-law and son-in-law signed the agreement, then proceeded with the process, transferring one property deed after another.

Dou Wenjing, who was assisting, looked on enviously. Having such a supportive father-in-law is like shaving years off one's struggles. Once all these properties are transferred, Lin Ji's Food will undergo a new renovation and become the biggest restaurant on Yingchun Street. Business should be even better by then, right? Managing such an enterprise should be quite exhilarating. Too bad I'm a woman and don't have such a father-in-law...

「Once everything was settled.」

More than an hour had passed.

When Lin Xu walked out of the transaction hall, holding a stack of property documents, he still felt like he was dreaming. Two hours earlier, I had no property in Beijing. But now, my name is on a bunch of shops. Combined, these premises span over three thousand square meters. No more worries about the stores being too small. Customers also won't have to worry about waiting in line anymore. Praise the father-in-law!

"Now that the property is in hand, let's start looking for someone to design the renovation... Wenjing, once you're free, help Xiaoxu scout around in the design industry and find a top-notch designer. The aim is to make Lin Ji a benchmark for the entire North Fourth Ring!"

Dou Wenjing was a bit surprised why she was asked to handle this task. But since Director Shen had assigned it, I definitely have to give it my all!

She nodded and said, "I will get on this as soon as possible. Please rest assured, Director Shen."

Chapter 175: The Right Way to Urge Marriage! Want to eat vegetarian? Then have Braised Pork Belly!

Seeing that Mr. Shen seemed to want to speak with Boss Lin, she spoke up:

"Then I'll head off now. I'll take a taxi to check out those famous design agencies in Beijing first, and if those don't work out, I'll look elsewhere."

After she finished speaking, she didn't wait for Shen Guofu's approval, pulled open the door of a taxi by the roadside, and got in.

"Where to, miss?"

"Just drive ahead for now; I need to find the address."

With that, Dou Wenjing took out her phone and began searching for famous design companies and agencies in Beijing.

Watching the taxi drive away, Shen Guofu turned and asked,

"What do you think of Xiao Dou?"

What do I think? Father-in-law, why do you sound like you're trying to play matchmaker?

Lin Xu said with a smile,

"Wenjing is excellent—diligent, efficient, and handles everything assigned to her meticulously. Are you planning to promote her?"

Shen Guofu opened the car door,

"No, I'm actually preparing to fire her."

Lin Xu: ???????

Firing an employee who performs well... What kind of logic is that? Is he bound to some kind of system that only rewards him for going bankrupt?

He opened the car door and got in, not quite understanding his father-in-law's decision.

"Why is that, Uncle Shen?"

Shen Guofu started the car, smiling as he said,

"Because you're lacking a manager here. Others don't have the experience, and I can't trust them. So, I found you a trustworthy general manager to handle the store and the company. You just need to focus on your cooking."

This... Just a moment ago, I was still wondering if Wenjing had offended someone in the company. Turns out, this was all to pave the way for me.

Lin Xu opened his mouth, very grateful for his father-in-law's help,

"Uncle Shen, wouldn't this be unfair to Wenjing?"

Being kicked from a publicly listed company to a startup—that's quite a drop, isn't it?

Shen Guofu shook his head,

"There's nothing unfair about it. On the contrary, the opportunity to manage a company independently is something many managers dream of. I'm letting Wenjing try because she has always performed well. And besides, as long as the pay is good enough, who really cares about fairness?"

After he finished speaking, he slowly drove the car towards Yingchun Street.

It was already almost four o'clock in the afternoon. Mr. Shen didn't feel like returning to the office, so he decided to accompany his son-in-law to the restaurant and wait for dinner.

「Back at Yingchun Street.」

Lin Xu shoved the stack of property deeds into the cash register's drawer, washed his hands, changed into his chef's whites, and went into the kitchen to get busy. The property transfer had already cost him nearly two hours, so he needed to hurry and prepare the ingredients for the evening, or he wouldn't be ready in time. Fortunately, no one had the day off today, and Niu Chuan and the others had already completed all the possible basic prep work.

While he was busy, Shen Guofu picked up the trophy and medals from the morning's competition with great interest and examined them carefully again. He had already watched the live broadcast at noon, but even now, seeing the trophy and medals, he still found it hard to believe. His son-in-law had actually defeated the chefs from Fishing Platform. His culinary skills were truly impeccable.

If there's a chance, I must have him make all the competition dishes for me to taste. This Old Shen would love to experience the joy of being a food critic!

Thinking of this, he called out to Lin Xu in the kitchen,

"Xiao Xu, tonight, could you make a serving of that White Jade Lotus Root Strips dish you won the championship with? I've been craving it ever since I watched the live broadcast; I really want to taste it."

"No problem, that dish is very simple."

Lin Xu readily agreed. My father-in-law gave me so many storefronts. Forget one serving of White Jade Lotus Root Strips; even if he wanted it every day, I'd have to make it for him.

