

Culinary 221

Chapter 221: Are You Offering Hada Here? Making Crab Soup Dumplings!

He then slowly pulled the ring of sugar open to its maximum extent.

Next, he formed a double loop and continued to stretch it...

But upon encountering this type of street snack, often seen in scenic areas or food streets, for the first time, they found it somewhat difficult to handle.

Either they pulled too hard and broke the ring, or they forgot to pass it through the heated glutinous rice flour, causing the slightly stretched sugar to cool and harden.

"You need to pull along with the give of the sugar; don't just yank it hard."

"If the temperature drops, bury it in the glutinous rice flour for a moment to warm it up. Don't keep pulling if it's not stretching."

"The temperature drops faster as you go on. After each pull, you need to pass it through the glutinous rice flour to keep the sugar warm. This will make it easier."

Seeing everyone's keen interest, Lin Xu began to guide them seriously.

Dragon Beard Candy is quite an interesting snack. Those who know how to make it maintain the sugar at the right temperature, keeping it soft, so pulling it is effortless from start to finish.

But those who didn't know either broke it early or exerted all their might, sweating profusely.

While everyone was busy, Wei Qian from Building One next door heard Lin Xu was at work and came over for a visit. As he stepped into the kitchen, he saw a group of chefs gathered around Lin Xu, pulling at something white.

He was momentarily baffled:

"Are you guys presenting Khata scarves here?"

As he walked closer, he saw it was Dragon Beard Candy.

He casually picked up a nearby order slip and saw that, sure enough, someone had ordered Lin Xu's original dish.

He'd just started work and already had orders coming in. No wonder everyone was learning from him.

Wei Qian was about to greet him.

Not far away, the head chef shouted to Lin Xu, "Add two more orders of *Home*. One for twelve o'clock sharp, and the other for twelve-twenty. Thanks for your hard work, Chef Lin!"

Lin Xu: "..."

Just three orders and it's considered hard work? Your kitchen really doesn't have much pressure, huh.

If this were Lin Ji's Food, three dishes would be nothing. It wouldn't even be worth shouting about; the quantity is too small. Announcing it would be demeaning.

"Wow, three orders already! Chef Lin is amazing."

"Yeah, it's rare for this type of dessert dish to get three orders so quickly."

"It must be because they heard Chef Lin was coming today; everyone wanted to taste it."

"..."

The chefs whispered among themselves while busy making Dragon Beard Candy. Hearing them filled Lin Xu with quiet joy. With Dundun around, there will definitely be more than three orders today.

As expected, while he was chatting with Wei Qian over a cup of tea, two more orders came in.

Aside from the *Home* dish made by Lin Xu, other chefs' signature dishes were also ordered by customers.

After everyone finished the Dragon Beard Candy, Lin Xu made Caramelized Pumpkin Strips and egg yolk baked pumpkin balls. Once those were done, he started teaching everyone how to plate.

For the chefs at Fishing Platform, neither Caramelized Pumpkin Strips nor egg yolk baked pumpkin balls were particularly challenging, as they had made similar dishes before.

But plating was another matter, requiring careful consideration. Even from the moment of cutting the pumpkin strips, the entire plating design had to be conceived. Some pumpkin strips needed to be cut curved, and some longer. Those used for support needed to be slightly thicker. All these details had to be taken into account.

Lin Xu deftly arranged the caramel-coated pumpkin strips with chopsticks, and a delicate Bird's Nest began to take shape on the plate.

He then arranged the slightly set Dragon Beard Candy, added the egg yolk baked pumpkin balls, and the dish was officially complete.

"My goodness, it's just beautiful!"

"Chef Lin's skills are truly unmatched!"

"It's both exquisite and beautiful, and the key is that each component has a different flavor. Impressive!"

As they admired the beautiful dish, everyone reviewed the method afterward and then returned to their stoves to practice.

They took advantage of the lull before the lunch rush to practice a couple more times.

The most challenging parts of this dish were the nest lining made from Dragon Beard Candy and the Bird's Nest structure built from Caramelized Pumpkin Strips. One could even say the entire dish relied on its presentation for success.

So they needed to practice repeatedly and try to create their own style.

Wei Qian had to get back to work, so he returned after a brief visit. Meanwhile, Lin Xu began preparing ingredients for lunch.

「Eleven in the morning.」

The Pork Skin in the chicken soup was ready.

He removed the Pork Skin from the chicken soup and picked out the Scallion and Ginger.

After cooling the Pork Skin, he minced it, then returned it to the chicken soup. He brought it to a boil over high heat, skimming off any scum and stray oil droplets.

When no more scum surfaced, he turned off the heat and poured it into a basin.

Then he carried it to the cold storage to cool.

「Noon.」

After Lin Xu finished the dishes he was responsible for, he found himself with some free time. He went to the seafood section, netted a few crabs, and then carried them to the steaming room.

The assistant chef inside greeted him as soon as he saw Lin Xu, "Chef Lin, are you using crabs?"

"Yes, I'm planning to try making some Crab Buns. Is it alright to leave them here with you?"

"Leave them here. I'll steam them and bring them over to you later."

Lin Xu was growing increasingly fond of this place.

He only needed to give an order for what he required and focus on the key steps himself. The rest of the time, he could attend to other matters.

Even when making the chicken soup and Pork Skin aspic earlier, he could have just instructed the assistant chefs in the boiling station to do it.

Tsk, no wonder people strive to move up in the world. This kind of workflow is something you'd never experience in a small diner in a lifetime.

Back at his own stove, he was just about to take a break.

The head chef who had previously announced the orders came over, "Chef Lin, the customers were very satisfied with your dishes. They would like to have a photo with you. Are you available now?"

A photo?

Lin Xu hadn't expected these high-end clientele to have such a custom when dining.

He shook his head and said,

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"It's not very convenient... perhaps next time."

Once you start agreeing to such requests, other customers will certainly want to take pictures as well. It's better to nip it in the bud right from the start.

The head chef said with a smile, "Alright, I'll inform the front desk to relay our response to the customers."

「At the restaurant's front desk.」

After receiving the notification, Shu Yun immediately went to the dessert station to pick up a complimentary dessert. She then carried it over to the table of customers who had asked for the photo and said in a gentle, apologetic tone, "I'm sorry, everyone. Our Chef Lin is currently busy in the kitchen and can't spare the time. He specifically asked me to bring you a small dessert and to convey his apologies."

The customers looked slightly disappointed but suggested taking a photo next time.

They genuinely liked the dish Lin Xu had prepared, "Family"; its presentation alone was captivating at first sight. They had also learned the story behind the dish—how he managed to remain focused and create such a game-changing dish amid the tense competition was indeed thrilling to them.

"Chef Lin, the crabs are steamed. Do you need help shelling them?"

"Oh, no need, I can do it myself."

「In the kitchen.」

The assistant from the steaming station quickly brought in the steamed crabs.

Lin Xu, who was chatting with Shen Jiayue about her lunch, declined the assistant's offer to help shell the crabs without much thought.

After the assistant left, Lin Xu looked at the crabs on the tray and only then realized he didn't know how to shell crabs.

Just then, Xie Baomin came over: "Are they steamed? Do you need help shelling them? Probably not. Your crab-shelling skills might even be better than mine."

Lin Xu was speechless. Senior Brother, if you wanted to help, you could have just started. Could I even have stopped you?

But since he had put it that way, Lin Xu had no choice but to use his remaining few points to exchange for the Excellent Level Crab Shelling Technique from the Points Store.

