

## Culinary 281

### Chapter 281: Super Simple Corn Soup Recipe! Master's Gift! Wipe Them Out!

"Is corn soup difficult to make?"

While Shen Guofu and his wife, along with Lin Hongqi and his wife, were eating and chatting, Shen Baobao squeezed into the kitchen. Seeing the two cobs of fruit corn in Lin Xu's hands, she asked curiously.

She remembered Aunt Liu used canned corn soup to make golden corn soup at home. It was super simple—just pour it into the pot and heat it up a bit.

But Lin Xu had actually taken out two corn cobs from the fridge.

How do you make it with corn cobs? So puzzling!

Lin Xu said with a smile, "It's quite simple. You can make this soup with fruit corn, husked corn kernels, or cornmeal, but I wouldn't recommend you try it."

Well, better give him a heads-up now to avoid her having a whim someday and burning down the kitchen.

His words had barely faded when Shen Jiayue pouted and asked, "Then what do I do if I want to make you heartwarming soup? I see others make soup for their boyfriends, and I want to try too."

As Lin Xu was peeling the corn husks, he said, "You could order takeout, and I'll pretend you made it."

"Hmm... You spoil me too much. What if you spoil me rotten?"

Better than a kitchen fire... Lin Xu turned his face and kissed her on the cheek. "Isn't it right for me to spoil you?"

Shen Baobao: "!!!!!!!!!"

Lin Xu actually took the initiative to kiss me? No way, I have to kiss him back. I, Shen Jiayue, am never outdone! How can I accept such an indignity?

Without another word, she wrapped her arms around Lin Xu's neck and kissed him several times.

Mhmm... I might not out-cook you, but surely I can out-kiss you?

After Lin Xu finished peeling the two corn cobs, he finally said with a smile, "Alright, alright, be good. I'm going to slice the corn now."

He washed the two corn cobs, then stood them upright, with the top end down. Steadying a cob with his left hand, he picked up a kitchen knife with his right.

He positioned the knife at the base of the corn kernels and sliced downwards. He was careful not to cut into the very root of the kernels, as the translucent membrane there would affect the corn soup's texture.

After slicing all the way down one side, a cut section appeared on the cob.

Then, he laid the corn cob flat and positioned the knife to slice off the row of kernels next to the cut section.

Again, he was careful not to cut too close to the base of the kernels.

With one slice, an entire row of kernels was cleanly cut away.

After cutting a row, he gently rotated the corn cob and continued slicing the next.

Using canned corn wouldn't be this troublesome. You could simply strain the corn kernels and proceed directly to the next step.

However, if using canned corn, it's best to choose whole kernels rather than corn grits or corn paste. Whole kernels preserve the maximum fresh corn flavor. Corn grits and corn paste aren't quite as good.

While Lin Xu was cutting, Shen Jiayue stood to the side watching like a curious baby. This time, she didn't cause any trouble, worried that if she did, Lin Xu might cut his hand with the knife.

Once all the corn kernels were sliced off, he finely chopped them with the kitchen knife.

The purpose of this was to release the corn's juices and sweet flavor into the soup, improving its taste and creating a smoother texture when drunk.

The chopped corn kernels were then placed in a bowl, and some Cheese Powder was added and stirred in evenly.

Cheese Powder is a synthetic flavoring, a blend of leavening agents, stabilizers, food coloring, and starch. It has a creamy flavor and also gives food a beautiful bright yellow color, widely used in dessert making.

The mild, creamy flavor and appealing bright yellow color of corn soup in some restaurants come from the addition of Cheese Powder.

After mixing the Cheese Powder evenly, Lin Xu started to heat water in a pot.

While the water was heating, Lin Xu mixed some cornstarch with cold water to make a slurry.

Although Cheese Powder contains starch and can thicken the soup, using too much can mask the corn's natural sweetness. Therefore, cornstarch is preferable for thickening.

Cornstarch increases the soup's viscosity, making its texture smoother to drink.

Once the cornstarch slurry was ready, he cracked two Eggs into a bowl and beat them with chopsticks.

Adding Egg not only improves the presentation but also infuses a fragrant egg flavor into the soup, enriching and diversifying its aroma.

Once the water boiled, Lin Xu poured the chopped corn into the pot.

Then, he added some White Sugar and a pinch of salt.

Salt enhances the corn's sweetness.

"Isn't this a sweet soup? Why add salt?"

"Because salt enhances the corn's sweetness. Typically, when boiling corn, adding some salt to the pot also makes the corn cobs sweeter and more flavorful."

That amazing? Shen Baobao didn't quite understand. Still, since Lin Xu said so, it had to be right!

After adding the salt and White Sugar, Lin Xu stirred the pot a few times with a spoon to accelerate their dissolving and to ensure the chopped corn spread out evenly.

When the water in the pot boiled again, he lightly skimmed off any surface scum, as this would improve the soup's final appearance.

Then, he let it simmer for a few minutes to fully draw out the corn's sweet flavor.

When the fragrance intensified, he added a few washed goji berries to the pot. Then, using a spoon, he stirred in two spoonfuls of the cornstarch slurry, and the soup quickly began to thicken.

After the soup in the pot boiled once more, he turned off the heat.

He then drizzled the beaten Egg mixture into the pot in a circular motion, just like when making Nori Egg Drop Soup.

After pouring, he stirred it with a spoon.

Beautiful egg flowers appeared in the corn soup.

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"Wow! How beautiful!"

The golden-yellow soup was dotted with a few red goji berries. The mix of gold and bright red made it very eye-catching.

The aroma of milk and corn wafting from it made this soup even more tempting.

"Would you like to taste it?"

"Yes, yes, yes, it must be delicious!"

Lin Xu took a small soup bowl, filled it more than halfway for Shen Baobao, then transferred the rest of the soup from the pot into a serving basin and carried it outside.

"Dad, Mom, try the corn soup I made."

Both dads and both moms turned their heads to look at the corn soup Lin Xu had made and couldn't help but praise it:

"Ayo, the color's so bright and golden; just looking at it, you can tell it's tasty."

"And it smells milky, too."

"Good job, Lin Xu, hurry up and sit down to keep eating."

"Right, sit and eat. Let Yueyue eat her fill and then she can go play with Dundun; don't delay your meal."

Shen Jiayue: ?????

Am I that expendable?

Maybe I should just change my name to Shen Expendable then!

She took a sip of the soup from her bowl.

Mmm, sweet and fragrant.

Delicious!

Lin Xu sat down. He first served both his mother and mother-in-law bowls of old hen soup. Then, he served himself a bowl of fish ball soup his mother had made. While sipping, he pondered the Superior Knife Skills' Skill Task.

This Skill Task had already been completed before making the corn soup.

Praise from both sets of parents and Shen Baobao easily gathered five people's compliments.

He was just curious. If failing to complete the Skill Task caused his Knife Skills to be downgraded, would the Superior Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips also be downgraded?

If so, would the system take this corn soup away?

Unfortunately, the system didn't answer such questions. Otherwise, he definitely would have pressed for clarification.

He scooped a fish ball with his spoon and chewed it gently.

The texture of the fish ball was nice.

The Fish Mince was scraped clean and beaten in a bowl to develop its stickiness before cooking.

After boiling, he turned off the heat. Then he added shredded seaweed and shrimp skin, along with half a spoon of lard and a pinch of coriander. The savory flavor and smooth texture made it impossible to stop eating after the first bite.

"Mmm, this chicken soup is truly savory. Did you pick those Mushrooms in the mountains?"