Hearing his son-in-law's agreement, Shen Guofu cheerfully took out his phone and, TAP-TAP-TAP, sent his daughter a message:

"Daughter, Xiao Xu is going to make White Jade Lotus Root Strips tonight. Aren't you curious to taste it, just like me?"

Shen Jiayue had driven to work after returning to the restaurant earlier. As a wage earner, she figured she might as well make as much as she could. After all, who wouldn't want to experience the joy of slacking off while still getting paid!

Right now, Shen Jiayue was at her office computer, organizing electronic documents. Seeing the message from her dad, she couldn't help but reply:

"I've already tasted it! Senior Brother Xie made it for me the first time he came to help at the store... Dad, you haven't had it before, right? How about I describe the flavor and texture of the White Jade Lotus Root Strips to you?"

Shen Guofu: "..."

You're going to describe it to me? The more you talk, the more I'll crave it! Yueyue, that girl, has been... well, utterly infuriating ever since she was little! Fortunately, my son-in-law is decent. That's probably the only consolation for raising a daughter!

While father and daughter were chatting, Wei Qian arrived at the entrance of Lin Ji's Food on a shared electric bike.

This place is tiny, isn't it? Completely unworthy of Lin Xu's culinary skills.

He parked the electric bike at a bicycle parking spot by the roadside, scanned the QR code to pay, then pushed open the door and entered the restaurant.

As soon as he entered, he saw Dundun fast asleep on the cash register counter.

Confirmed, this is Lin Xu's place. I remember this fat cat; it ate the fragrant pork I gave it this morning.

"Hello, we're not open for business yet..." Song Tiantian said politely, looking up from the accounts she was checking and the morning's paperwork she was sorting.

"I'm here to see Lin Xu."

As he spoke, Wei Qian saw Lin Xu busy in the kitchen and walked in.

"Your restaurant is tiny, isn't it? It doesn't fit your champion image at all. So many people online are dying to taste your cooking, and yet here you are, running such an inconspicuous little place."

Chapter 176: The Right Way to Urge Marriage! Want to Eat Vegetarian? Have Braised Pork Belly Then!

Lin Xu laughed and said, "I was just preparing to expand it. Today, my father-in-law transferred the property to my name."

Wei Qian, hearing this, immediately said enviously, "Your father-in-law is really good to you. I wish I could have such a nice father-in-law."

Lin Xu: "..."

Shouldn't you be worried about finding a girlfriend? Why are you looking for a father-in-law first?

Hearing someone praising himself, Shen Guofu looked up at Wei Qian and recognized him right away.

Hey! Isn't this the chubby chef who won third place in the morning competition? His entries seemed to be Sweet and Sour Pork Ribs and Fried Pork. Um... meat? As a middle-aged man who loves meat... Shen Guofu couldn't help but crave those two dishes. It would be nice to taste this chubby fellow's cooking skills. He wondered how it compared to his son-in-law's skills. Would inviting him over casually damage my image as a gourmet prince? After all, he had just complimented me.

While Shen Guofu was pondering, he heard Wei Qian say, "Is there anything I can help with? Get me a bigger apron; I'll help out. I might not be good with other dishes, but when it comes to pork, none are beyond me."

He had butchered pigs since he was young and was quite familiar with various meat dishes.

Lin Xu didn't refuse. He sent the young apprentice to the storeroom to get an apron.

Wei Qian washed his hands, tied on the apron, and began to help.

Just as Shen Guofu was about to go over and give Wei Qian a few complimentary words, to lead into asking him about the Sweet and Sour Pork Ribs and Fried Pork, his phone suddenly rang.

Seeing it was a call from Han Shuzhen's clinic, he quickly answered it.

"Guofu, I'm swamped at the clinic today. I probably won't get off work until after six, so you just eat over at Young Xu's place."

Shen Guofu was delighted.

Ha! I'm already in place now. Watching the morning live stream made me feel like I'd practically starved! So I definitely need to eat some meat today to make up for it, and maybe have a couple of drinks too. Hmm, since my wife isn't here, I can just find a designated driver on the way back. Easy!

Despite his excitement, Shen Guofu sighed with a face full of regret, "Without eating with you, I don't have an appetite for anything..."

Han Shuzhen on the other end of the line laughed, "Are you still a child? It's so hot these days; even if you don't have an appetite, you should eat a little. Also, not too greasy. Your uric acid will shoot up if you're not careful. Eat more vegetarian dishes; don't always go for meat."

"Eat what meat? I'll just nibble something and go home."

After hanging up the phone, Lin Xu asked curiously, "Auntie Han didn't let you eat meat again, Uncle Shen?"

Shen Guofu put down his phone and nodded. "Yes, she told me to eat more vegetables... Young Xu, do we have any tasty vegetarian dishes here? I wanted to satisfy my craving while Auntie Han is not around."

Vegetarian dishes? And you still want to satisfy your craving? Why don't you just say you want to eat meat?

He laughed and asked, "How about Braised Pork Belly?"

Wei Qian next to him immediately laughed. Your father-in-law wants to eat vegetarian dishes, and you recommend Braised Pork Belly right off the bat? Is that a vegetarian dish?