His points were once again depleted.

He grabbed a small pair of kitchen scissors, flipped a steamed crab over, and opened it from the belly, removing the stomach sac, gills, and other inedible parts. Next, he broke off a claw and carefully scraped the crab roe into a bowl. After scraping it clean, he took another small bowl and picked the crab meat into it.

He meticulously picked out all the meat from the claws, legs, and even the tiny crevices of the body. Xie Baomin, watching from the side, clucked his tongue in amazement: "The Central Plains isn't a crab-producing region, so logically, you should be quite inexperienced at this. But this technique... even fishermen living by Taihu Lake probably couldn't do much better than this! Impressive, Junior Brother!"

Lin Xu shot him a helpless glance. I'm not really in the mood to deal with you right now, Senior Brother. You made me spend all my points, and now you're standing there making sarcastic remarks. You're quite adept at twisting the knife.

After shelling all the crabs, Lin Xu finely chopped the crab meat, mixed it with the crab roe, and then added some ginger juice. Normally, one would add minced ginger, but since his Shen Baobao disliked the texture of ginger, he used ginger juice instead.

Well, since it was being made for her, naturally, the seasoning had to be adjusted to her preference.

After adding the ginger juice, he added a bit of salt, Light Soy Sauce, and fine sugar for seasoning. The steaming time for Crab Soup Dumplings is typically five to eight minutes. This short window means regular White Sugar might not dissolve properly. Therefore, fine sugar is used for flavoring. With a little heat, the sugar granules dissolve and blend into the broth, enhancing its umami flavor.

Besides fine sugar, caster sugar could also be used. However, caster sugar tends to clump when added to the filling and isn't as easy to use as fine sugar.

Once the filling was prepared, Lin Xu covered it with plastic wrap and stored it in the refrigerator.

He then chopped some pork mince. If the Crab Soup Dumplings contained only crab roe and crab meat, the umami flavor would be too intense and overpowering. Therefore, some pork mince was needed to balance it. This also added aroma, ensuring the flavors of the filling were harmonious and balanced. The pork mince shouldn't be too fatty; a ratio of three parts fat to seven parts lean was best. After finely mincing the meat, he seasoned it with Scallion and Ginger water and placed it in the refrigerator as well.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, Lin Xu took some high-gluten flour and began to make the dough needed for the Crab Soup Dumplings. He smoothed out the flour in a basin, then drew a shape resembling a Mercedes-Benz logo in it, dividing the flour into three portions. Next, he prepared a bowl of boiling water and a bowl of cold water, dissolving salt in each. He used the salted boiling water to mix two portions of the flour into a shaggy dough, then used the salted cold water for the remaining portion to achieve the same. After stirring, he kneaded it into a dough ball with his hands. The dough needed to be kneaded thoroughly so that the dumpling wrappers would have better elasticity and gluten strength.

The kneaded dough was left to rest for half an hour.

At half-past four, Lin Xu brought over the solidified chicken stock aspic to chop, along with the pork mince and crab filling. The three components were mixed together. It needed more aspic to ensure a

generous amount of soup in the dumplings. He mixed the ingredients until they formed a large, trembling, jelly-like mixture.

He brought over the rested dough and began rolling out wrappers and adding the filling. The wrappers for the Crab Soup Dumplings needed to be large, about the size of a palm. It wasn't easy to roll them thin and even with a rolling pin, especially to achieve the desired thicker center and thinner edges. The edges of the rolled-out wrappers needed to be slightly rippled; only then would they meet the standard.

Holding a wrapper in his hand, Lin Xu scooped a large spoonful of filling onto it. He then gently pinched the dough, meticulously creating 32 pleats.

And just like that, a Crab Soup Dumpling was assembled.

「Elsewhere.」

The three members of the Shen Family left work early, changed clothes at home, and then got into Shen Guofu's Bentley, heading towards the Fishing Platform for dinner. All three were dressed formally; after all, they were going to a formal venue for dinner and couldn't be careless. Besides, it was their son-in-law's first day at work. As his parents-in-law, how could they embarrass him?

"Do you remember when we had Shengjian Buns last time, I casually mentioned Crab Buns?" Shen Jiayue instructed her parents from the back seat of the car. "Well, today Xu Baobao made them for me! So, no matter how they taste, don't forget to praise him, okay?"

Her words made Shen Guofu and his wife exchange a look.

Did their silly daughter save the entire universe in her past life? How did she end up with such a boyfriend who spoils her rotten?

Shen Guofu said to his wife, "Honey, a few days after we meet the old matriarch, get in touch with his mother right away. Let's arrange the wedding soon. I'll buy a house if they need one. We absolutely must hold onto such a good son-in-law..."

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"How is it, Senior Brother?"

"Hmm, delicious! This soup is truly exquisite!"

In the kitchen, the first steamer basket of Crab Soup Dumplings had already been brought out. The skin of the dumplings was steamed to a semi-transparent state, and the aspic inside had completely melted. With just a light touch, ripples would appear, as if they were water-filled balloons.

Xie Baomin was, by right, the first to taste them. He used chopsticks to carefully pierce a small opening in a dumpling's skin, then leaned in to gently sip the soup from within. The savory essence of crab, the fragrant aroma of chicken broth, and the rich perfume of the pork filling all mingled in the soup. Taking a slurp was sheer bliss.

"Fantastic, Junior Brother! Your skills are more than enough to apply for a head chef position in Building Six," he exclaimed.

Building Six primarily featured Suzhou cuisine, and its Jingjiang Crab Buns were a signature item. Known for their thin skin, generous filling, and a soup that was both delicious and rich, they were popular among domestic and international guests. Xie Baomin felt his junior brother's skills were on par with the head chefs there.

Lin Xu smiled and said, "I'm not at that level yet. I still need to learn from a true master when I get the chance."

He had initially thought his senior brother was also an expert in this area, which was why he'd let him taste first. He hoped for some pointers and to experience the joy of being guided by a State Banquet master. However, it turned out that while his senior brother understood this type of pastry, he clearly wasn't as proficient with it as he was with main dishes. So, the anticipated upgrade notification never appeared. Instead, all he heard was his senior brother's belch.

Hmm... Building Six specializes in Crab Soup Dumplings? Then I should pay them a visit and ask their head chef for some pointers. This Fishing Platform is truly a treasure trove! If this were a game, I'd definitely be in a special instance brimming with rewards, the kind I could claim anytime, anywhere.

After Xie Baomin had his taste, Lin Xu also tried one. It was indeed excellent.

These Crab Buns are only at the Excellent Level at best, and they're already this good! If they were upgraded to Superior or Perfect Level, wouldn't they taste even more incredible? I really want to try...

Just as this thought crossed his mind, the system's notification sounded: "Host is determined to make Perfect Level Crab Buns, triggering the side quest 'Dumpling Upgrade': Please visit Building Six within one week and, under the guidance of Building Six's head chef, elevate the Crab Buns to Superior. Upon completion, you will be rewarded with one Dish Upgrade Card for soup dumplings."

Damn it! I just wanted to **try** them; I didn't plan on **making** them! Can't you review the objectives properly before issuing quests? I always feel like this system is out to get me... Still, a visit to Building Six isn't out of the question. After all, it's like running an instance. I have to get my hands on every possible reward.

Thinking this, Lin Xu said, "Senior Brother? You said Building Six specializes in these? Could I visit Building Six someday? I feel like my Crab Buns aren't quite perfect yet."

