

Culinary 24

Chapter 24 - Shocking Mom for an Entire Year!

4:30 a.m.

After finishing his morning routine, Lin Xu took the elevator downstairs.

Since renting the apartment, his biggest change was that he could sleep longer. When he lived at school, he had to get up at four in the morning just to catch the early market for buying groceries. But now, he could afford to stay in bed until 4:20.

He scanned for a shared bike at the entrance of the residential area. Lin Xu leisurely made his way to Chunfeng Market to start sourcing the ingredients he needed for the day.

"Morning, Boss Lin!"

"Here to buy groceries, Boss Lin?"

"Boss Lin, can you make more Chicken Feet today?"

"Exactly, we finish late at the market, and by the time we're done, your early batch is already sold out."

He had just arrived at the market when the various vendors began to greet him. Lin Xu purchased large quantities, cooked delicious meals, and with his youth and good looks, had quickly become a celebrity at Chunfeng Market.

"I reserved this top-quality lotus root for you overnight after receiving your message last night," Uncle Shen said, standing in front of his stall and enthusiastically introducing the Lotus Root to Lin Xu. "These are all nine-hole roots; they're crisp and perfect for cold dishes."

Lotus Root is categorized into seven-hole and nine-hole types. Seven-hole Lotus Root is thicker and high in starch, suitable for stewing. Meanwhile, nine-hole Lotus Root is slenderer, with a comparatively lower starch content, making it ideal for crisp cold dishes.

Lin Xu checked them over. The Lotus Roots were of a moderate thickness, evenly shaped, and indeed of good quality.

After inspecting them, he said, "Give me twenty pounds. It's our first day making this, and if we don't have enough, the customers will start to complain."

After picking the Lotus Roots, Lin Xu selected tomatoes, eggplants, and leafy greens for the day. He also bought staple ingredients like pork and Chicken Feet. The enthusiastic meat stall owner then delivered everything to his shop.

Lin Xu arranged the ingredients needed for the afternoon. Then he began to prepare the morning dishes.

He soaked the Chicken Feet and pork. Then he heated up the braising liquid used for the Braised Chicken Feet the day before on the stove, melting the jelly-like substance in the bucket. That braising liquid was originally made with stock. After being used for the collagen-rich Chicken Feet, it would solidify into a gel when the temperature dropped slightly. When it was time to use it, it needed to be heated up in advance.

Once the braising liquid had liquefied, Lin Xu used a large strainer to scoop out all the residue of Scallion and Ginger, dried chili, Sichuan peppercorns, and star anise from the bucket into the trash. The braising liquid could be reused endlessly, and the more it was reused, the richer the flavor became. However, the residue could not be reused. It required daily cleaning and filtering; otherwise, the braising liquid could easily spoil and go bad.

After filtering the braising liquid, Lin Xu started to prepare the Chicken Feet.

Now the shop needed to sell more than two thousand Chicken Feet and over seven hundred bowls of handmade noodles every day. This was pretty much the maximum production capacity of the kitchen. Though he could grit his teeth and increase production a bit more, Lin Xu felt it wasn't necessary because the quality of the dishes couldn't be guaranteed with increased production. Besides, continuous

high-intensity labor would be too much for his body to withstand. It was better to stabilize at this sales volume and gradually introduce new dishes – that was the right way to do it.

「At seven in the morning」

Lin Xu had just set the Chicken Feet to braise and was about to start preparing the Lotus Root when his mother, Chen Meijuan, suddenly sent him a WeChat message: "Son, I've boarded the high-speed train to Beijing. I'll arrive around 10:30. Send me your location, and I'll take a taxi straight to you."

Lin Xu was speechless. Do you still think I'm holed up in some pyramid scheme? You send a message only after you've boarded the train, as if scared I wouldn't let you come.

He sent his location to his mother and then returned to handling the Lotus Root. First, he washed off the residual mud from the surface and then used a peeler to remove the skin of the Lotus Roots. When preparing Lotus Root, the skin must be peeled off thoroughly. Otherwise, the resulting slices turn black, affecting the visual appeal.