He thought Shen Guofu would refuse, but the big boss nodded repeatedly and said, "Yes, yes, yes, that's great! That's my favorite vegetarian dish. Make more, and don't waste the broth; it's absolutely divine with rice."

Wei Qian: ?????

Did I lose my mind in today's competition? Since when did Braised Pork Belly become a vegetarian dish?

After Shen Guofu confirmed the Braised Pork Belly for the evening, he went off happily playing with Dundun.

After he left, Wei Qian urgently asked, "Is the Braised Pork Belly at your restaurant a vegetarian dish?"

Lin Xu laughed and said, "My mother-in-law doesn't let my father-in-law eat much meat, so he calls meat dishes 'vegetarian dishes.' That way, he feels more justified when he eats them."

Wei Qian: "..."

I've learned another clever trick to get along with a father-in-law! Now all I need is to find a father-in-law.

There's leftover pork belly in the fridge from today. Lin Xu pulled out a piece, weighing about two to two-and-a-half kilograms.

The skin of the pork had already been scorched and scrubbed clean, ready for cooking.

Braised Pork Belly is a popular homestyle dish widespread across the nation and even abroad, favored for its simple preparation and rich, aromatic flavor. The most delicious Braised Pork Belly is usually stewed in a clay pot over gentle heat. Only then does the Braised Pork Belly turn out soft and tender with a rich, mouthwatering flavor.

However, there wasn't enough time today. Lin Xu had to opt to use a pressure cooker instead.

He cut the pork belly into four-centimeter cubes, then blanched them in cold water.

Blanching removes blood impurities from the meat, enhancing its delectable taste. After blanching, it was easier to render the fat from the meat cubes. Braised Pork Belly prepared this way turns out fatty without being greasy, lean without being dry, releasing a burst of flavor with each bite.

During blanching, Scallion and Ginger were added to the pot, along with a bit of Cooking Wine.

Once the water boiled and froth formed, he skimmed off the froth, then boiled it for a few more minutes to thoroughly cook the meat, ensuring it wouldn't end up dry and hard.

He then lifted the pork belly pieces out of the pot.

They were rinsed under hot water.

Next, a bit of cooking oil was added to the pot. When the oil was hot, the pork belly was put back in to be fried.

The fat was rendered from the pork, simultaneously sealing the moisture in the lean meat.

Seeing this, Wei Qian curiously asked, "Braised Pork Belly looks prettier with sugar color; do you need me to prepare some for you?"

Actually, Lin Xu had planned to directly stir-fry the Crystal Sugar with the meat. By the time the meat was nearly done, the Crystal Sugar would have turned into caramel as well.

But since Wei Qian offered to help, he didn't refuse. "Alright, then help me make some."

Wei Qian set up a frying pan, drizzled in a spoonful of water and a tiny bit of cooking oil, then added two handfuls of Crystal Sugar and started to fry it on low heat.

Seeing the young apprentice watching him, he smiled and said, "Let me share a little trick, guys. When making sugar color, use more water and less oil. That way, even if you splash cold water on it, the prepared sugar color in the pan won't splatter everywhere."

The sugar color used in the restaurant now was made by Lin Xu. The young apprentice and the others hadn't heard of such a trick before, so they became interested.

With nothing else to do, Wei Qian took the opportunity, using the sugar caramelizing in the pan, to seriously explain the steps of making sugar color to everyone gathered around.

"When the sugar melts and starts bubbling significantly, that's the 'frosting' stage. Ingredients for dishes that need a 'sandy' or 'frosted' coating are added at this stage.

Fry it a while longer, and when the sugar turns slightly yellow, it reaches the 'spun sugar' or 'threads' state. At this stage, the sugar is at its stickiest and has the best elasticity.

Continue to fry, and it becomes 'glaze' or 'glass.' When cooled, sugar at this stage forms a glass-like hard shell on the food. Crystal Sugar Haws are a typical example of this sugar stage.

And finally, when the sugar syrup in the pan turns date-red, that's the perfect sugar color.

Once it reaches this stage, pour in hot water. When you add it to your cooking, it becomes an excellent coloring agent, particularly for meats. Almost any dish needing a reddish hue relies on this sugar color.

As for another coloring 'Divine Artifact' commonly used at home—Dark Soy Sauce—it's merely light soy sauce with industrially produced caramel color added. The coloring effect still comes from the sugar color."

When the sugar color was ready, Lin Xu had also nearly finished frying the meat.

He used chopsticks to transfer the meat into the pressure cooker, added the prepared sugar color, two large bowls of Rice Wine, a small bowl of Light Soy Sauce, and an equivalent amount of water.

He then began seasoning: a handful of Crystal Sugar, a small teaspoon of salt for enhancing taste, a few slices of old ginger, and a knot tied from Scallions.

All these were put into the cooker. After covering it with the lid, the cooking began.

The young apprentice curiously asked, "Boss, didn't you add any Sichuan peppercorns or spices?"