"Sure," Xie Baomin replied. "Qiu Zhenhua, the executive chef of Building Six, and I get along quite well. His uncle, old Mr. Qiu Minghai, is even closer with our Master."

A close relationship? Upon hearing this term, Lin Xu immediately thought of his Senior Brother Xie and Chef Guo from Building Ten. Is it a **genuinely** close relationship, or the 'avoid each other like the plague' kind of close? I hope they don't try to intimidate me the moment I step into Building Six. Lin Xu had always felt that his Master's arrogant, show-off personality made it difficult for him to have genuinely close friends; any he did have were likely bullied into the relationship. But since the system issued the quest, I might as well go. After all, a Dish Upgrade Card for soup dumplings is pretty useful.

After the two had finished tasting the Crab Buns, dinner service began in the back kitchen.

The employee meals at the Fishing Platform were different from Lin Ji. At Lin Ji, you could eat whatever you wanted with no restrictions. At the Fishing Platform, however, there were detailed regulations. For instance, meals could not exceed four dishes, include any imported or seafood ingredients, or have ingredient costs that surpassed the Fishing Platform's standard meal allowance. Furthermore, the Fishing Platform's kitchen operated on a rotation system, with all chefs taking turns cooking the employee meals.

Arriving at the staff cafeteria, Lin Xu saw today's dinner: rice, minced meat with vermicelli, hand-shredded cabbage, stir-fried beef with Chinese kale, and a Tomato Egg soup. Three dishes and a soup, a mix of meat and vegetables. Importantly, the portions were generous, and there was more than enough rice. Although such staff meals lacked the flair of Lin Ji's Food, they smelled quite good. Actually, Lin Xu's Crab Soup Dumplings had also been part of the dinner, but they were snatched up the moment they were brought out; Lin Xu didn't even catch a glimpse of them.

He picked up a clean empty bowl and served himself a small portion of rice. He had been taking it easy all day, not busy even during the lunch rush, and plus he had just eaten some Crab Soup Dumplings, so he wasn't very hungry. After dishing out his rice, Lin Xu sat down and scooped a chopstick-full of the minced meat vermicelli into his bowl. Then, he pulled out his phone to scroll through the day's trending news while eating the vermicelli.

But as soon as the food entered his mouth, his expression froze.

Holy crap! This vermicelli is actually really good!

He looked down at the vermicelli in his bowl. The reddish strands were coated with minced meat and flecked with finely chopped chili peppers and minced garlic. The garlic must have been added last; its fresh aroma filled his mouth as he ate.

He took another bite. The vermicelli was indeed delicious—oily and smooth in texture, with a rich, spicy flavor, enhanced by a subtle hint of garlic that made it both fragrant and tasty. After finishing the vermicelli, he followed it with a mouthful of rice.

Satisfying!

Lin Xu considered himself to have tasted some pretty good food in his time.

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The dining services at Finance University were also decent, with similar stir-fried dishes frequently available. But he had never expected such an ordinary dish of minced meat and vermicelli to be delicious to this extent, even exceeding his understanding of vermicelli.

"Who cooked today's meal? It's really delicious."

He chatted with the head chef next to him while eating.

"Oh, it was cooked by Chef Qin—Qin Wei. Chef Lin praised your cooking."

In a corner not far away, a young chef who was hunched over his bowl, shoveling rice into his mouth, looked up, gave Lin Xu a timid smile, then lowered his head and continued eating. He was probably about twenty-six or twenty-seven, thin and refined-looking, not resembling a chef so much as a somewhat melancholic folk singer.

The chefs nearby started to tease, "Our Chef Qin is as bashful as a young maiden; he doesn't like to mingle, nor does he like parties."

"He's quite reserved and uncommunicative; sometimes he doesn't say a word all day."

"Right, he's more introverted, unlike us who are all a bit rough around the edges."

When Lin Xu inquired about Chef Qin, everyone chirped in with information about Qin Wei.

Lin Xu smiled at Qin Wei. He was just about to eat when he suddenly thought of poaching staff, so he summoned the system to check the list of chefs available for recruitment. Then he saw that Qin Wei's name was highlighted.

TSK. TSK. TSK... He truly hadn't expected to find a recruitable chef on his very first day at work. So, what was he waiting for? Time to start poaching!

He put some minced meat and vermicelli into his bowl, added a couple of chopsticks' worth of cabbage, and then cheerfully sat down next to Qin Wei. "Chef Qin, how did you make this minced meat and vermicelli? The flavor is absolutely incredible, isn't it?"

Qin Wei hadn't expected Lin Xu to come over. He coughed lightly, a little uncomfortable. "It's... it's nothing special... I just... I just casually... you know... stir-fried it... and... and it was... done..."

He stammers? Is that why he's so shy?

Lin Xu said with a laugh, "Don't be nervous, I'm just making small talk. When you have time, how about you teach me how to make it?"

"S-sure!"

Both men continued to eat their rice, exchanging a few words now and then. Although Qin Wei still stuttered, he was much better than when they'd started talking. Especially when he noticed that Lin Xu didn't tease him at all, he relaxed considerably.

「After the meal.」

Lin Xu said goodbye to Qin Wei and put his bowl and chopsticks in the dishwashing basket.

After returning to his own cooking station, he made another batch of Crab Buns. Just as he placed them in the steamer, his phone suddenly rang.

He took it out to look. Shen Jiayue's family had arrived.

He hurried to the front desk, seeing his mother-in-law holding Dundun and asking if the little guy was happy about the change of place, while Shu Yun was introducing the historical anecdotes of Building

Two to Shen Guofu. The only one relatively idle was his own Shen Baobao. She was leaning near the decorative rockery with a water feature by the front desk, amusing herself with the little goldfish inside.

Upon seeing Lin Xu come over, the girl immediately rushed towards him. "Are the Crab Buns ready?"

"Yes, they're ready, and they taste quite good. I'll bring them out for you in a moment."

"Great!"

Today, Shen Jiayue wore a light blue sleeveless dress. Such attire is difficult to pull off, but with her tall stature and good figure, not only did she carry off the dress perfectly, but her skin, so exquisitely fair and smooth, also made the dress seem ethereal. Unfortunately, Lin Xu was wearing his chef's uniform from Fishing Platform, complete with a tall chef's hat. Standing with Shen Jiayue, it created the awkward image of a chef who had run off with a wealthy young lady.

"Ah, Xu is here. Let's take our seats then," Shen Guofu said.

Earlier at noon, Shen Guofu had his secretary, Ms. Zou, make a reservation here and even pre-ordered some of the restaurant's signature dishes. Well, although his son-in-law worked here, he had no intention of taking advantage of that. He intended to pay the full price, just like any other customer.

Arriving at their table, after they were seated, the waiter first brought over the pre-meal tea and snacks. As the tea was poured, Lin Xu picked up a cup and took a sip. The tea had a mellow and fragrant flavor, and after he finished, a faint, sweet aftertaste lingered in his mouth. Clearly, this was good quality tea.

Shen Guofu curiously asked, "How is it?"

"It's excellent. Tastes wonderful."

"Then the more than one thousand yuan spent on it was well worth it."

Lin Xu was floored. This small pot could hardly hold 300 milliliters, yet it costs over a thousand yuan? That means each sip is several tens of yuan! Good heavens! How can I possibly afford to drink this?

He finished the tea in his cup, stood up, and said, "The soup buns should be almost ready. I'll go to the kitchen to check. If they're ready, I'll have them brought over for you to taste."

Indeed, this was an important task he couldn't forget.