"Yes, they're from the mountains. Next time you have a chance to go, I'll take you picking. There's plenty in the mountains. In autumn, you can collect wild chestnuts from the mountains to make jelly. It's tastier than the kind made with mung beans."

Han Shuzhen sipped her chicken soup while chatting with Chen Meijuan.

Just the idea of jelly made from wild chestnuts piqued the interest of the chief of gastrointestinal medicine.

Chestnuts are so delicious when stir-fried; jelly made with them must be even more delectable, right?

Definitely worth staying in the scenic area for some time to enjoy the mountain delicacies.

After enjoying a bowl of chicken soup, the two mothers also tasted the corn soup Lin Xu had made.

As always, it tasted great.

The hint of milk blended with the sweet corn aroma was comforting to smell.

A small spoonful slid smoothly into the mouth.

Chopped corn kernels added a slight crunch, giving the soup an added freshness. The sweetness wasn't overpowering, making everything just right.

"It's tasty. The corn's sweet flavor is so rich. How did you manage to do that?"

Shen Baobao, who was sitting on the couch sipping soup, said,

"You don't know this, Mrs. Shen? Just add a pinch of salt to the corn soup and the sweetness of the corn becomes even richer. That's a piece of knowledge for you."

Han Shuzhen: "..."

I really regret not spanking this girl more when she was younger. It's led her to turn out so twisted.

Should I coax her by saying that in Beijing there's a custom of spanking daughters before they get engaged?

Forget it, my son-in-law wouldn't like that. For my son-in-law's sake, I won't stoop to this brat's level.

Shen Baobao was sitting on the couch, posting pictures of today's lunch in a group chat, tagging Chen Yan with each photo:

"This is wild Mushroom and hen soup my mother-in-law simmered. Do you want to taste it, Yan Bao?"

"This is fish ball soup, handmade Fish Balls, the kind without gelatin."

"This is braised Carp, it's my mother-in-law's signature dish. I didn't get enough yesterday, so we had it again today."

"This is Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips made by my dear Lin Xu. Guess what ingredients we used?"

"..."

[In Building One of the Fishing Platform.]

Chen Yan saw the messages in the group chat and became infuriated.

You're enjoying good food and now you're flaunting it in the group chat. Flaunt all you want, but why do you keep tagging me?

Before, you would flaunt your relationship in front of me, torturing me with your affection.

Now, it seems, you've moved it online.

AAAAH, I need to fight back! I need to make this brat suffer too!

But how should I strike back?

I haven't even had lunch yet, so how can I flaunt it?

I could go to the restaurant in Building One, but those dishes won't provoke my cousin. What really moves her are the unusual homemade dishes.

Chen Yan's mind was spinning rapidly, considering ways to retaliate.

Her fingers inadvertently slid across the screen.

Soon, she saw Geng Lele's profile picture.

Maybe I should ask Lele?

Yes, that girl is clever and has tons of tricks up her sleeve. She might have been enticed by the dishes too, so why not join forces with her to strike back at my cousin.

Thinking about Geng Lele's usual silliness and the funny things she says, Chen Yan decided to send her what seemed like a nonsensical message:

"The Earth is in its most dangerous time right now!"

"?"

「Haidian High School.」

Geng Lele, who was eating Shengjian Buns, slowly typed out a question mark.

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Normally quite the jokester, she now felt a sense of, I often don't fit in with you all because I'm not silly enough.

As she was puzzling over this, she saw the second message Chen Yan had sent, "Do you want to join our Avengers... oh no, the Anti-Yueyue League?"

Huh? Couldn't hold back any longer, could you?

Geng Lele asked with a giggle, "You want to strike back at the boss lady, right?"

"Exactly, exactly, exactly!"

Chen Yan breathed a sigh of relief; communication between two top students was just that smooth.

Well, Chen Yan, a Master's graduate in Chinese Literature from Fudan University, always prided herself on being an academic achiever at home. Chatting with Geng Lele now, she felt the tacit understanding that only fellow top students shared.

Just as she was thinking this, she saw the message Geng Lele had sent, "What do you think makes the boss lady so proud?"

Is that even a question? It must be my brother-in-law. With such a perfect boyfriend, my cousin practically wants to be attached to his hip. Of course, if I had a boyfriend like that, I'd do the same.

She typed back quickly, "What she's most proud of is my brother-in-law, always spreading 'dog food.' Are you as sick of it as I am?"

"?"

Geng Lele sent another question mark.

Then sent another message right after, "Communicating with you Fudan people is really exhausting. What she's most proud of is her figure! Without such a perfect body, even if she had Mr. Lin, she'd always feel insecure!"

Chen Yan: "..."

Oh my god, I've disgraced my alma mater! But with my cousin's perfect figure, how could I possibly criticize her? She's more likely to criticize me. Her ample chest, those long legs, that skin... UGH, why do I feel worse the more I think about it?

While she was caught in self-doubt and self-denial, Geng Lele sent a new message, "All you have to do is announce the calorie count of every dish she posts. Ideally, break it down to the calories per bite, ensuring the numbers are detailed but not over-the-top. Then, share a few fake news articles about husbands divorcing their wives because they let their figures go. The boss lady will definitely be more worked up than you."

Chen Yan: ?????

Oh my god! Isn't this tactic a bit too vicious? I must never offend Lele in the future; that girl is seriously cunning. If she suddenly attacked me like this, I'd definitely have a meltdown.

However, since this was a counterattack against her cousin, Chen Yan's composure didn't crumble at all; in fact, she felt a thrill of excitement.

Just as she was about to look up the calorie values of various foods, Geng Lele sent her a link, "I figured you Fudan folks might not have food calorie charts memorized, so I sent you a website link. Look it up yourself, and be quick about it. That's how you'll get to her."

"Mm, got it, thank you, Lele!"

My apologies, alma mater. This slacker has brought shame upon you!

Chen Yan checked the calorie content of the dishes.

She quickly replied, "Braised carp is 108 kilocalories, but this one is fried, so that doubles the calories. Plus, with the lard, it's even higher. One bite of this fish is like eating a mouthful of rice."

"Fish Balls have an average calorie count, but lard has 884 kilocalories. Drinking a small bowl of that soup is like eating a bowl of rice."

"Chicken soup isn't too high in calories itself, but it's high in purines. Plus, an old hen has more fat, so eating it makes it easier to store fat."

"..."

She replied message by message.

She even estimated Shen Baobao's total calorie intake from that lunch, "Your lunch today was equivalent to eating a whole basin of rice! Tsk, tsk, an entire basin! I can't even imagine what you'd look like if you hit 150 pounds."

At Lin Xu's home.

Shen Baobao, who was sipping her corn soup, suddenly couldn't swallow another mouthful.

AAAAH, I don't want to get fat! If I get fat, Xu Bao will find me disgusting! When I get back, I'm locking myself in the gym and not coming out until I've burned off every single calorie!

A moment of indulgence is bliss, but fat loss is a fiery trial.

The mere thought of herself becoming fat sent Shen Baobao into a panic.

"Cousin, you're absolutely right to remind me. Thank you. I'll treat you to a meal soon!"

Chen Yan, who had been waiting for her cousin to freak out and collapse: ?????

This is it? Why don't I feel the satisfaction of a successful counterattack?

The meal concluded. Lin Hongqi and Shen Guofu had each drunk over half a jin of liquor. The more they drank, the more jovial they became. Eventually, they even had their arms slung over each other's shoulders, making Lin Xu worry they might become sworn brothers on the spot.

Fortunately, his dad remained clear-headed enough. Feeling he'd had plenty, he declined Shen Guofu's suggestion to "double the good fortune" with another round.

The two men ate some rice with the remaining dishes on the table, finally bringing the lunchtime "battle" to an end.