Wei Qian, standing nearby, laughingly replied, "You don't use those for Braised Pork Belly. This dish emphasizes the natural savory taste of the pork. Actually, if it weren't for using the pressure cooker, you

wouldn't even need to add water—just stew it in a clay pot or casserole with Rice Wine and Light Soy Sauce, and it would taste even better."

Having grown up eating pork, he spoke with the most authority about this dish.

「Forty minutes later.」

When Shen Jiayue, who was slacking off, arrived for a meal with the head of the audit firm, Tan Yajun, Lin Xu took the pressure cooker off the stove.

After releasing the pressure, he poured the contents into a wok.

At this moment, the Braised Pork Belly was exuding a rich aroma. Each piece of the tender, reddish-brown meat quivered at the slightest touch, almost like jelly.

He removed the ginger slices and scallion knot and increased the heat to reduce the sauce.

Then, he evenly arranged the meat pieces, skin side up, on a plate.

He poured the sauce from the wok over the meat.

Time to eat!

Chapter 177: Lele, from now on, Lin and I are peers, remember to address him accordingly!

When Lin Xu placed a large platter heaped with Braised Pork Belly on the dining table, Shen Guofu's eyes practically popped out.

"Oh my! The color of this meat is really something—so rosy and wobbly, it just makes you want to take a bite."

Shen Jiayue was at the doorway with Song Tiantian, assembling a new cat bed. Dundun was beside them, "helping" by pawing at the cardboard box. After hearing her dad's comment, Shen Jiayue couldn't help but say, "Dad, you're too old to be using those cutesy, repetitive words. It's gross... Huh? What smells so delicious?"

She turned her head, saw the Braised Pork Belly on the table, and immediately tossed the half-assembled cat bed aside and ran over.

"Wow! Braised Pork Belly, my absolute favorite!"

Song Tiantian, still assembling the cat bed according to the diagram, couldn't help muttering, "Every time a new dish is made, the boss lady claims it's her favorite. Isn't her love a bit too... widespread? What do you think, Dundun?"

... I don't know how to respond. Because I'm just a cute little kitty.

At the dinner table, Tan Yajun looked at the Braised Pork Belly and couldn't help but swallow. "This meat is cooked beautifully! The pieces are so substantial... I was planning on eating less tonight so I could go swimming. But to heck with that! Now I'll have to eat at least two big bowls of rice with this!"

Soon, the White Jade Lotus Root Strips were also served. Wei Qian, who had some free time, also made a dish of Fried Pork and another of Stir-fried Pork with Chili—both perfect accompaniments to rice.

Shen Jiayue immediately took out her phone, snapped a photo, and posted it on her social media. "Tonight's dinner is rather lavish! My dad looks like he's going to need a basin for his rice."

Shen Guofu was completely focused on the dishes, unaware his daughter was taking photos and posting online. Once all the dishes were on the table, he slapped it as if possessed by Li Chungang. "Bring the rice!"

He had originally planned to have a few drinks with Old Tan, but given the circumstances, a big bowl of rice felt more appropriate to start with.

The rice had just been served when Xie Baomin arrived with Guo Weidong and Guo Xinghai.

Shen Guofu promptly got up to greet them. "Ah, Master Xie, you're here! Quick, come in! Lin Xu just finished preparing the food."

This is my son-in-law's senior brother, and also the executive chef at Fishing Platform. He could be very helpful to my son-in-law in the future, so I need to cultivate a good relationship.

Xie Baomin hadn't expected to run into his junior brother's father-in-law. He pulled Guo Weidong over. "Let me introduce you. This is Guo Weidong, the executive chef of Building Number 10. We're very close friends. We came together today to congratulate my junior brother on winning the championship."

Guo Weidong: ...Why twist the knife after you've already stabbed me? Does it make you feel powerful?

"Ah, Chef Guo! Please, have a seat, have a seat." Shen Guofu became even more enthusiastic when he learned Xie Baomin had brought another executive chef.

Tan Yajun picked up the bottle of Wuliangye on the table, and as he poured it into the glasses, he said, "I just ate at Building Number 10 the other day. Their Cantonese cuisine is truly authentic. Especially the roasted suckling pig—even in Yangcheng, few places can make it this well."

Hearing himself praised, Guo Weidong quickly returned the pleasantries. He hadn't expected that customers dining in this small eatery would also patronize Building Number 10. The average bill there was several thousand yuan, so its clientele was hardly ordinary.

Seeing Lin Xu and Wei Qian in the kitchen, Guo Xinghai walked over. "Well, Lin Xu. You said you'd treat us to drinks, but it looks like you're making us work for it instead, huh?"

Lin Xu replied with a smile, "Not at all. Our staff was just about to have dinner. Why don't you join us?"

Guo Xinghai wasn't accustomed to eating staff meals, nor did he think a restaurant's staff meal could be particularly good. But when Lin Xu brought another platter of Braised Pork Belly and a dish of Steamed Pork Ribs with Black Bean Sauce to the table, his eyes widened.

All this for a staff meal?

As he wondered, he also saw freshly made Boiled Fish, steamed chicken feet so tender the skin practically melted off the bone, and another plate of White Jade Lotus Root Strips.