When he reached the back kitchen, the second batch of Crab Buns had just finished steaming. Lin Xu pulled the steaming tray from the steamer, then took several clean plates and began plating. This was not an easy task, as the skin of the buns was so delicate it could break with the slightest touch, and they were filled with scalding broth, so lifting them directly could easily cause them to tear. Successfully getting the buns onto the plates required some skill.

He pinched the top knot of the soup bun between his middle and index fingers, his fingertips supporting the upper skin, his thumb the skin on one side, his pinky the skin on the other, while the lower part of his palm cradled the bottom. After securing all sides, he gently lifted. This way, the entire bun was lifted. His left hand, holding a plate, quickly slipped it underneath, and the soup bun was steadily settled onto it.

Thank goodness for Heartless Iron Hand. Otherwise, he wouldn't have dared to touch these freshly steamed soup buns.

After plating three buns per dish, he placed each plate into a small steamer basket and asked a food runner to deliver them to his father-in-law's table.

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Then he packed another one and carried it to the washing room,

"Master Qin, try the Crab Bun I made and give me some feedback."

Qin Wei was on duty today. He not only had to prepare dinner but also had to clean the staff's bowls and utensils with the dishwasher, so he was quite busy.

Seeing Lin Xu bring over a Crab Bun, he was somewhat surprised,

"I... I don't know... about... crab... Crab Buns..."

"What's there to know? Just taste it and see if it's good, that's all. You eat first; I'm heading back to the stove to busy myself. We can talk more once you're free."

"Okay... alright."

「In the restaurant.」

Shen Guofu said with a look of regret,

"If I had known, I wouldn't have let Xu come to work today. Our family should have come to eat first, and then he could have gone to work tomorrow."

This fine meal just didn't feel the same without his son-in-law present.

As they were talking, the Crab Buns were brought over.

"Chef Lin specially made these for you. Please enjoy."

The lid of the steamer was lifted.

The trembling Crab Soup Dumplings inside were revealed.

"Wow! They look so pretty! Do you have any straws? Please bring us a few straws."

Upon seeing the soup dumplings, Shen Jiayue was instantly smitten.

Wet and glistening, the slightest touch to the plate would create ripples, and through the skin as thin as a cicada's wings, one could see the crab roe and meat inside.

Never mind the taste; the mere appearance of the soup dumplings was enough to make one marvel at the wonders of cooking.

How on earth do you manage to encase so much soup inside a bun? It's magical!

Soon enough, the straws were delivered.

Shen Jiayue poked a hole in the top of the soup dumpling with her chopsticks, inserted a straw, and with a gentle sip, the rich and savory soup gushed into her mouth.

The soup was somewhat similar to that of Shengjian Buns but had an added delicious freshness of chicken broth.

Still, the freshest flavor was undoubtedly that of the crab roe.

A single sip was so delicious it sent shivers down one's spine.

The taste was absolutely extraordinary.

"Amazing! So delicious!"

Shen Guofu and Han Shuzhen also gave them a try.

They too praised Lin Xu's culinary skills.

After finishing the soup in the dumpling, they poured a little vinegar inside, then gripped the skin with chopsticks, eating the chewy skin and the filling together.

So satisfying!

「In the kitchen.」

While Lin Xu was busy preparing dishes for another table of customers, he suddenly heard the system's notification:

"The Crab Bun made by the host has gained Shen Jiayue's approval, completing the reward mission 'Crab Bun.' You are awarded one Excellent Level seafood dish draw. Would you like to draw now?"

Finally, it was complete.

Lin Xu heaved a long sigh of relief.

Although he was confident his Crab Buns were generally good and Shen Baobao would never call them bad, without the system's notification, he still felt somewhat anxious.

He decided to go to the front desk later, after the rush, to interact with Dundun and see what dish he could draw.

The menu at Lin Ji's Food was lacking in seafood dishes. Currently, they only had Steamed Sea Bass to offer, and with a new store opening soon, that wouldn't be enough. There needed to be both freshwater and seafood options.

While he was busy, Xie Baomin fished out a Gu fish from the tank and personally prepared a dish of sweet and sour fish cubes to send over to Shen Guofu.

"Mr. Shen, welcome to our Building No. 2 for your meal. This is a complimentary dish of sweet and sour fish cubes I prepared myself. My junior apprentice brother is still busy. I'll have him come over to accompany you once he's finished."

Shen Guofu replied with a smile,

"Oh my, that's quite an honor for me. Thank you so much, Chef Xie."

After Xie Baomin left, Shen Guofu said to his daughter,

"Hurry up and try it, dear. Chef Xie doesn't cook for just anyone. This sweet and sour fish looks delicious."

Shen Jiayue picked up an asparagus from the plate next to her, put it into her mouth, and chewed while saying,

"My senior apprentice brother made it for me before. You and Mom should eat up; I won't fight you two for it."

Shen Guofu: ?????

This silly girl, what a stroke of good fortune she's stumbled upon!

The family ate and drank to their heart's content.

Toward the end, Lin Xu brought out a dish he had prepared called "Home."

His parents-in-law hadn't tasted this dish before, so he made it today for the elders to try.

Seeing the dish, Shen Guofu immediately pulled out his phone, took a photo, and then shared it on his social media feed:

"This is an original dish by my son-in-law, included in the menu of the Fishing Platform State Guesthouse's Building No. 2 restaurant. If you dine there, remember to order 'Home' and try it. It has a great meaning."

Old Shen actually wasn't someone who liked to show off. But with such a perfect son-in-law, not showing him off just felt wrong.

Soon enough, his social media feed was flooded with various comments:

"Look out, Old Shen is showing off his son-in-law again!"

"Old Shen, did your son-in-law start working at the Fishing Platform?"

"Building No. 2, right? I have a banquet in a few days. I'll book it there and try your son-in-law's cooking."

"This dish looks like a work of art. I'll have to go try it someday."

"Old Shen, is your son-in-law an only child? Does he have any brothers or sisters?"

"..."

Reading these comments, Shen Guofu was over the moon with joy.

It was a good thing he'd let Yueyue choose her own partner. She had managed to find such a perfect son-in-law. If they had forced her into matchmaking, who knows what kind of oddball they might have ended up with.

After the family had their fill of food and drink, Lin Xu, having finished his work, came to the front desk.

"Drive carefully after work. Dundun is in the car. Don't turn the air conditioning up too high."

Han Shuzhen held Dundun, whispering her instructions.

Secretary Zou had already helped with the payment at lunchtime, so Lin Xu, who had planned to rush to pay, was left empty-handed.

It's so nice to have a secretary. Even little matters like this didn't need his attention.

He carried Dundun as he saw his parents-in-law and Shen Jiayue off.

After they left the restaurant, Shen Guofu looked at Lin Xu and said,

"Come over to our place this weekend. Since your and Yueyue's relationship is public now, it's a good time to visit our home and meet the relatives. They're all quite curious about you."

"Alright."

After they had all gotten into the car and left, Lin Xu hugged Dundun and muttered in his mind:

Draw!

Following a sequence of actions, the system's notification soon sounded in his mind:

"Congratulations to the host for acquiring an Excellent Level seafood dish—Spicy Crayfish."

Damn!!! It's actually crayfish! Dundun is really on fire today, huh?

He was so excited that he tossed Dundun into the air as one might a child, scaring Dundun into clinging desperately to his shirt, its ears flying.

Servant, what do you think you're doing? I finally helped you draw something good, and you're actually trying to assassinate me?!!!!

Chapter 226: Making Winter Melon Candy! Anyone wants to eat crawfish? If you do, press 1!