After the meal, Lin Xu prepared a fruit platter and brewed a pot of Biluochun Tea. Both families sat and chatted for a while longer before Shen Guofu rose to leave.

Lin Xu, carrying Dundun, went downstairs with his parents to see his parents-in-law off.

Chen Meijuan handed a bulging bag to Han Shuzhen, "Shuzhen, these are the wild mushrooms I used for the soup today. If you want to make it again, just have your housekeeper buy an old hen and stew it in a clay pot. Or, you can ask Lin Xu to make it when he's not busy."

Han Shuzhen accepted it with a pleasant surprise. "I was just about to ask if you had any more of these wild mushrooms! Since we're family, I won't be polite with you, Meijuan. For tomorrow's competition, I'll take the day off to go and cheer for Lin Xu."

Since her son-in-law now called her 'Mom,' it was only natural that she should go to the competition to support him.

"Alright, see you tomorrow then!"

After bidding each other farewell, the three members of the Shen family got into the Alphard minivan that was already waiting downstairs.

Zou Cheng nodded to Lin Xu before driving slowly out of the residential complex gates.

「In the afternoon.」

Lin Xu went to check on the Ziqiang Shengjian shop again. The business was still booming.

He had initially worried that Wang Ziqiang wouldn't be able to handle it, but it turned out Wang Ziqiang was managing perfectly with two electric griddles. Moreover, each batch needed to cook for a full eight minutes, giving him just enough downtime to catch his breath.

In the evening, Wu Kexin and Yue Liyue even did a special 'store visit' live stream, letting even more people know about Ziqiang Shengjian.

「The next day.」

After eating the millet and pumpkin porridge and egg pancakes his mom had made, Lin Xu drove his parents and Dundun to the Fishing Platform. The competition was at ten in the morning. He planned to first take his parents for a walk around the Fishing Platform grounds.

Upon arriving at the Fishing Platform, he had just parked the car at the entrance of Building Two when Shu Yun stepped out the door.

It had been two days since she last saw little Dundun; she wondered if the little fellow still remembered her.

However, before she even reached the car, Dundun, inside, began pawing at the window. A warmth spread through Shu Yun's heart. Ah! The little darling still remembers me!

As Lin Xu got out of the car, Shu Yun immediately scooped Dundun into her arms and planted two kisses on the little guy's head. Dundun squinted his eyes, looking thoroughly content.

"Welcome, Uncle and Auntie, to our Fishing Platform for a visit."

Entering Building Two, Shu Yun immediately took on the role of a tour guide, telling Lin Hongqi and Chen Meijuan about the foreign dignitaries Building Two had hosted in the past. These were all part of the building's prestigious history.

Just as Lin Xu was about to sit down for a rest, Xie Baomin approached from the direction of the kitchen. He was carrying a cleaver in a sheath, which he handed over, "This is the cleaver Master has used for half his life. It was delivered to me last night."

Lin Xu was taken aback. "Isn't Master coming today?"

"He can't make it; he's still in Xishuangbanna right now."

Lin Xu took the knife and drew it out. It was a pointed-tip cleaver, somewhat reminiscent of the one in the movie *\*From Beijing with Love\**, though not quite as flamboyant. He tested the blade; it was extremely sharp.

"If I use this to smash garlic, it won't break, will it?"

Xie Baomin burst into laughter at this. "Ha, you can give it a try."

After examining the cleaver for another moment, Lin Xu slid it back into its sheath.

"Besides this knife, Master also had a message for you."

"What is it, Senior Brother?"

"Crush them!"

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Destroy them!

With just four simple words, Gao Daye's attitude toward the competition was vividly displayed.

He had worked at the Fishing Platform for a lifetime and had deep feelings for the place. Now that other hotels were coming to challenge, and they had even purposely set up the venue within the Fishing Platform's own competition grounds, who could bear it?

Lin Xu said with a smile, "I'll do my best!"

The system had already given a series of tasks, awarding a prize as long as he got first place in a single round. Now that he had his master's instruction, he had to give it his all.

He had never let his master down before. This time, he also aimed not to disappoint the old man.

"Today, the head chefs from all eighteen floors of our building will be there to support you. Stay steady, do well in the competition, and we'll drink to success afterwards," said Xie Baomin with composure.

He particularly felt that, given his junior brother's talent and skills, making it into the top three wouldn't be a big issue. As for winning the championship, that would depend on what the final competition topic was. If it was an item his junior brother wasn't good at, then the chances of winning the championship would be somewhat slim. But if it was something he excelled at...

Hmph... All those hotels and contestants who came to challenge could just wait to become the backdrop for his junior brother.

Lin Hongqi and Chen Meijuan took a tour around Building Number Two. Under Shu Yun's guidance, and carrying Dundun, they even went upstairs to see the presidential suite. Unlike other five-star hotels' presidential suites, this one had truly hosted foreign heads of state, not just one, but several—it was a presidential suite in the true sense of the word.

「At 8:40.」

Shen Guofu drove his Bentley, bringing Han Shuzhen and Shen Jiayue along too.

Today, Shen Baobao was wearing black yoga pants and an oversized white T-shirt that covered her thighs, topped with a baseball cap, displaying a leisurely and casual look.

Upon seeing Lin Xu, the girl cozied up to him. "Xu Bao, did you miss me?"

"I did."

"What a coincidence, I missed you too!"

While the young couple was being affectionate, Chen Yan's voice could be heard from the side, "Eww, I just got goosebumps..."

"Yan Bao~~ Yan Bao~~~~~" Shen Jiayue deliberately called out to Chen Yan in a coquettish tone.

Chen Yan was so annoyed she really wanted to pin down her cousin and give her a beating.

"Brother-in-law, the livestream setup over there is all good, and your fans are here too, all fifty of them, not one less. Zeng Xiaoqi is planning to have you go greet everyone, can you do it now?"

"Now?" Lin Xu looked at his watch.

It was almost nine o'clock, so heading to Building Number One was fine.

It was the perfect opportunity to talk to Wei Qian about switching jobs.

He went to the changing room in the back kitchen to put on the Fishing Platform's standard chef uniform. He then told his parents and in-laws, and everyone got into their cars and headed towards Building Number One.

Xie Baomin couldn't leave just yet, as he had to wait for the other head chefs to arrive so they could all go together.

That was the only way to make a formidable appearance, to truly have presence.

Arriving at the entrance of Building Number One, Lin Xu parked the car. Holding the knife his master gave him in one hand and Shen Baobao's hand in the other, he walked into the main entrance of Building Number One.

Before even entering the banquet hall, a group of fans surrounded him.

"Wow! Finally, I see the living Boss Lin!"

"He looks even handsomer than in the videos."

"The boss's wife is so pretty too."

"Boss Lin, can you win the championship this time?"

"You have to win the championship, Boss Lin! I made a bet with my roommates. If I lose, I'll have to clean the toilets for a month. Don't let your brother down, Boss Lin!"

Lin Xu said with a smile, "Alright, alright, I'll do my best not to make you clean toilets."

After greeting the fans and taking photos with them, he and Shen Baobao went into the banquet hall together.

The banquet hall was already arranged. Unlike the last competition, this time, the commercial atmosphere of the event site was even thicker. Not only were the stoves and kitchenware branded with advertisements, but ads for various kitchen tools, seasonings, hotel catering, and more were posted everywhere.

As soon as he entered the venue, he ran into the busy Zeng Xiaoqi. This popular host from the travel channel was not only busy with the live broadcast but also had to take care of the netizens under the topic of Lin Ji's Food.