Momma mia! This staff meal is better than what they serve guests at noon in Building Number 1. Lin Xu treats his staff incredibly well!

Wei Qian said, "The atmosphere in this shop is fantastic! I never realized a restaurant kitchen could be free of infighting, arguments, or cliques, where everyone helps each other despite having different roles. It's so much better than the kitchens at Fishing Platform."

At Fishing Platform, he had almost become Chef He's disciple, experiencing both being eagerly sought after and then coldly shunned. So, suddenly arriving at Lin Ji felt like coming home. This congenial atmosphere was truly heartwarming.

As they began to take their seats, Shen Jiayue also came over with her bowl of rice. When Xie Baomin had entered, she had been about to pop a piece of Braised Pork Belly into her mouth. But upon hearing her dad invite Master Xie and Chef Guo to sit at that table, she quickly snagged a few pieces of pork for her own bowl and moved to the side to eat.

The fatty portions of the meat were cooked to perfection, practically melting in the mouth, while the lean meat remained tender and juicy. This texture, combined with the interwoven sweet and savory flavors, immediately whetted the appetite.

"This Braised Pork Belly is super tasty! When will this be added to the menu?" Shen Jiayue asked curiously.

I wish I could eat it every day.

Lin Xu smiled and said, "It won't be added for now. In a few days, this place is going to close."

What? Closing? Business is booming, why would they close?

The employees were all stunned.

Chapter 178: Lele, from now on I'll treat Lin as an equal, remember to change how you address him!

Wei Qian and Guo Xinghai, who had just sat down and picked up their chopsticks, also looked at Lin Xu.

Shouldn't he be heavily promoting the restaurant to increase business after just winning the championship? Why close it then?

"Why are you all looking at me like that?" Lin Xu explained, "When I said 'close,' I meant temporarily close for renovations. This afternoon, my master and my father-in-law transferred the ownership of this shop, the one next door, and the units upstairs to my name. Once we find a designer and get a design plan in the next couple of days, we'll close for renovations and transform Lin Ji's Food into a major restaurant."

Since a small store could no longer meet the customers' needs, then it was time to expand. Anyway, all the properties were now in his name, and Lin Xu didn't have the 'even if you line up to Chang'an Avenue, I won't expand my business' mindset of those internet-famous small diners.

"Wow, that's a big move!" Wei Qian exclaimed, full of admiration.

He'd thought Lin Xu would stop working in this industry after finding a wealthy father-in-law. He hadn't expected him to expand the business instead. That definitely deserved praise!

Guo Xinghai hadn't expected an expansion of the storefront either. He smiled and said, "When you reopen, let me know, okay? I'll come from Yangcheng to attend the opening ceremony."

As a friend, he hoped Lin Xu's business would grow bigger and better. As a fellow member of the catering industry, he also wished for the sector to prosper further.

Guo Xinghai and Wei Qian were both happy for Lin Xu.

But Chezai and his crew couldn't feel quite as happy.

They had just found a restaurant with good pay and a good boss, only for it to close for renovations. So, what were they supposed to do? Should they wait until the renovations were over to come back to work, or should they start looking for another job?

Seeing everyone making eyes at him, Chezai gathered his courage and asked, "Boss, what about us...?"

Honestly, he really didn't want to change jobs again. Niu Chuan, Xu Xinhua, and Ma Zhiqiang felt the same way.

But they were afraid that once the new restaurant was renovated, the boss would hire new chefs. After all, it would be a large restaurant then, and plenty of chefs would be willing to work there. They, as 'problem employees' with severely lopsided skills, might not be valued by the boss anymore.

Just as they were anxiously worrying, Lin Xu said, "As long as you're willing to stay, I definitely won't leave you idle. Don't worry about your wages either; you'll be paid just as before. This is actually a good opportunity to try to improve your culinary skills."

Right, hadn't his senior brother asked him to come work? Then it was perfect to bring these guys along. Anyway, the kitchen at the Fishing Platform wasn't busy, and there were plenty of experts there. If Chezai and the others spent a month there, they would definitely learn something. It would be like taking an advanced course—and the top-level kind at that.

Seeing that Chezai and the others had arrangements, it was Song Tiantian's turn to get anxious. "Boss, what about us...?"

Lin Xu replied, "You'll have arrangements too. As long as you don't leave, I'll make sure everything is taken care of."

Upon hearing this, everyone finally felt relieved.

Wei Qian was envious again. What a good boss, still paying salaries during renovations! No wonder these employees looked so reluctant to leave; they were truly fortunate to have such a good boss.

Everyone continued eating.

Only Shen Jiayue seemed a bit downhearted.

"BOO HOO! What about my lunch during these days of renovation!" she pouted, feeling as if she had been abandoned by her dear Xu Bao.

Lin Xu said, "I'll just have it delivered to you then; I won't let you go hungry."

The Fishing Platform wasn't too far from Dongming Building. He could arrange for lunch to be delivered, and it would also let this girl taste those dishes from the Fishing Platform that cost two or three thousand per person.