"Is Dundun angry?"

「Back at the dining hall of Building Two.」

As soon as Lin Xu entered, Dundun leaped from his arms and into Shu Yun's, burying its head deep in the crook of her arm, looking utterly aggrieved. No matter how Lin Xu spoke to it, the little guy just ignored him.

"What did you do to it?" Shu Yun asked.

"I was just tossing it a bit in the air, and it suddenly got scared..." Lin Xu explained sheepishly.

Lin Xu and Dundun are truly a comically mismatched father and son, Shu Yun thought. Why on earth would you toss a child around when everything's fine?

"You go get busy in the kitchen; I'll comfort it," Shu Yun said.

"Sure, thanks a lot, Manager Shu."

Lin Xu headed to the back kitchen, washed his hands thoroughly, and then continued to cook according to the order slips.

「Seven o'clock in the evening.」

After confirming there were no new customer orders, Lin Xu officially clocked out.

While he was changing his clothes, Xie Baomin came over with a smile and asked, "Junior Brother, how did your first day of work feel?"

"It feels... like I'm on vacation," Lin Xu replied.

He had never imagined that a restaurant kitchen could be so relaxed. He had only prepared about a dozen dishes all day. If not for being busy making Crab Buns, he reckoned he'd have been idle enough to go chat with the crab sellers in the seafood area.

Xie Baomin took a sip of tea and said with a smile, "Your arrival has really boosted business at Building Two. It's been a long time since we've had a day as good as today."

Was business really that good today?

Lin Xu wondered. He recalled there being only about a dozen tables of customers for both lunch and dinner. Forget table turnover; the dining hall wasn't even half full. Senior Brother, do you have some misunderstanding of what 'good business' means?

"Today's restaurant revenue exceeded three hundred thousand..."

Lin Xu was dumbfounded. My apologies, I was too hasty!

He'd never imagined that today's seemingly dead business could generate such high revenue, almost matching Lin Ji's Food's entire weekly turnover.

Consider the terrifying customer volume at Lin Ji's Food. Consider the massive workload in Lin Ji's kitchen. And then look at this place... Indeed, raising prices is the driving force behind economic growth!

"What's the usual daily revenue here?" he asked Xie Baomin.

At first, I thought Dundun hadn't made an impact. Now it seems the little guy not only made a difference but even overperformed.

"Usually, it's seventy or eighty thousand, sometimes over a hundred thousand, and occasionally we hit two hundred thousand. We only reach three hundred thousand on holidays... This is all thanks to you, Junior Brother!"

But it wasn't really me, Lin Xu thought. It was thanks to that little cutie out there, still sulking. I never imagined that Senior Brother only let Dundun come to Fishing Platform because everyone was calling it a lucky cat and he thought it was a good gimmick. Who knew it would be such a windfall? If I had known, I would've negotiated a salary for Dundun. After all, for a cat, being held by beautiful women is hard work too.

After bidding farewell to his Senior Brother, Lin Xu took his car keys and went outside.

He opened all four car doors to air out the heat, then started the engine, turned on the AC, and cooled down the interior.

He returned to the front desk. Dundun was still in Shu Yun's arms. Seeing Lin Xu approach, it immediately turned its little head away, still looking miffed.

"Thanks so much for your trouble, Manager Shu. Please give Dundun to me; we're heading out now."

"MEOW..."

Before Shu Yun could speak, Dundun, still in her arms, let out a protesting meow.

Lin Xu laughed and took it into his arms. "A new toy arrived today. Want to play with it?"

Dundun: "..."

Too devious, using toys to tempt this kitty! Which little cat could resist such a temptation?

It immediately stopped struggling and even affectionately rubbed its head against Lin Xu's shoulder.

Shu Yun giggled. "Your Dundun is just too cute. Don't forget to bring it tomorrow, Boss Lin."

"Don't worry, Manager Shu, I definitely will."

Once in the car, the little fellow promptly scampered to the rear windshield and lay down, intently watching the passing scenery.

Lin Xu started the car and slowly drove out of Fishing Platform, heading straight for Yingchun Street.

Normally, this would be the busiest time at the shop. Yet today, I get to clock off and go home. The feeling of being an employee is truly exhilarating!

When crossing the North Fourth Ring, Lin Xu saw a long queue outside the pan-fried bun shop near the entrance to Yingchun Street. He even spotted a certain mushroom-headed student who was notorious for skipping classes.

TCH... Skipping class just to buy pan-fried buns near the school gate. That foodie nature is truly inherited from Mr. Lishan.

Arriving at Yingchun Street, Lin Xu could see from a distance that the location of Lin Ji's Food was now surrounded by a green barrier. This way, the ongoing renovations inside wouldn't disturb pedestrians outside, and it would also effectively prevent unauthorized people from entering the construction site, thus avoiding accidents like electric shocks.

Lin Xu parked the car in a roadside spot and went to the courier station to collect his parcels for the day. Inside were the self-entertaining toys Shen Jiayue had bought for Dundun, as well as new cat litter and a new scratching post.

After stowing them in the car's trunk, he was about to drive to his residential complex. Just then, Old Yu, who had stepped out of the nearby supermarket for some air, spotted him and called out urgently, "Boss Lin, the Winter Melons have arrived! When are you going to make winter melon candy?"

"Then let's do it now," Lin Xu agreed.

When Lin Xu arrived at the supermarket, he happened to see several staff members stocking an aquarium with newly arrived crayfish. These crayfish were quite large. After being dropped into the tanks, they became lively, occasionally waving their big claws and fighting with each other, as if vying to be the boss of Causeway Bay.

TCH, these crayfish are really good.

In the vegetable section, the white-skinned Winter Melon needed for making winter melon candy was ready, along with a bag of about ten pounds of White Sugar and a bag of food-grade quicklime.

Chapter 227: Making Winter Melon Candy! Anyone wants to eat crayfish? Press 1 if you do!

This is an essential ingredient for making Winter Melon Sugar.

"I won't take any sugar," Lin Xu said. "We have tens of pounds of White Sugar from the store piled up at home, and I'm worried it might absorb moisture and spoil."

He cut off a piece, less than half of the winter melon, and held it in his arms. Then, he grabbed some quicklime, ready to leave.

For his first attempt, he wanted to test the taste. If it turned out well, he'd consider making it in the back kitchen of the Fishing Platform later. That space was more generous, and the pots were bigger—much better than the small stove at home.

After only a few steps, Lin Xu suddenly saw a few old pumpkins in the fresh produce area nearby.

If winter melon can be made into sugar, then the method for making Winter Melon Sugar should also work for pumpkin, right?

He decided to give it a try.

After mentioning it to Uncle Yu, Lin Xu found himself holding more than half of an old pumpkin in his arms.

He drove back to the complex.

First, he took Dundun upstairs, then came back down to carry the winter melon, pumpkins, and various delivery boxes.

After moving everything up, he unpacked and assembled the toys.

By then, Dundun was already getting impatient, circling Lin Xu and trying to "help," occasionally pawing at the toy parts on the floor, as if to urge him to hurry.

It was an electric mouse that could automatically change direction.

After inserting the batteries, Lin Xu turned on the switch. The little mouse SQUEAKED and ran forward on its four wheels. It automatically turned when it was about to hit the sofa and then continued to run.

Dundun stalked it, a mix of fear and curiosity in its eyes. Occasionally, it would pounce, swatting the little mouse with its paw.

Seeing it playing happily, Lin Xu unpacked the other deliveries, placing the cardboard boxes in the empty space behind the sofa.