"Boss Lin, where are your fans? I had some cheer T-shirts made for you, and I was also preparing to rehearse some cheering slogans, but they've disappeared without a trace."

It was everyone's first time at the Fishing Platform, so it was natural for them to want to look around and take some photos and videos. Not being able to find them now was normal.

Lin Xu said with a smile, "Forget the slogans, just put on the T-shirts."

This was a food competition, not a pity party... cough, and not a talent show. Screaming cheer slogans seemed too low-end; it would be so much better to calmly await the championship. While waiting, they could also enjoy a variety of exquisite dishes. That was the true essence of watching the competition live.

"Okay, then we won't chant. I'll go distribute the shirts," replied Zeng Xiaoqi. Just as she was about to leave, Lin Xu suddenly said, "Thanks for your hard work, Reporter Zeng. When there's time, I'll treat you all to a meal, including crayfish. How does that sound?"

"Sure, that sounds great, no problem. But you should focus on your engagement for now. There's no rush for crayfish."

Yes, it was good to have Lin Xu owing her a favor. That way, inviting him to do a show in the future would be much easier. Zeng Xiaoqi was thrilled at the thought of Lin Xu appearing on her own planned food show. If he won the championship this time, with Boss Lin's popularity, her food show would absolutely become the TV station's top-rated program!

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Lin Xu wandered around the venue. He spotted Panda, who was working with the TV crew to adjust the live broadcast signal. The cooking competition was to be broadcast live on both the travel channel and the internet. Because it was a simultaneous live broadcast, a lot of preparation had to be done.

After greeting Panda and saying hello to Wu Kexin's fans in the live stream, Lin Xu saw a message from Wei Qian and went with Shen Baobao to the rest room they had visited last time.

Wei Qian was already waiting. To make it seem formal, he had even brewed a pot of hot tea and brought over a few Snacks.

As Lin Xu entered and Shen Baobao tasted the Snacks, Lin Xu said, "Lin Ji needs a head chef. Wei Qian, can you come over and help me?"

Wei Qian's mouth fell open. He wasn't very happy working in the back kitchen of Building 1 and figured being a chef at Lin Ji would be fine. He hadn't expected Lin Xu to offer him the position of head chef right off the bat. It completely took him by surprise.

"I... I've never been a head chef before. I don't know if I can do it."

It was flattering to be so highly regarded by a good friend. It would be a lie to say I wasn't moved. Not to mention the salary, the management experience gained from the head chef position alone could take my career to a new level.

But he had no relevant experience. If I just thumped my chest and agreed, that would be doing more harm than good.

Lin Xu said with a smile, "When I graduated from college last month, I never thought I could open a little restaurant and run the business so well. There's always a first time for everything, so why don't we grow together?"

Now that Lin Xu had said all that, Wei Qian stopped hesitating. He picked up the tea in front of him and downed it in one gulp. "Just tell me when to start working!"

That was quick? I had a whole speech prepared that I hadn't even gotten to say yet.

Lin Xu thought.

He said with a wry smile, "Aren't you going to ask about the pay at least?"

"No need to ask; whatever you think is fair will be fine. I've been waiting for you to poach me for a long time. I didn't expect you to only bring it up now."

This response left Lin Xu at a loss for words.

Damn! To think I'd been agonizing over this for so long. Since Wei Qian was so easy to poach, I might as well try for Qin Wei and Shu Yun next. As for the others, I can wait. No rush.

"Whew... I'm finally going to leave," Wei Qian said. "In the next couple of days, I'll find a few more people I don't get along with and get my shifts for the month after next covered too. For those who've been mocking me all day, it's time to collect some interest."

Wei Qian already had his plan. Before Lin Ji opened, he would switch shifts or take leave whenever possible, trying to take it easy for a while. Once Lin Ji opened, being that relaxed wouldn't be possible anymore. After all, the customer traffic there would be many times that of Fishing Platform. The back kitchen was going to be very busy.

"Aside from me, who else are you planning to poach?"

Now that he had decided to work at Lin Ji, he had to start thinking from Lin Ji's perspective. Fishing Platform was full of hidden talents, and young chefs found it hard to get ahead. So, taking the opportunity to poach a few chefs to leave together was the smart move.

"Qin Wei from Building 2. I think his cooking skills are pretty good," Lin Xu said.

"I know that guy. He stutters a bit and is quite good at home-style cooking, but Building 2 has no market for that... He's quite suitable for Lin Ji." Although Wei Qian was from Building 1, he knew quite a bit of gossip from other buildings. As soon as Lin Xu mentioned poaching Qin Wei, he immediately raised both hands in agreement.

"Are there any other chefs?"

"I haven't found any other chefs who are suitable for Lin Ji yet."

"Then let me recommend someone to you: Zhu Yong from Building 15. He made the top three in last year's competition but wasn't competing this year because he's over 25."

Zhu Yong? Isn't that Song Dahai's nephew? I was originally hoping he could help me steal some sugarcane. But after Chef Dai and the others swept all the sugarcane clean, I never went back to Building 15. Come to think of it, he's one of my fans. I'll have to meet him when I get the chance.

While the two were chatting, the discussion forums for Lin Ji's Food were already exploding.

Blind Taxi Driver: HAHAHA, I saw Boss Lin, here's a selfie [Image]

Great Mahayana Stage cultivator: Count me in, count me in! [Image]

Liang Mountain Hero: Guys, I'm here too, Yeah! [Image]

Member No. 111 of Meow Meow Sect: I even saw Dundun, being held by a super classy-looking lady. Seems like Boss Lin's mother-in-law [Image]

Zhizhen Burying Flowers: The set-up is really high-class here, @Lin Daiyu pulled up weeping willows, Bao'er, have you arrived?

Hi, I'm Weeping Willow: Here, just arrived at the entrance of Building 1 [Image]

Zhizhen Burying Flowers: ?

Zhizhen Burying Flowers: You're not on the list, how did you get in?

Hi, I'm Weeping Willow: I work here, so isn't it normal for me to come and watch the competition? Not only did I come to watch, I even used my staff privileges to bring Yuyu in. [Image]

Qiang Brother of West Erqi: Zhizhen, don't cry, stand up and fight!

Lin Ji Boy Yue Liyue: Zhizhen, don't cry, stand up and fight!

High Priest of Meow Meow Sect: Zhizhen, don't cry, stand up and fight!

...

At the entrance of the banquet hall, the tall and lean Zhu Yong chuckled as he said to the girl in sportswear beside him, "Yuyu, everyone has taken photos with Boss Lin. Do you want to go? I'll ask my friend from Building 1 to find out Boss Lin's current location for us."

The girl in sportswear rolled her eyes in exasperation. "How many times have I told you? My name is Lu Lu. Stop calling me Yuyu! If you keep calling me Yuyu, I'm going to get Yuyu Syndrome... Weeping Willow, thank you for getting me in here."

Zhu Yong patted his chest. "What's there to thank? Aren't we all Lin Ji people?"

Chapter 286: Undermining Foundations with a Buy-One-Get-One-Free Deal? The Cooking Competition Officially Begins!

With that, he took out his phone and quickly typed out a string of messages.

Wei Qian was casually chatting with Lin Xu when his phone suddenly rang. He took it out and immediately said, "Hey, speak of the devil! Zhu Yong is here, and he wants to take a photo with you."

Hearing that his nominal number one fan had arrived, Lin Xu stood up. "I'd better go meet him. While I'm at it, I'll see if he's interested in switching jobs."

Since Zhu Yong had managed to break into the top three last year, there was a high probability that he'd be recognized by the system. Lin Xu knew he needed to show some sincerity to avoid being rebuffed when trying to poach him.