After peeling the skin, Lin Xu picked up the kitchen knife and started slicing. When making Ginger Lotus Root, the slices must not be too thick nor too thin. About two millimeters in thickness is best. Slices of this thickness can be blanched quickly until cooked through, and it also makes it easier for the starch to soak out, resulting in a crisper texture.

The sliced Lotus Root should be immersed in water mixed with white vinegar. This will make the Lotus Root slices even whiter and prettier to look at.

By the time the Lotus Root slicing was finished, Che Zai had also come to work. Lin Xu had him scheduled to arrive at the restaurant by seven-thirty in the morning. He was responsible for several toppings for the noodles and some assorted tasks, while Lin Xu only needed to handle the technical aspects.

He rinsed the sliced Lotus Root several times to wash off as much surface starch as possible. He then immersed it in clean water to continue soaking.

Taking advantage of this time, Lin Xu brought out the ginger and the juicer. He began to extract the ginger juice. The main feature of Ginger Lotus Root is the use of ginger juice instead of minced ginger. The juice needs to be freshly pressed to be good.

Once the ginger juice was ready, he seasoned it with white vinegar, then added salt and twice as much sugar as salt. The dressing for the Ginger Lotus Root was now ready.

There are many flavors of Ginger Lotus Root. There is the sour and spicy taste, the sour and salty taste, and the sweet and sour taste that Lin Xu had just made. The sweet and sour Lotus Root is crisp and appetizing. It's a good accompaniment to drinks.

「At ten forty in the morning」

The preparation work in the store came to a pause. Lin Xu and his five employees were all eating noodles from large bowls with big bites. In front of them were a plate of Tiger Skin Chicken Feet and a plate of Ginger Lotus Root.

"Eat more, everyone," Lin Xu said. "The lunchtime rush is always hectic, and once we get busy, we won't even have time to drink water, let alone eat anything."

While speaking, Lin Xu picked up a piece of white, jade-like Lotus Root and put it into his mouth. The sweet and sour, crisp Lotus Root had a hint of ginger's spiciness and was topped with finely chopped green and red peppers, which not only enriched the flavor but also enhanced its visual appeal.

"The boss's skills are simply amazing!" Che Zai originally thought that introducing Lotus Root wouldn't be particularly impressive, at least not as popular as Tiger Skin Chicken Feet. But after tasting it, he realized he had underestimated the boss's culinary skills. These Lotus Root slices were indescribable. Whether it was the white color, the crisp texture, or the sweet and sour taste, they were all irresistibly delicious.

As they were eating, Chen Meijuan pushed the door and entered the restaurant. She was about forty-six or forty-seven years old. Though her face bore the marks of time, one could tell from her still fair skin that the young Chen Meijuan had definitely been a beauty.

"Hello, welcome!" As soon as Song Tiantian saw someone coming in, she hurriedly put down her chopsticks to greet them.

Lin Xu looked up and then realized his mother had arrived.

He said with a smile, "This is my mom; she came from our hometown to see me... You guys keep eating."

After saying this, he went to the door to greet her.

Hearing that it was the boss's mother who had arrived, Che Zai and the others quickly rose to greet her.

"Hello, Auntie!" one said.

"Auntie, you must be tired. I'll get you some water," another offered.

"Are you hungry, Auntie? We have Tiger Skin Chicken Feet and Ginger Lotus Root right now!" a third chimed in.

Chen Meijuan smiled and greeted them, then made her way into the kitchen. "You keep eating, don't mind me," she said. "Son, cook me a bowl of noodles. Let Mom have a taste of your skills. I'm curious about how delicious the handmade noodles that make ten thousand a day are."

Lin Xu picked up the rolling pin. "Mom, ten thousand was from the day before yesterday."

Chen Meijuan's expression turned serious. "Are you saying that it's usually not that much? How much did you make yesterday?"

Lin Xu curled his index finger and thumb, raising his middle, ring, and little fingers.

Chen Meijuan gave him a slap on the arm. "Honestly, answer me when I ask a question. What are you doing making an OK sign?"

Lin Xu smiled lightly. "It's not OK, it's thirty thousand!"

Chen Meijuan stared, utterly astounded.