"Thank you, Xu Bao!" Shen Jiayue's mood immediately brightened upon hearing there was still food.

She scooped some sauce from the Braised Pork Belly and mixed it with her rice. Then, she mashed the Braised Pork Belly with her spoon and mixed it in. After stirring it well, she took a spoonful and put it in her mouth.

UMM... This was truly satisfying! The perfectly steamed rice grains were enveloped in the rich, glossy sauce, each grain exuding a tantalizing fragrance, while the minced meat added a different texture to the rice. With one bite, she felt as if her entire being had been elevated. All worries and sadness were completely forgotten. The only thought in her mind was... one more bite!

"It's just perfect! Braised Pork Belly with rice is something I could never tire of eating!"

Shen Jiayue initially thought one bowl of rice would be enough. But the Braised Pork Belly was so delicious that she couldn't help but consider getting another bowl. At worst, she could just do a couple of extra sets of jumping jacks when she got back.

While she was praising how delicious the Braised Pork Belly was, Guo Xinghai, beside her, was marveling at the flavor of the Pork Ribs with Black Bean Sauce.

During the competition at noon, Guo Xinghai had tasted the Steamed Sea Bass Lin Xu prepared, so he knew Lin Xu was also proficient in Cantonese cuisine. However, he hadn't expected the restaurant to offer dishes like Steamed Pork Ribs with Black Bean Sauce and Phoenix Claws with Black Bean Sauce.

Driven by curiosity, he picked up a piece to taste, and his eyes instantly lit up.

He had always thought that his grandfather, the curator of the Cantonese Cuisine Museum, was a leading figure in Cantonese cuisine, second to none in the field. But tasting Lin Xu's cooking, he realized that in the realm of Cantonese cuisine, there was someone who was by no means inferior to his grandfather.

The pork ribs and phoenix claws were steamed to perfection. Especially the pork ribs—they were tender yet springy. The black bean sauce wasn't as elaborate as what other restaurants typically made; it was just a simple fragrance of black beans. Yet, it was this simple black bean aroma that enhanced the deliciousness of the pork ribs to perfection.

AWESOME!

If he had tasted this dish before the competition, he would have withdrawn on the spot. There was simply no comparison; Lin Xu's control over the dishes and his understanding of cooking were far superior to his own.

Chapter 179: Lele, from now on I'll treat Lin as an equal, remember to change how you address him!

No wonder he could win the championship.

At this moment, Guo Xinghai was thoroughly convinced by Lin Xu. Not only was he convinced, but he even felt that Lin Xu was a figure to look up to, like a towering mountain. Lin Xu was two or three years younger than him, yet his culinary skills were a whole level above. How could anyone compare?

He had tasted all the dishes. The more he tasted, the more amazed he became.

Typically, a chef would spend their entire life mastering one type of cuisine. But Lin Xu was not only good at Cantonese cuisine; he had also perfected the classic Sichuan dish, Boiled Fish.

It seems there's still so much I need to learn from Lin Xu!

After the meal was over, Guo Xinghai had thoroughly convinced himself. When he first arrived, he had jokingly said that Lin Xu had called him and Wei Qian over to do work. However, he now voluntarily washed his hands, tied on an apron, and unceremoniously began helping out.

Well, since I'm going to learn from Lin Xu, I might as well start now.

It was only after he entered the kitchen that he realized the restaurant even had the classic Shandong dish, Sweet and Sour Pork Tenderloin.

My goodness, one person mastering three different cuisines, and all expertly done! Too impressive!

Meanwhile, Shen Guofu and the others were still drinking. He had already tasted the White Jade Lotus Root Strips, the dish his son-in-law had won the championship with today. Initially, he thought his son-in-law had won purely because of the presentation. It was only now he realized that even if the dish were messily served, the championship would still be his because the flavor was truly outstanding.

Delicious! When I leave later, I have to pack a portion for my wife to try. Otherwise, if both of us in the house have tried the dish except her, that could easily spell trouble. Oh right, I have to tell my wife that we only had vegetarian dishes and leafy greens today. No meat was eaten, and I certainly can't mention Braised Pork Belly. As long as Yueyue doesn't betray me, my wife will absolutely not find out. To make it more convincing, when packing the dishes later, everything has to be packed as vegetarian. Braised Pork Belly absolutely cannot be taken home, or it will definitely give it away. As for drinking... I'll just say it was Old Tan and Head Chef Xie who insisted I drink, and I had no choice but to indulge in just a small cup. Yes, no choice! Then I'll complain a bit about Old Tan. That way, the drinking matter can just be glossed over. After all, there isn't a breathalyzer at home, so as long as I insist I only had a small cup, even if my wife suspects anything, she won't have any evidence.

However, what he didn't know was that Shen Jiayue's recent WeChat Moments update had just been clearly seen by Han Shuzhen, who was waiting for patients.