After speaking, Lin Xu patted Shen Baobao, who was eating snacks like a little hamster, and said, "Let's go. I need to meet someone."

"Oh... this Horse Hoof Cake is so delicious! Can you make some for me when you have time?"

Horse Hoof Cake?

Just as Lin Xu thought of this, a system notification sounded in his mind:

"Host has dedicated time to researching desserts, triggering the reward task [Horse Hoof Cake]. The Host is required to make an Excellent Level traditional Chinese snack, Horse Hoof Cake, within one week and gain Shen Jiayue's approval. Upon completion, a reward draw for an Excellent Level stewed dish will be granted once."

As expected... As long as Shen Baobao craves something, the system triggers a reward task. This one isn't bad. The method for making Horse Hoof Cake isn't difficult, and the reward is a stewed dish Lin Ji's Food urgently needs. I'll try making it after the competition and see what dish I can draw.

With that in mind, Lin Xu promptly picked up the plate of Horse Hoof Cake. "Let's go. I'll carry it for you so you can eat while we walk."

"Okie dokie!"

Wei Qian, who had endured their public display of affection, led the way. Lin Xu and Shen Baobao followed, heading towards the entrance of the banquet hall where Zhu Yong was.

Before they even arrived, Zhu Yong hastened to meet them, "Wow! I've finally met you, Boss Lin! I've wanted to visit you at Building No. 2 several times, but my uncle always stopped me. He was worried your senior brother would lead me astray..."

Is he sure it's okay to sell out Chef Song like this?

Lin Xu held the Horse Hoof Cake for Shen Baobao in his left hand and shook Zhu Yong's hand with his right. "I was planning to visit you these past few days, but I heard your uncle's sugar cane was all stolen, so I didn't dare to come."

"Haha, my uncle is still upset about it."

He says his uncle is upset, yet he's laughing so loudly... Lin Xu accessed the system and checked the chef recruitment page, finding Zhu Yong's name shining brightly.

There was no question about it. Time to start poaching! But Zhu Yong is Chef Song's nephew. Wouldn't poaching him directly be inappropriate?

He was just about to find some reason to ease into the topic when Wei Qian interjected from the side, "Zhu Yong, Lin Ji's Food is hiring a head chef. I'm planning to switch. How about you?"

Upon hearing this, Zhu Yong immediately asked, "What are the requirements, Boss Lin? As a die-hard fan of Lin Ji's Food, you've got to lower them a bit for me. Don't worry, if I come over, I'll work just as hard as the guys on the team!"

He even knew the guys on the team—he really was a die-hard fan of Lin Ji's Food.

Lin Xu, curious, asked, "Does your uncle agree to you switching jobs?"

"What does it matter if he doesn't agree? I've asked for a pay raise several times, but he keeps saying young people need more experience. He even says several chefs are already in line waiting for raises..."

So that's how it is.

Lin Xu immediately said, "Then come on over. We'll double your salary."

The young chefs at Fishing Platform earn just over ten thousand. Doubling it would only be a bit over twenty thousand. For just over twenty thousand dollars, I can recruit a chef who made it to the top three in a cooking competition. This deal is definitely worth it.

Of course, this was just the salary; Dou Wenjing would discuss the other benefits with Zhu Yong.

As long as they work hard, they won't have to worry about making money at Lin Ji's Food.

After this conversation, Lin Xu was pulled by Zhu Yong to take a photo with Lu Lu, who had been waiting for a while.

Indeed, this girl, whose name invoked Lin Daiyu, was a Sanda coach from Sanlitun with explosive fighting power.

Originally, Lin Xu had worried that Zhu Yong, being a delicate "weeping willow," might end up fighting with Lu Lu, who seemed more like a Lu Zhishen type. But now it seemed more likely that Lu Lu would be the one to beat up both of them.

「Before long.」

Guo Xinghai arrived. Together, everyone headed into the event venue.

「Just before ten o'clock.」

All the contestants had arrived. As the Fishing Platform trio was preparing to enter, a group of head chefs wearing uniforms embroidered with the national emblem filed in, immediately causing an uproar in the live broadcast room.

"Wow! So cool!"

"This is the prestige of Fishing Platform."

"Why didn't that group of old masters come last time?"

"I heard the organizers wanted to invite them, but one of the old masters said, 'Did Fishing Platform give you too much face?' And after that, the matter was dropped."

"Why do I feel like it was Boss Lin's master who said that?"

"What a coincidence, I get that feeling too!"

"No matter who said it, the animosity has certainly been established."

"I hope Boss Lin will bring glory to Fishing Platform."

"Yes, yes, go Boss Lin!"

After Xie Baomin and his group came in, they made a point of stopping in front of the trio to offer some words of encouragement. Afterwards, they took the seats that the older gentlemen had occupied last time.

「Ten in the morning.」

The competition officially began. After a series of preliminary procedures, the main event commenced.

This time, the head judge was Liu Zhengyu, the chairman of the National Tourism Association. He stood up and said, "First, let me explain the competition rules. In every round, all contestants will participate. Rankings will be decided, and an elimination quota will be determined. Meanwhile, all contestants' scores will be added to their respective teams' totals; eliminated contestants' scores won't count. At the end of the competition, the team with the highest score will win the Platinum Award issued by the National Tourism Association."

"Wow! What an innovative approach!"

A single competition would not only determine individual awards but also the strongest foreign-related hotel.

Guo Xinghai said, "I can mess around in individual competitions, but when it comes to the reputation of Fishing Platform, if I screw up, my third uncle will definitely beat me up."

Lin Xu and Wei Qian also became serious.

We must get first place for our team!

「Very soon.」

The competition began.

A chef brought a large, clear bucket filled with hot water and placed it in front of all the contestants. Then, he took out a box and poured a full box of strange and curious powders into the bucket. After pouring them in, he stirred the mixture thoroughly. Then, he ladled out bowls of the resulting soup and distributed them to all the contestants present.

The head judge, Liu Zhengyu, spoke up, "A qualified chef must have a clear understanding of flavors and seasonings. Please taste this and write down the names of all the ingredients. You have five minutes. The timer starts now!"

Chapter 287: The Eye of Discrimination Is So Useful! The Reward for the First Round of the Contest!

Did he guess the right question? After hearing the requirements of this round, Lin Xu subconsciously looked towards a certain Little Mushroom Head in the audience who had skipped class to join in the fun.

Sitting below, Geng Lele stuck out her tongue; she hadn't expected her casual remark to actually come true. But this was nothing to be happy about. Because Boss Lin had said he wasn't good at these tasks. And now a similar topic had come up, and it was even more difficult than the day they ate barbecue; this round was doomed!

Shen Baobao, sitting beside her, also wore a look of shock. She hadn't expected her Xu Bao to be so unlucky. She had been looking forward to seeing him win the championship, but how could he encounter such an unfavorable topic in the first round? Would he be eliminated because of this?

"What's the matter, girl? Why such a grim face? Are you worried about Xiao Xu?" Han Shuzhen asked curiously, seeing Shen Jiayue's anxious expression.

Although this round of competition looked quite strange, her son-in-law was so capable that he would surely win, she thought.

"He's not good at these things!" Shen Jiayue's face was filled with distress.

She had even started thinking about how to console her Xu Bao.

「At the competition site.」

The other contestants, after hearing the topic, immediately tasted the bowl of soup in front of them.

The thirty contestants participating today came from the Chinese cuisine departments of ten foreign hotels, all of whom were young people under the age of twenty-five.

Before coming, they had also sparred internally within their own hotels.