To a cat, these were the real cat beds.

After finishing these tasks, he washed his hands and went to the kitchen.

He poured the food-grade quicklime into a large basin, added fresh water, stirred it evenly, and set it aside.

Quicklime is rich in calcium ions. When the cut winter melon strips are soaked in it, these ions cause the melon's naturally soft texture to become firm and crisp.

This is what gives Winter Melon Sugar its characteristic crisp texture.

However, regular lime is not edible. Specially processed, food-grade quicklime is required.

This type of quicklime is reportedly processed from sources like clam shells, making it safe for consumption.

However, not all the limewater is used. The process involves stirring the quicklime into water until it's evenly mixed and then letting it settle. Only the clear water from the top layer is used; the small particles that precipitate at the bottom are largely discarded.

After preparing the limewater, Lin Xu placed the winter melon on the cutting board.

First, he peeled the winter melon, then cut it open and scooped out the soft inner pulp and seeds. He kept only the firmer flesh, as this is what makes delicious Winter Melon Sugar.

After removing the pulp, he used a kitchen knife to cut the winter melon flesh into strips approximately ten centimeters long and one centimeter thick.

Once all the winter melon was cut, he prepared the pumpkin in the same way.

Soon, he had a basin each of winter melon and pumpkin strips.

He poured the clarified limewater into the basins, ensuring the winter melon and pumpkin strips were fully submerged.

Next, he placed the basins in the refrigerator's cold storage compartment to soak overnight.

After soaking overnight, both the winter melon and pumpkin strips would become firm and crisp.

Only then could he proceed with the next step.

What should I do next?

Seeing Dundun happily playing, Lin Xu didn't disturb the little guy. Instead, he changed his shoes and went downstairs, planning to check on the construction site.

Well, even though I've fully delegated it to Dou Wenjing, I can't just ignore it. After all, this is my business, and my future car and house purchases depend on this store.

As soon as he arrived downstairs, he saw Dou Wenjing and the attractive reporter Zeng Xiaoqi walking out of the construction site wearing hard hats.

"Mr. Lin, the shopfront demolition is complete, and all the old equipment has been sold," Dou Wenjing came over, reporting the renovation progress in an organized manner. "The sections on the first to third floors that required removal have also been completely cleared. Hardware construction will start tomorrow."

On the day the renovation contract was signed, Shen Guofu transferred several million yuan to the company account. This was a personal loan to the company for the renovation, sparing Dou Wenjing the trouble of applying for a bank loan.

With sufficient funding, the pace of renovation naturally accelerated.

For example, the demolition work would normally have taken several days. However, thanks to the financial backing, they could hire additional workers. As a result, all the necessary demolition was completed in a single day, and the construction debris was promptly transported to the designated disposal site.

"You've worked hard, Sister Jing."

"It's my responsibility... Oh, by the way, Reporter Zeng is here to film the renovation progress. This will help maintain the buzz around Lin Ji's Food."

Lin Xu quickly turned to Zeng Xiaoqi to express his gratitude, "Thank you so much, Reporter Zeng, for making the trip. Sister Jing, please reimburse Reporter Zeng for her travel expenses later. After all, she's going to a lot of trouble for our restaurant."

"I will, Mr. Lin."

Zeng Xiaoqi said with a smile, "No need, no need. Just treat me to a meal sometime."

Treat her to a meal? That's easy.

Lin Xu suddenly thought of the crayfish Technique he had just acquired that day. Plus, the crayfish at Uncle Yu's supermarket were indeed tempting. So he said with a smile, "How about I treat you to crayfish later?"

After acquiring the crayfish Skill, he had been planning to make a spicy crayfish feast to satisfy his craving.

In the past, when he wanted to eat it, he couldn't afford it; by the time he could afford it, he had no time.

Now that he had money, time, and the know-how, he naturally wanted to experience the freedom of enjoying crayfish whenever he liked.

"Wow! Really, Boss Lin? Crayfish is my favorite!"

Zeng Xiaoqi was overjoyed. She had just been making a casual remark and hadn't expected Lin Xu to actually agree—and he hadn't suggested 'another day' or 'when he had time,' but had directly proposed today.

Lin Xu said with a smile,

Chapter 228: Making Winter Melon Candy! Anyone Wants to Eat Crawfish? Press 1 if You Want to Eat!

"You chat with Wenjing first. I'll head to Uncle Yu's supermarket to pick up some crayfish and call some more people over, so we can all have a lively meal together."

Eating crayfish with just a few people can be a bit dull. It's much more enjoyable when a large group eats together noisily.

While speaking, Lin Xu took out his phone, opened the Lin Ji's Food high-end VIP customer group, and sent a message:

"Anyone craving crayfish? If so, press 1!"

The message had just been sent.

Shen Jiayue: 1

Geng Lele: 1

Chen Yan: 1

Yue Liyue: 1

Wu Kexin: 1

...

Faster than grabbing a red packet.

Lin Xu sent another message:

"I'm going to cook crayfish at home soon. You can come over now if you want to join."

Shen Jiayue: On my way!!!!

Geng Lele: On my way!!!!

Yue Liyue: On my way!!!!

Chen Yan: On my way!!!!!!

...

But not everyone could come right away.

Li Qiang sent a crying emoji:

"This overtime is killing me! If you have a heart, save me a couple of scoops of broth to make some noodles."

Geng Lele immediately tagged him:

"When can you get off work? If it's early, we'll wait for you."

"Around two in the morning..."

"Then I guess we're heartless. But don't worry, Bald Qiang, we won't post videos while we eat or smack our lips. And we definitely won't film close-ups of the peeled shrimp. You can rest easy."

Li Qiang: "!!!!!!!!!"

"Lele, you're too evil! I can already picture it!"

Lin Xu estimated the number of people, then proceeded to Uncle Yu's supermarket and headed straight to the fresh produce area.

"What do you need, Boss Lin? Running low on ingredients?" Uncle Yu, who was organizing cardboard boxes, asked curiously.

"I saw the crayfish looked good earlier. I'm planning to buy some to make spicy crayfish. I knocked off work early today, so I decided to treat myself."

"Go pick some then. These crayfish just arrived."

Lin Xu went to the crayfish tank, took a plastic bucket, and began selecting carefully.

He picked a good fifteen pounds. All of them were super large.

After selecting them, he had them weighed, then placed them into an ultrasonic crayfish cleaner and washed them all thoroughly.

Then, under Uncle Yu's instructions, a few sales attendants in the fresh produce area who weren't busy helped Lin Xu snip off the heads, remove the entrails, and devein the crayfish.

Actually, not deveining them makes the crayfish meat firmer. But it's less satisfying when eating. After peeling the crayfish, you still have to pull out the vein, which is a hassle. Comparatively, it's more satisfying to eat them when they've been deveined in advance.

Lin Xu grabbed a pair of scissors and helped them out.

In less than half an hour, the fifteen pounds of crayfish were neatly prepared. If Lin Xu had to prepare them himself, it would probably take him at least an hour or two.

Carrying the cleaned crayfish, Lin Xu also bought some other ingredients and supplies, then scanned his payment at the cashier and left the supermarket.

By then, Shen Jiayue had already arrived. Her white BMW X1 was parked on the roadside, looking cute and well-behaved, next to Chen Yan's Porsche 911.

Several beautiful women were standing at the entrance of the residential complex, munching on Shengjian Buns that Geng Lele had queued up for, while Panda and Yue Liyue were discussing gaming techniques.