She couldn't believe it! Her husband, who just said he had no appetite and would only eat vegetarian, had turned around and ordered a whole table of dishes, even including Braised Pork Belly—and such a large plate at that! Nice one, Shen Guofu! So this is what you meant by only eating vegetarian dishes? This is what you meant by having no appetite? You tell me, which dish on this table is vegetarian? A man nearly fifty still lacks such self-control. He can't be left unsupervised for even a single meal! I'll settle this with you when you get home!

Fuming, she looked at the table, but couldn't help but be drawn to the Braised Pork Belly.

This meat is really well-made, perfectly layered with such a glossy, rosy color. It looks delicious just by its appearance. If Old Shen packs a few pieces for me, I'll forgive him. Otherwise... HMPH!

With that thought, she pressed the call button, urging the patients waiting outside to hurry in. I need to finish today's consultations early and get off work. After getting home, I'll either eat Braised Pork Belly or deal with Old Shen!

「North Third Ring.」

In the Geng Family's courtyard residence, Geng Lishan was in his study, his brushwork vigorous as he spiritedly wrote four large, powerful characters:

"Lin Ji's Food"

Then, in a flowing cursive script, he added an inscription:

"Presented to the proud and solitary Mr. Lin Xu, from Lishan, respectfully."

He didn't put on airs like a top-class calligrapher; instead, he adopted a slightly more humble posture. After all, I misunderstood the man before. I need to present the right attitude. Only then can I win the understanding of this kindred spirit.

After finishing, Geng Lishan scrutinized his work, planning to mount it personally tomorrow and deliver this piece of calligraphy into his young friend Lin Xu's hands himself. When the time comes, I definitely want to share drinks and conversation with this young friend. If possible, I hope to taste the White Jade Lotus Root Strips again. Indeed, ever since returning from Fishing Platform, I haven't been able to stop thinking about that dish—its crisp texture, extraordinary flavor, and impeccable presentation. It's undoubtedly a dish served to VIPs, truly exceptional. I never imagined lotus root could taste so good. So much so that I instructed the housekeeper to prepare an all-lotus-root feast this evening. All forms of lotus root dishes—strips, slices, sections, sticks, boxes, and pockets—were served. If I can't have White Jade Lotus Root Strips, then I'll console myself by indulging in other lotus root dishes.

As he was thinking this, Geng Lele, with her mushroom-like haircut, walked in. "Old Man, why did you hole up in the study as soon as you got back today? Dinner's ready! If you don't come out, we'll just bring the dishes in and eat here."

Hearing this, Geng Lishan immediately said, "Absolutely not! No unauthorized individuals in this room. I'll wash my brush and be right out."

"What are you writing that's got you so engrossed?" Geng Lele, curious, leaned over the table to carefully examine the calligraphy Geng Lishan had just finished and saw the four large characters: "Lin Ji's Food."

Wow, beautiful. He put much more heart into this than last time. One can even feel a sense of proud aloofness emanating from the characters. This perfectly matches the positioning of Lin Ji's Food.

After looking at the characters, she checked the inscription and then froze. "From Lishan, respectfully"? Old Man, Boss Lin is so much younger than you! Even if you want to eat his cooking, you don't need to adopt such a stance, right? If this were hung up in the restaurant, the entire cultural circle would probably have a meltdown! A renowned calligrapher using respectful terms for someone so much younger? How would other calligraphers and people in the cultural scene even function? Would they have to kowtow to Lin Xu when they see him? Not only would Grandpa's reputation be ruined, but even Lin Ji's Food could get dragged into it. No, I absolutely can't let Grandpa do something so foolish!

As Geng Lele was mulling this over, she heard her grandfather say, "You're here just in time, Lele. From today onward, young Lin and I are equals. Remember to adjust how you address him accordingly when you see him next."

Geng Lele was utterly flabbergasted.

Chapter 180: Uncle Shen, what happened to your face? Making Boiled Chinese Broccoli!

4:30 a.m.

Lin Xu placed Dundun in the shop, then drove the produce truck his master had rented to the Chunfeng Vegetable Market to buy vegetables.

"Boss Lin, congratulations on winning the championship! The Guangdong cabbage you ordered is all ready. It's top quality, the best in the entire wholesale market," Uncle Shen greeted Lin Xu with a smile as soon as he saw him.

The stall was stacked with bundles of lush green Guangdong cabbage, looking exceptionally tender and fresh.

Guangdong cabbage, also known as choy sum or Chinese flowering cabbage, is a cruciferous plant unique to the Guangdong and Guangxi regions. It is cherished for its tender taste, can be grown year-round, and is the most common vegetable there.

After acquiring the recipe for Boiled Chinese Broccoli yesterday, Lin Xu had made immediate preparations to introduce it at his restaurant.

Customers had often complained that there were no green vegetables in the shop, saying that eating there every day could lead to 'internal heat.'

Now, finally, there was a vegetable dish available.

While selecting the Guangdong cabbage, Lin Xu said to Uncle Shen, "Lin Ji might have to close for a period soon. We're preparing to renovate and turn it into a proper restaurant. When that happens, I won't be able to come here to buy vegetables, so I'll have to trouble you, Uncle Shen, to deliver them to the shop."