Those who were selected were the strongest contestants, aiming to defeat Lin Xu of Fishing Platform, so that their hotels could step on Fishing Platform in their promotions.

Nowadays, major foreign hotels have to be self-financing.

To attract more social customers, they had to be creative in their marketing efforts.

And the easiest way to make a splash in marketing was naturally to step on their competitors.

The taste of the soup was very bad.

The contestants tasted it with gritted teeth and closed eyes, and then, with the pen and paper provided by the staff earlier, they earnestly wrote down the seasonings and spices they could identify.

Guo Xinghai and Wei Qian were also tasting and writing down the seasonings as they went along.

This was Lin Xu's weak point, so he had to try his best to list as many seasonings as possible to score high and ensure their group's score didn't look too bad. As long as he wasn't eliminated this round, maybe he could catch up in the next round.

Everyone was earnestly tasting and writing.

Only Lin Xu had his attention focused entirely on the system page in his mind.

Use special tool Experience Card! he recited silently.

The special tool ten-minute Experience Card in his item bar immediately activated automatically, and the system's prompt sounded again:

"Please select the special tool you want to experience."

Is there even a choice? Besides the Eye of Discrimination, do you have any other special tools in your special tool bar?

Lin Xu immediately chose the Eye of Discrimination.

Very soon, the system's prompt sounded again:

"Eye of Discrimination experience successful, experience duration: Ten minutes. After ten minutes, the experience effect will automatically end."

No sooner had the voice faded than Lin Xu felt a cool sensation in his eyes.

He looked around but didn't trigger anything. However, when he looked down at the soup in the bowl, rows of text immediately flashed before his eyes:

"A bowl of broth made by stirring salt, Flavoring, Chicken Essence, Chicken Powder, White Sugar, Brown Sugar, Baking Powder, Cheese Powder, Scallion Powder, White Vinegar, Cooking Wine, White Pepper powder, Black Pepper Powder, Sichuan peppercorn powder, Sichuan peppercorn powder, Star Anise Powder, Chili Powder, Cumin Powder, Clove Powder, Angelica dahurica Powder, Grass Fruit Powder, cinnamon powder, Buckwheat Flour, Matcha Powder, pickled bamboo shoot shreds, Sesame Shredded, Peanut Shreds, preserved vegetable shreds, and 70-degree hot water. Level: Not up to the lowest rating standard."

Lin Xu frowned. My goodness! With these ingredients, even if his senior brother came, it would be difficult to do. In the last cooking competition, Geng Lishan used a worn-out kitchen knife to intimidate the contestants. Now, making the seasonings this complicated, is this another form of intimidation? Two kinds of pepper powder, two kinds of sugar, various powders, and various shreds—trying to taste them out with the tongue? What a joke!

After finishing his grumble, he took a small sip from the bowl in front of him. Well, even though it tasted awful, he still had to taste it to blend in and not stand out too much. Otherwise, how would he write the answer on paper? Rely on guessing?

As soon as the soup in the bowl touched his mouth, rich and diverse flavors like sour, sweet, bitter, spicy, and rotten flooded his palate.

Oh, dear!

Lin Xu suppressed the urge to vomit and quickly wrote down his answers.

At the consultant's seats beside the audience, Xie Baomin heaved a sigh of relief when he saw this. He had been worried for Lin Xu when he first heard about the content of the competition. His junior brother was indeed a bit lacking in the basics. His understanding and recognition of seasonings were also quite superficial. Unfortunately, this kind of challenge that tested fundamental seasoning skills was quite common in culinary competitions. Some troublesome judges even deliberately added stinky or rancid ingredients to increase the difficulty of identifying the flavors.

After the competition began, while others were tasting and writing, Lin Xu was stunned in place, making Xie Baomin even more worried. He feared his junior brother would give up and hand in a blank sheet.

Now that he saw Lin Xu starting to answer as well, he finally felt relieved.

"Xinghai said that when he went to Lin Xu's house for barbecue last time, they used dry seasoning made by Old Dai. They guessed the ingredients randomly, and Master Lin didn't get any of them right... He's quite weak in this area," Guo Weidong said with concern.

When there wasn't a team score, everyone just treated it as a competition. But now that there was a team score, everyone would naturally become serious because it was related to the reputation of Fishing Platform.

Chapter 288: The Eye of Discrimination is really useful! The reward for the first round of competition!

"My barbecue rub?"

From the back row, Dai Jianli, curious, leaned forward and whispered, "Brother Dong, is your intel accurate? Brother Lin seems to be doing a thorough job with his writing, doesn't he?"

Guo Weidong frowned. "Old Dai, if you're going to call Lin Xu 'Brother Lin,' then don't call me 'Brother Dong.' Lin Xu and my nephew are peers. If you call him that, you're putting my nephew on the same level as me."

Xie Baomin shot him a sideways glance. "Lin Xu is my Junior Brother. If he's the same generation as your nephew, wouldn't I have to call you Uncle Guo?"

"Then go ahead and call me that. Your Uncle Guo here... gives out red envelopes."

Haha, I finally got the better of this bastard! After being bullied by this damn guy so many times, I've finally gotten back at him.

Guo Weidong was feeling quite pleased with himself.

However, just as he was reveling in his small victory, he heard Xie Baomin beside him say, "Old Song, actually, Guo Weidong was the first one to go steal those sugarcanes. I was bored during a meeting and casually mentioned to him the benefits of having sugarcane around. Who knew he'd not only steal some himself but also tell Old Dai and the others about it."

Song Dahai's eyes immediately glinted with murderous intent. "Guo Weidong, is what Old Xie said true?"

Guo Weidong: "!!!!!!!!!"

Xie Baomin, you rotten bastard, why are you so vicious?

As the biggest beneficiary of the sugarcane theft incident, Dai Jianli quickly changed the subject. "Old Xie, is your Junior Brother really writing about seasonings? It's been almost two minutes, right? Why is he still writing? He's writing more than I did for my school essays."

With that reminder, Xie Baomin also noticed. Everyone else stopped writing after a bit, so why is my Junior Brother still going at it? You were asked to list the ingredients, not write out your entire thought process, my dear Junior Brother. Please don't churn out an eight-hundred-word essay!

「At the competition venue.」

Most of the contestants had already stopped writing. Some had even started whispering amongst themselves.

"So that's Lin Xu. I hear he's pretty popular online."

"He's definitely popular. Didn't you see that group of people in the stands wearing matching shirts? Those are all his fans who came to support him in person."

"Hah, look at him, still writing."

"Sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, salty—there are only so many types of flavorings. Does he think this is an essay-writing contest?"

"Well, he's an internet celebrity chef, always trying to stand out."

"When the answers are announced later, he'll realize that writing too much doesn't always earn you points; sometimes, it can even lose you points."

Finally, the time for the competition was up. Lin Xu also managed to finish writing down nearly thirty types of seasonings and spices.

After getting used to typing, suddenly writing by hand felt a bit awkward; his fingers were as stiff as hardened winter melon candy.

After the papers were submitted, the judges began scoring. To ensure fairness and transparency, the screen behind the judges' table also displayed all the seasonings and spices used in the soup.

The few contestants who had just been mocking Lin Xu were no longer smiling.

「Meanwhile, in the livestream chat.」

The fans were already ecstatic:

"Whoa! I thought Boss Lin had regressed to elementary school and was writing a short essay on the spot. I didn't expect there to be so many seasonings!"

"What kind of palate can identify that many ingredients?"

"Same question! Is that even a human tongue?"

"The judges are being mischievous again."

"I was just worried for Boss Lin, but it turns out he actually possesses the Divine Tongue!"

"Are you guys saying Boss Lin tasted all of those? I find that a little hard to believe."