Upon seeing Lin Xu approach, Geng Lele exclaimed, "Hurry up, hurry up! They've eaten all my Shengjian Buns!"

Lin Xu asked with a smile, "Did you let everyone eat them on purpose? So that now they're full, no one will compete with you for the crayfish?"

The others: "!!!!!!!"

"Wow! Lele, you're so cunning!"

"It's one thing to trick Li Qiang, but to trick us too?"

"Exactly! I curse you to fail the Lanxiang Technical School entrance exam!"

"And New Oriental! You won't pass the New Oriental Culinary School exam either!"

Geng Lele grinned, stuffing the empty Shengjian Bun bag into the trash can. "It's your fault for asking me if the Shengjian Buns were good. The taste is really not bad, but it's just so hard to queue for them. I waited in line for over half an hour!"

Shen Jiayue had changed into sportswear. To make eating crayfish more convenient, she had even deliberately put on a red T-shirt. "I was actually full earlier. You messaged me while I was at the gym, but as soon as I saw 'crayfish,' I suddenly felt hungry. Isn't that magical?"

Lin Xu: "..."

It's the first time I've seen someone describe their craving in such a refined way.

He laughed and said, "If you want to eat, I'll cook for you every day from now on. Fishing Platform has even better shrimp than these. I'll make some for you to try sometime."

"Okay!"

Chen Yan, standing nearby, pouted helplessly. "Can you two stop with the public displays of affection already? Hurry up! I even canceled tonight's dinner party for this crayfish feast."

"What kind of dinner party? A blind date?"

"No, it's a commercial promotion event..."

The women chattered away, while Panda and Yue Liyue helped Lin Xu carry the ingredients.

When they got upstairs and Lin Xu opened the door, several of the young women immediately pounced on Dundun, who was busy chasing a toy mouse.

"Dundun~ my Dundun~~~~"

"Dundun, quickly call me Aunty! Quick, call me Aunty!"

"Holy Master, you look so majestic chasing that mouse! How about I sneak some mice out from our lab for you to play with someday?"

It was everyone's first visit to Lin Xu's place. While playing with Dundun, they also took a tour.

Zeng Xiaoqi looked around and commented, "I thought guys' rooms were always messy. I'm surprised it's so tidy."

Dou Wenjing added with a smile, "And it doesn't smell odd either. I thought having a cat would make the house smell."

As they were speaking, Geng Lele chimed in, "A tidy room with no weird smells? He's either a cross-dresser or he's gay!"

She had barely finished speaking when Lin Xu's voice came from the kitchen: "Geng Lele, you just lost your share of the crayfish!"

"Hahaha, I was just kidding!"

The young women played with Dundun in the living room, while Yue Liyue turned on Lin Xu's computer, launched a game, and chatted with Panda, "Which Call of Duty level did Boss Lin say he was stuck on? I'll help him clear it..."

「In the kitchen.」

Lin Xu washed all the crayfish again. He prepared Scallion and Ginger, Sichuan peppercorns, dried chili, and other ingredients like Doubanjiang, green chilies, and perilla leaves.

He set up the large, double-handled wok he had brought from the restaurant.

He began making spicy crayfish!

Chapter 229: Spicy Crayfish! Senior Brother, Is This What You Called An Inseparable Friendship?

"Are you starting to cook?"

When Lin Xu poured oil into the pot, Shen Jiayue curiously moved closer.

"Yes, I've started," Lin Xu replied. "This way, you can eat sooner."

Once Shen Baobao heard this, she immediately grinned and pulled out her phone, saying, "It's rare for you to cook crayfish, so I have to record this and show it to my parents when I get back."

Lin Xu was speechless.

Planning some late-night food temptation, are you? Then you'd better watch out, or you might get a beating.

Shen Jiayue activated the camera on her phone, leaned in, and began recording, narrating as if she were a food blogger, "When cooking crayfish, you first need to parboil them, adding Scallion and Ginger, Cooking Wine... Eh? This isn't water?"

She had recently been watching a lot of food videos. She was pretty well-versed with the basic preparations for meat. For instance, meat is typically parboiled before cooking. It's common to add Scallion and Ginger, and Cooking Wine during this process, so she automatically mentioned it while recording.

However, she realized mid-sentence that it wasn't water in the pot. Lin Xu also had no plans to add Scallion and Ginger or Cooking Wine.

"Crayfish have a strong smell," Lin Xu explained. "You need to first flash-fry them in hot oil to better remove the smell. This also makes it easier to peel the flesh when eating."

"Oh... I don't understand!" Shen Baobao looked completely clueless.

But she was recording this video purely to tease her parents with tempting food late at night. So the method didn't matter; as long as the crayfish looked enticing afterward, it was fine.

The family stove had a weak flame. It took a long time for the oil to heat up.

Lin Xu scooped up a large spoonful of crayfish with a strainer and scattered them into the pot. A loud SIZZLE erupted as the crayfish hit the hot oil. The oil in the pot quickly boiled, turning the originally green Large Shrimp an appealing red color.

This step was essential for making delicious crayfish. Frying not only removed the fishy smell but also enhanced the aroma and the oily texture. More importantly, after frying, the moisture in the shrimp flesh was locked in, making the crayfish even more tender and juicy.

As the hot oil in the pot boiled intensely, Shen Jiayue stood aside, filmed a video of the crayfish tumbling in the hot oil, and sent it to a group named "Closely Knit Family" on her phone.

After sending it, she rapidly typed a lengthy message about how much she was looking forward to eating crayfish. She even detailed the taste of the spicy crayfish, planning to intensely tantalize her parents.

However, when she tried to send the message, it failed: "You are not a member of this group and cannot send messages!"

Shen Jiayue was bewildered. What the...? Was I kicked out?

She checked the group members; indeed, only two were left.

Aaaah! I actually got kicked out! Is there no justice in this world?!

Just as she was about to confront her parents, Lin Xu, who was beside her, suddenly said, "Your dad just added me to a group called 'Closely Knit Family.' Why aren't you in it?"

Shen Jiayue was floored. They got the shrimp, and now they're going for the heart too? This local Chapter is just too unscrupulous!

After saying this, Lin Xu set down his phone, picked up the strainer, and began removing the crayfish. This stuff shouldn't be fried for too long. Generally, once the color changes, it can be removed; frying too long makes the shrimp flesh tough.

He removed the crayfish from the pot and began frying the next batch.

After all the crayfish were fried, he scooped most of the oil out of the pot, stopping when about two large spoonfuls remained.

It was time to fry the aromatics.

Lin Xu said to Shen Jiayue, "It will get very smoky in the kitchen soon. You'd better go outside."

"Okay!"

Getting kicked out by her parents didn't matter. Shen Jiayue immediately contacted Chen Meijuan and joined the Lin Family's group chat.

The Lin Family's group was named "Joyful Family," similar to the Shen Family's. But the treatment Shen Baobao received after joining was worlds apart.

Chen Meijuan first sent a 200-yuan red envelope in the group, announcing, "My daughter-in-law joined the group! Here's a red envelope to celebrate."

Shen Jiayue grabbed 199 yuan. Overjoyed, she hugged Lin Xu, planted a kiss on his face, then cheerily left the kitchen to show off outside.

Soon, loud exclamations were heard from outside:

"Wow, no way? You grabbed 199 yuan out of a 200-yuan red envelope? Are you that lucky?"

"I should've asked you to buy me a few lottery tickets at the community entrance just now!"

"Which group is giving out such a big red envelope?"