To save on labor, owners of small eateries usually purchased ingredients themselves. They bargained where they could, as saving even a little was beneficial. Larger restaurants, however, had dedicated purchasing departments responsible for selecting and inspecting ingredients, relieving Lin Xu of the need to do it himself.

"Oh, congratulations, Boss Lin! Just let me know in advance when you plan to close for renovations, so I can adjust the volume of vegetables I stock."

"Sure, no problem!"

After loading all the purchased vegetables and other ingredients into the truck, Lin Xu bought some meat and then drove back to the shop.

First, he unloaded the truck. Then he processed the ingredients, soaking, scalding, or washing them as needed.

After finishing these tasks, he washed his hands, mixed a bit of Dough, and prepared to make some chicken soup with noodle sheets.

The weather was very hot, and he was sweating a lot, so he needed to drink more salty soup to replenish lost salt.

The Dough required for the noodle sheets was the same as that for making wontons. It just needed to be rolled into thin sheets.

This home-style dish of chicken soup with noodle sheets required a broth that was savory yet not greasy. The noodle sheets should be thin and translucent, smooth to eat, and perfectly seasoned.

A hot bowl of this noodle soup, paired with a staple food, would provide all the energy needed for the morning.

The chicken broth was ready-made. These days, it was always simmering in the shop.

Once the Dough had rested sufficiently, he could start rolling it out and cooking.

While the Dough rested, Lin Xu used this Kung Fu to mix another batch of Dough with high-gluten flour, intending to pan-fry some beef-filled pancakes on the flat griddle. He couldn't eat steamed buns and pan-fried buns all the time; it was important to vary the menu occasionally. After all, breakfast wasn't sold to the public, so he could make whatever he liked, allowing for considerable freedom.

After mixing the Dough, he set it aside to rest.

Next, he soaked some glass noodles, then chopped some scallions and ginger. He placed them in a bowl of cooled boiled water, added two small spoonfuls of salt, and massaged them in the water about ten times to create a Scallion and Ginger saltwater.

Adding salt directly to the beef filling could cause it to lose moisture, but using salted water was fine.

Once the Scallion and Ginger saltwater was ready, he took a piece of beef tenderloin and finely minced it with a cleaver. He added Light Soy Sauce, oyster sauce, and ground pepper, stirring until well mixed. Then, he gradually incorporated the Scallion and Ginger saltwater, beating the mixture until it became elastic and held its shape.

「Half an hour later.」

The Dough had properly rested, and the meat filling was marinated.

Lin Xu retrieved the softened glass noodles, chopped them, and added them to the meat filling. He then chopped some more fresh Scallions and mixed them in.

When preparing meat fillings for items like steamed buns, dumplings, or savory pancakes, chopped scallions must only be added right before use. Otherwise, the filling could develop an unpleasant, stale scallion odor.

After adding the chopped Scallions to the meat filling, he drizzled Dark Soy Sauce into the bowl, added a little lard and Sichuan peppercorn oil, then stirred everything until evenly combined.

The amount of salt in the beef was already sufficient, so there was no need to add more.

Lin Xu spread a little cooking oil on his work surface. He turned the rested Dough out onto it, coated the Dough evenly with more cooking oil, then rolled it into a long log and divided it into equal-sized portions.

The Dough for these beef pancakes must not be kneaded. Otherwise, the gluten would develop too much, causing the pancake skins to shrink during cooking.

He flattened each portion of Dough, brushed it with a little oil, and then used a rolling pin to roll it into a thin, long rectangle.

After rolling out a piece, he would slap the thin dough sheet a couple of times. He then placed some beef filling at one end. First, he folded the edges of the dough over the filling, then rolled it up towards the other end, ensuring the dough tightly encased the filling.

Once the filling was completely wrapped, he gently pressed the roll flat, and a beef pancake Dough was formed.

After preparing enough for roughly one batch, Lin Xu placed a flat-bottomed pan on the stove. Once it was hot, he greased the bottom with a layer of oil. He then carefully placed the beef pancakes into the pan one by one, covered it with a lid, and let them cook over low heat.

The Filling mixing, Dough preparation, and even the final shaping of the beef pancakes—he could accomplish all of this thanks to his Skill. However, he was a bit unsure about the final frying process. Therefore, he could only fry them slowly over low heat, preferring to take his time rather than risk burning them.

Now was when having a master would have been truly advantageous. If his master were here, there would be no worries about controlling the heat for these beef pancakes; even on high heat, he could cook them until they were perfectly golden and crisp on both sides. Unfortunately, the old 'Sea King' had retired. He wondered if he'd ever get to enjoy the drama between him and the Leopard-Print Auntie again.

「About two minutes later.」

Lin Xu lifted the lid and brushed a layer of oil on the pancakes.

Then, using a spatula, he flipped them over.

The side that had been against the pan was now nicely browned and emitted a pleasant, doughy aroma. What a pity it wasn't cooked through yet; otherwise, he definitely would have had a taste.