"Hmph! This kind of thing is always half educated guesses and half bluffing. It just comes down to who can guess more of them right."

Guo Xinghai looked at the list of ingredients on the screen, a flicker of helplessness crossing his face.

I missed quite a few. I thought I could help Lin Xu pull his score up a bit, but I didn't expect I might end up near the bottom myself. I was careless. I should have practiced more after Geng Lele spotted that question type last time. With these things, it's better to be safe than sorry.

Wei Qian, beside him, was also somewhat astonished. He had only written down about ten types. He thought he'd written down most of them. Who would have guessed there were nearly thirty ingredients in total? Who could possibly identify all of those by taste?

Because the answers for this round were relatively fixed, the scores were quickly displayed on the large screen. To appear fair, the incorrect items were listed next to each contestant's score.

First place, Lin Xu: 9.9 points (extra: cardamom powder and bitter tea powder)

Second place, Huo Yifan: 9.5 points (missed: chicken powder, white pepper powder, buckwheat flour, matcha powder)

Third place, Zhuang Xiaozhou: 9.2 points (missed: chicken powder, black pepper powder, grass fruit powder, buckwheat flour, matcha powder, minced preserved vegetables)

Fourth place, Guo Xinghai: 8.8 points...

「On the livestream's bullet chat.」

The Lin Ji guys and gals were overjoyed:

"Boss Lin was the only one who wrote \*too many\*."

"LMAO! He listed more seasonings than they even put in!"

"He seems to know more than the spice vendors at the market."

"Boss Lin: As a king of crossing disciplines, isn't it normal for me to understand seasonings?"

"Since Boss Lin knows so much about seasonings, I hope he can release his own 'Thirteen Spices' blend. The Thirteen Spices on the market these days is really losing its flavor. You have to add so much, and a box is gone in no time."

"Exactly! Today's seasonings just aren't as potent. The aroma always seems much weaker than it used to be."

「In the audience section.」

Seeing their son's name ranked at the very top, Chen Meijuan and Lin Hongqi were thrilled. This was the culinary competition between the top ten hotels in Yanjing that cater to foreign guests! For their son to win first place in such a competition was truly amazing.

Shen Guofu said cheerfully, "Little Xu is truly incredible. After the competition ends, we absolutely have to give him a big reward."

Chapter 289: The Eye of Discrimination is really useful! The reward for the first round of competition!

Having said that, he took out his phone, took a photo of the big screen on site, and casually posted it in his Friend Circle:

"My son-in-law is representing Fishing Platform in the Yanjing Top Ten Foreign-Related Hotels Cooking Competition, and he clinched first place in the first round. It's truly a cause for celebration!"

Shen Jiayue had already thought about how to console Lin Xu after he was eliminated. He actually won first place right off the bat? Last time he claimed over and over that he didn't understand this stuff, was he lying? It's one thing to lie to others, but to lie to me too? Hmph! Without five kisses and three hugs, I won't forgive you!

「Meanwhile, in the consultant's area.」

Dai Jianli nudged Guo Weidong from behind. "Brother Dong, when did you start spreading rumors like the seniors in the residents' group? With these seasonings, even if it were us, we might not be able to guess them all correctly 100% of the time. Cinnamon, cardamom—once they're ground into powder, they're too similar and hard to distinguish."

Guo Weidong was also bewildered. After Guo Xinghai had eaten barbecue last time, he'd specifically mentioned this, even hoping there wouldn't be a seasoning segment. Who knew this kid would turn out to be a seasoning expert? This is too surprising, isn't it?

「At the competition site.」

When Guo Xinghai and Wei Qian saw Lin Xu's score, they were both inwardly delighted. Awesome, awesome. Lin Xu is really amazing!

"Damn! You're clearly an expert, yet you claimed you didn't understand any of this last time, making us worry for so long just now." Wei Qian glanced at the team scores, with Fishing Platform's group temporarily in the lead, and couldn't help but lightly punch Lin Xu. Although he planned to jump ship and leave, he didn't want to see Fishing Platform trampled underfoot by other hotels.

Guo Xinghai, looking at the score on the big screen, said to Lin Xu, "That Huo Yifan is the son of Huo Yuanchao, the executive chef of China Grand Hotel's Summer Palace restaurant. He's been learning culinary arts from a young age and masters various cooking techniques. This time he's hell-bent on crushing you."

Crush me? Lin Xu didn't quite understand. "Why, though?"

Guo Xinghai whispered, "For this competition, Huo Yuanchao proposed that Fishing Platform's advisory group take part. Your master then retorted in the group chat, 'Is Fishing Platform supposed to be giving you lot face by doing that?' And that's how the feud began."

Lin Xu was speechless. Master, can't you just enjoy your honeymoon peacefully? Or at least show some private concern for Lucy and the girls. Why go around stirring up trouble and making enemies? A perfectly good competition has been turned so fraught with tension. Having such a troublesome master really gives one endless worries. Besides Master, there's also that troublemaking senior brother. Tsk... If other culinary schools' lineages are broken, it might be because they became financially free and switched careers, or perhaps they never learned the real skills. But if my own lineage were to break, it would definitely be because we made too many enemies and got ourselves killed.

「After the scores were announced, it was time for the judges' comments.」

The head judge, Liu Zhengyu, holding a microphone, looked at Lin Xu and said, "If it weren't for me personally putting those seasonings into the boxes backstage twenty minutes ago, I would really suspect that someone was cheating... Can you tell us how you identified these seasonings?"

If you're going to ask about that, then I'll just have to make something up on the fly.

Lin Xu thought for a moment and said, "Speaking of that, I have to thank Chef Dai from our Fishing Platform's Building Eighteen. He gave me some dry dipping sauces a few days ago, and I've been wanting to reproduce them, so I studied the ingredients obsessively. It just so happens that today's competition involved this; I guess luck was on my side."

As Lin Xu said this, Dai Jianli, ever the joker in the consultant's area, quickly stood up and waved to everyone, exclaiming, "Lin Xu is talking about me! Ha ha! Welcome, everyone, to visit our Building

Eighteen. Photographer, give me a close-up! It's not often I get to sneak an ad in..." His shameless antics caused the audience to burst into laughter.

Liu Zhengyu smiled and looked at Lin Xu with admiration. This young man truly has talent. He had watched very clearly during the competition: Lin Xu only took two small sips before he began to write. Meanwhile, the one who came in second, Huo Yifan, had drunk more than half the bowl and still missed identifying a few items. People truly can't be compared!

After commenting on Lin Xu's answer, Liu Zhengyu looked at Huo Yifan and asked, "I see you drank the most of everyone here. How did it taste?"

Huo Yifan's face flushed; he sported the buzz cut common among chefs. Upon hearing the head judge's question, he replied seriously, "Hard to swallow."

"Then why did you drink so much?" Liu Zhengyu asked.

Huo Yifan glanced at Lin Xu. "To win."

Seeing this formidable contestant look at him, Lin Xu smiled back and nodded in greeting. Right, Master's grudges are Master's. Us young folks shouldn't stoop to the level of the old-timers.

However, to Huo Yifan, this gesture seemed like... Huh? So you just luckily got first place? And now you're provoking me? He turned his head away expressionlessly, leaving Lin Xu somewhat baffled.

Damn! Is he really that petty?

「Soon, the critique was finished.」

Liu Zhengyu announced, "Congratulations to contestant Lin Xu for securing first place in this round of the competition."

As soon as his words ended, a system notification sounded in Lin Xu's mind: "The host has successfully garnered first place in this round of competition, completing the serial task [Overcoming Challenges] part one, and has been awarded a Gold Level Points Overdraft Card."