"Your mother-in-law's group? Yueyue, if you keep up with this public display of affection, I'm calling the police!!!"

Closing the kitchen door, Lin Xu turned the range hood to its highest setting.

After the oil heated up, he added Scallion and Ginger, Sichuan peppercorns, Star Anise, and dried chili segments.

He stir-fried them until aromatic, then added a large spoonful of Doubanjiang.

Doubanjiang not only helps create Red Oil but also adds a rich, savory flavor to the crayfish, making them even more delicious.

The Doubanjiang needed to be stir-fried a bit longer until it was fragrant and the Red Oil was released; this would make the crayfish taste even better.

After stir-frying until aromatic, he added some water to the pot. Then, he added a handful of Sichuan peppercorns, another handful of Sichuan peppercorns, a handful of dried chili, a ladleful of Light Soy Sauce, and a touch of Dark Soy Sauce for color.

He brought the sauce to a boil and let it simmer for a bit, allowing the flavors of the seasonings to meld.

Then he added the fried crayfish to the pot and poured in a few bottles of beer.

Beer effectively removes any fishy smell and also helps thicken the sauce.

After pouring in the beer, he added a handful of Crystal Sugar, half an onion, and a small bowl of halved garlic cloves.

Then he covered the pot and began to simmer the crayfish.

While the crayfish were simmering, Lin Xu washed the green chili peppers he had bought, cut them into rings, and set them aside with perilla leaves, cilantro leaves, and chopped green onions.

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Just before the small crayfish were almost ready, he tossed them into the pot. This would elevate the flavor of the crayfish to another level. Many people mistakenly believe that dried chilies are sufficient for cooking small crayfish and that green chilies are unnecessary. Although green chilies have a limited effect on increasing spiciness, they can enhance the dish's fresh, clean notes, making the overall flavor richer and more complex. Perilla leaves are the perfect accompaniment to small crayfish; typically, when buying crayfish from a stall, a handful of perilla leaves is included.

After setting the crayfish to stew, Lin Xu washed the cucumbers he had bought and cut them into strips as thick as his little finger. He planned to make refreshing sweet and sour cucumber strips to help cut through the richness of the crayfish. He took a small basin and added one ladleful of Rice Vinegar, half a ladleful of Chen Vinegar, a generous handful of White Sugar, half a ladleful of Light Soy Sauce, a touch of Dark Soy Sauce, a small teaspoon of salt, a few lemon slices, a generous handful of chopped hot chili rings, and some coriander segments. Using chopsticks, he stirred the seasonings until the salt and sugar dissolved. Then, he added the prepared cucumber strips, sealed the basin with plastic wrap, and placed it in the refrigerator's chilling compartment to marinate. Since they were meant to be eaten right away, the seasoning needed to be stronger. This would allow the flavors to penetrate the cucumber, transforming them into sour, sweet, savory, and spicy strips. When eating the small crayfish, one could simply pick up a strip and pop it into their mouth. It was not only an appetizer and palate cleanser but also kept the mouth feeling refreshed.

After preparing the cucumber strips, he readied a few other dishes before finally emerging from the kitchen.

"Wow, the aroma from the kitchen is amazing!"

As the kitchen door opened, a group of famished foodies immediately craned their necks. Chen Yan even pulled out a disposable glove she had prepared. But when they saw their brother-in-law come out empty-handed, disappointment was immediately written across their faces.

Lin Xu chuckled, opened the refrigerator, and said, "There are chilled drinks here. What does everyone want?"

Yesterday, while tidying up, the delivery boy had brought home some leftover drinks from the shop's beverage cooler. Wanting them for his own convenience, Lin Xu selected some of his favorite flavors and placed them in the compartments on the fridge door.

Upon hearing there were drinks, Chen Yan, who was famished, got up from the sofa. She planned to drink something to boost her sugar levels, worried she might get hypoglycemic before even tasting the crayfish. As she stood before the refrigerator earnestly making her selection, she noticed winter melon strips and pumpkin strips marinating inside.

"What's this, brother-in-law? Can we eat it?"

"Those are for the Winter Melon candy and Pumpkin candy I'm preparing. They're soaking in limewater now and can't be eaten yet. You can try them when they're ready," he explained.

"Winter Melon candy? My grandma loves those! Yueyue, doesn't Grandma like Winter Melon candy?"

Chen Yan's maternal grandmother was also Shen Jiayue's paternal grandmother, Madame Shen.

Hearing her cousin, Shen Jiayue nodded repeatedly and said, "Yes, yes, my grandma absolutely loves them... You can make these? That's fantastic! Remember to bring some over the weekend; my grandma will be overjoyed."

So... Dundun had me draw this snack as a way to honor the elders?

No wonder, out of all the delicious dishes, it was this Winter Melon candy that he picked.

What a respectful and considerate child!

To reward Dundun, Lin Xu made a special trip back to the kitchen and steamed a small piece of pork loin for the little fellow in a small steam pot.

Indeed, while the adults indulged in the small crayfish, the little one also needed some meat.

「Half an hour later.」

The small crayfish were ready.

The coffee table in the living room had been cleared, and everyone gathered around it. On the table sat three large trays piled high with small crayfish that were a vibrant red, glistening with oil, and exuding a numbing and spicy aroma. Several side dishes were arranged around them.

"Let's eat the crayfish first. After we're done, I'll cook some noodles and toss them in the broth," Lin Xu suggested.

At this, everyone's appetite was instantly rekindled.

Using the broth from the crayfish to toss with noodles—even the most ordinary dried noodles would taste absolutely superb, wouldn't they?

But for now, they couldn't dwell on that thought. The small crayfish before them were far too tempting.

Everyone put down their phones, donned disposable gloves, and dug in!

Eating small crayfish is one of the best ways to liven up the atmosphere at a gathering because everyone is too preoccupied to use their phones, forcing them to chat with one another.

Picking up a large crayfish, one would first suck on the head to savor the brains and rich roe. The savory, numbing, and spicy flavor instantly awakened the taste buds. Next, they would break open the body. Those with strong teeth might tackle the claw meat, but most people preferred the tail. After peeling out the plump crayfish meat, those who liked a stronger flavor would dip it in the sauce. The fresh sweetness of the meat, combined with the savory, numbing, and spicy sauce, was an incredible combination.

"Wow! Delicious, delicious!"

"So spicy and savory, this is incredibly satisfying!"

"Lin, your culinary skills are truly beyond words; these small crayfish are exceptional."

"Exactly, especially that hint of sweetness in the sauce. It's simply amazing. I think it's even more satisfying than the crayfish from Guijie."

"Will this small crayfish dish be on the new restaurant's menu?"

Lin Xu popped a piece of peeled crayfish meat into his mouth, then raised his chilled beer to clink glasses with Yue Liyue before replying, "It most likely will. After all, small crayfish are highly profitable and incredibly popular. There's no reason for us not to make this money."

With that, he tilted his head back and took a large gulp.

The savory, numbing, and spicy crayfish paired with ice-cold beer—this was truly fantastic.

Unfortunately, Shen Baobao, his sister-in-law, and Panda had to drive, so they couldn't drink. While Zeng Xiaoqi, Dou Wenjing, and Wu Kexin didn't have to drive, the three of them were more interested in eating than drinking. As for Geng Lele... technically, he should have been at the children's table with Dundun, so drinking was out of the question for him.

Thus, while everyone else had soft drinks, only Lin Xu and Yue Liyue, who lived nearby, enjoyed iced beers. They clinked their glasses occasionally, making those who had to drive quite envious.