(Gold Level Points Overdraft Card: Allows the host to have a 500,000 points overdraft limit. The overdraft must be repaid with 700,000 points within one month, or else a random Perfect Level dish will be canceled.)

What the—?! An overdraft of 500,000 points requiring a repayment of 700,000 within a month? Even loan sharks aren't this predatory! Aren't you afraid I'll report you to the banking regulator? Damn! Tasks with unrevealed rewards are always traps, huh? I used a precious special Experience Card only to get a high-interest overdraft card. The more I think about it, the more ripped off I feel! But what's done is done; I'll just have to keep my head down and continue the competition. I hope the upcoming rewards aren't such a rip-off.

「After the first round of the competition ended.」

The eliminated contestants left the stage. Following a brief adjustment, the second round began. Two staff members pushed in a trolley laden with winter melon, cucumber, pumpkin, white radish, carrots, and lactone tofu. What's this...?

"These are all ingredients suitable for showing off Knife Skills. This round isn't going to be about Knife Skills again, is it?" Wei Qian placed his cleaver on the table. As long as I can use my own cleaver, I'm confident I can make it into the top five this round.

Just as he was thinking this, Liu Zhengyu stood up and said, "According to the standard competition sequence, this round would typically showcase Knife Skills Technique, but today let's mix it up. We'll still compete in Knife Skills, but not Basic Knife Skills... Please choose your favorite ingredient and show off your decorative cutting Technique. Remember, it's decorative cutting. If you're just slicing or julienned, you won't score any points."

Decorative cutting Technique? This is totally outside my expertise! Although my Knife Skills are decent, they're all Basic Knife Skills for slicing and julienned. As for decorative cutting Technique, I've truly never encountered it. What do I do now?

He browsed through the system interface. When he saw the Points Overdraft Card he had just received in the item column, he couldn't help but curse inwardly, Damn it, System, you really are an outstanding loan shark!

Chapter 290: Mastering the Carving Knife Technique! Good heavens, Boss Lin is going after the sculptors' livelihoods!

Before, I had only heard about forced loan repayment; I never imagined there would be compulsory lending.

Lin Xu had been waiting to save enough points to redeem the Eye of Discrimination, but now, his points kept decreasing and were even on the verge of turning negative.

Use the Points Overdraft Card!

He muttered to himself, and immediately the system's notification sounded in his mind:

"Gold Level Points Overdraft Card used, 500,000 points obtained. Please earn 700,000 points within one month, or a random Perfect Level dish will be canceled."

After getting the points, Lin Xu quickly entered the Points Mall and started exchanging them for the techniques he needed.

In the Points Mall, individual techniques were relatively cheap. For example, the Superior White Water Lamb Dipping Sauce Technique he had exchanged for during the last competition cost only 200,000 points. But Knife Skills, a major and widely applicable skill category, were a lot pricier. For instance, the Carving Technique he wanted to exchange for now cost 80,000 points even at the Basic Level. At the Excellent Level, it reached 200,000 points. As for Superior, it required 500,000 points.

Hmm, I just received an overdraft of 500,000 points, and it's going to be spent in less than a minute.

The system truly understood the essence of microloans.

By now, other contestants had already started picking their ingredients.

Lin Xu also focused his mind, pondered for a moment, and chose the Superior Carving Technique. All the contestants present, every single one of them, had carving techniques above the Excellent Level. If he had exchanged for the Excellent Level, it would have been better to admit defeat right away.

"The Host spent 500,000 points and obtained the Superior Carving Technique. This triggered a Skill Task: 'Please use the Carving Technique once within half an hour and receive praise from over a thousand people. Otherwise, the Superior Carving Technique will be downgraded to the Excellent Carving Technique.'"

As expected... another one of these Skill Tasks. But a thousand people is just a thousand. Though there are only two to three hundred people on-site today, many more are watching the live stream online and on TV. Getting praise from a thousand people shouldn't be difficult. After all, carving techniques are visually demonstrative; there's no need to taste anything. As long as the carving is up to par, winning a wave of applause won't be an issue.

Upon absorbing the experience, Lin Xu strolled over to the ingredients rack to pick his items.

He first decided against cucumbers. Although this ingredient could demonstrate the art of intricate carving in a confined space, it was ultimately too small to score highly. As for the Winter Melon, its size was too large, and its texture not delicate enough. It was only suitable for carving some crude and bulky designs. While it might look good from afar, up close, it was full of flaws.

Pumpkin was actually not bad. Its size was moderate and its flesh dense, suitable for displaying carving techniques. But when Lin Xu went to pick one, he found that the pumpkins had already been snatched up. The same was true for other popular ingredients for carving—White Radishes and Carrots were also gone.

It's a pity there aren't any Beauty Heart radishes. If there were, I could have carved a rose. That would have scored high and delighted Shen Baobao – killing two birds with one stone!

With no other choice, Lin Xu grabbed a box of Lactone Tofu.

If one were showcasing Basic Knife Skills, Lactone Tofu was a popular choice. Because, no matter the occasion, Wensi Tofu is always the prime candidate for demonstrating Basic Knife Skills. But since this was about carving, and it was a live broadcast, the fragile nature of Lactone Tofu—prone to crumbling at the slightest touch—made many contestants hesitant. The risk of a disastrous failure was too high; it wasn't worth the gamble. On the contrary, ingredients like radishes and cucumbers were easier to work with and offered a better chance to impress.

"It's Lactone Tofu again; Boss Lin really has a special fondness for this ingredient."

"Probably loves tofu just like me (joking)."

"Hey, the commenter above, clarify what you mean by 'eating tofu'!"

"Uncle Ben once said, 'The greater the difficulty, the more points added.' Boss Lin must have chosen it for the extra points, right?"

"Dude, which version of Spiderman did you watch?"

"I study jade carving. Why do I suddenly feel so nervous?"

"Don't panic, brother. Boss Lin may be crossing disciplines, but he won't steal your business... Anyone need welding? If your iron gate is squeaking, give a shout! A metalworking veteran of twenty years is online and taking orders!"

Seeing Lin Xu choose Lactone Tofu, the fans in the live stream began to eagerly anticipate what kind of surprising crossover he would attempt.

In a spot next to Lin Xu, the quick-acting Wei Qian chose a section of pumpkin near the stem. This part of the pumpkin, lacking pulp and seeds, was an ideal choice for carving. As for Guo Xinghai, he selected a finely-textured White Radish. Both their chosen ingredients were quite good. As long as there were no mistakes in their carving, they should be able to score well.

After looking around, Lin Xu then brought over a glass bowl half-full of clear water. The Lactone Tofu was extremely soft and delicate. To carve a beautiful pattern, it had to be done underwater to best ensure the integrity of the shape.

He drizzled some water on the cutting board. Then, he cut the four corners of the Lactone Tofu box, tore off the surface film, and carefully slid the tofu out.

He drew the kitchen knife, one his master had used for half a lifetime, from its sheath. Lin Xu carefully wiped the knife with a towel, then sprinkled water over the tofu and meticulously trimmed its edges. Once packaged, Lactone Tofu develops a slightly firmer 'skin' on its sides, top, and bottom surfaces. During carving, these firmer edges needed to be trimmed off. This ensured the tofu's texture would be perfectly uniform, preventing mistakes during the carving process.

After trimming all four sides, he carefully sliced off the top surface using a flat-blading technique. Then, cautiously, he slid the knife blade under the tofu and carefully transferred the quivering block of Lactone Tofu into the glass bowl filled with water.

Once it was in the water, the preparation work was considered complete, and he could begin carving.