

Culinary 301

Chapter 301: Huo Yifan Wants to Make White Robed Shrimp? What are you waiting for, learn!

It wasn't because the dish was famous, but mainly because Lin Xu's grandmother was particularly fond of Shrimp. With his return home coinciding with his grandmother's seventieth birthday, it was the perfect opportunity to let the old lady taste the dish.

When he was in school, his grandmother had often secretly given him money.

Now it was time to repay her kindness.

After deciding to learn White Robed Shrimp, he strolled over to Huo Yifan with his hands behind his back. The moment Huo Yifan, who was squeezing out Shrimp, noticed him, his hand trembled, and a piece of Shrimp the size of a fingertip dropped to the ground.

Lin Xu paused. Do I look that scary?

"What are you doing here?"

Just thinking about how his father got rebuked by Lin Xu's master in the group chat made Huo Yifan very annoyed.

Today he had originally planned on shining at the Fishing Platform and fiercely making a statement.

Yet Lin Xu turned out to be even more skillful.

This left Huo Yifan with a bellyful of anger. So, you won and now you're here to show off? What a petty victor!

Lin Xu spoke honestly, "I've never seen White Robed Shrimp before; I came to learn... Can this be done with other kinds of Shrimp?"

Learn? I don't believe you could learn by just watching once!

As the saying goes, one shouldn't hit a smiling face. Additionally, Wu Kexin was walking over with the live streaming equipment, so Huo Yifan reined in his temper and honestly explained, "You can use giant river prawns too, but the best choice would be the Qing Shrimp from Taihu... This dish has high requirements; you must use live Shrimp, dead Shrimp won't do."

He said all this to discourage Lin Xu.

Huo Yifan listed a bunch of points to pay attention to when making White Robed Shrimp.

For instance, Shrimp just caught could not be used. They needed to be kept in clean water for one or two more days so the Shrimp could purge any sand and silt. This would result in a more tender and fresh taste.

Moreover, only the plumper section of the Shrimp was used for the dish, with the tail tips being discarded.

Therefore, the Shrimp had to be squeezed out. This method extracted the tastiest part from where the Shrimp's tail and body met, making the individual pieces look more symmetrical and attractive.

During the squeezing process, the Shrimp shell would leave scratch marks on the Shrimp meat.

These scratches would help in the subsequent battering.

If the Shrimp were simply peeled, their surfaces would be too smooth, causing the batter to slide off easily during cooking.

While Huo Yifan was explaining, Lin Xu took out his phone, opened his notes app, and rapidly typed down what was being said, while requesting, "Speak slower, let me take this down."

He needed to jot down the steps clearly. That way, even if the Cooking Learning Card malfunctioned, he would still have a reference when cooking at home and wouldn't be completely in the dark.

Huo Yifan was speechless. I just mentioned it casually, are you really planning on learning it? This dish isn't easy; without a year or more, don't even think about mastering it.

Originally, he wanted to scoff at Lin Xu's naivety, but then he thought about how Lin Xu didn't miss any learning opportunity, even at a competition. Did he really have the right to mock him?

No wonder he was always first every round. Such an opponent with high talent and a love for learning was indeed formidable.

While he was contemplating, Huo Yifan heard Lin Xu's urging voice, "Don't stop, keep going. Is there anything else I need to pay attention to?"

Huo Yifan gave a wry smile. "I really admire you..."

Just then, he had finished squeezing out all the Shrimp needed.

He held a bowl filled with Shrimp and poured in half a bowl of water, carefully rinsing the Shrimp.

The biggest challenge with the White Robed Shrimp dish wasn't actually preparing the Shrimp, but keeping them a pristine white color during cooking.

The prepared Shrimp had to be as white as snow.

Any discoloration meant the dish was a failure.

To achieve this, the Shrimp had to be rinsed repeatedly. Sometimes, flour was even used for scrubbing, as its absorbent properties helped wash away any dirt from the Shrimp's surface.

"And then?"

"Then comes the marination... The 'white robe' in White Robed Shrimp refers to whipping egg white until it's just about to foam. Then, some Potato Starch is mixed in until uniform, and this mixture is used to coat the Shrimp before cooking. Since it looks like they're wearing a white robe, that's how the name White Robed Shrimp came about."

Oh? So that's the origin of the dish's name. I thought it was made using some Pao method.

Today, Huo Yifan was using the highest quality Qing Shrimp from Taihu. They were so clean and translucent that they didn't need to be scrubbed with flour.

He rinsed them twice and drained the water.

Then he placed them on a tray lined with paper towels, covered them with another paper towel, and patted their surfaces dry of excess water.

After that, he put the Shrimp back into the bowl and began the marination process.

"How should I marinate these Shrimp?"

"Just use Scallion and Ginger brine."

After saying this, Huo Yifan brought over the prepared Scallion and Ginger water, added some salt to it, gently stirred until the salt dissolved, and then poured it over the Shrimp.

Then he mixed the Shrimp to thoroughly coat them with the Scallion and Ginger water.

After that, he put the Shrimp into the refrigerator's chiller.

"When the Shrimp are chilled, their water content contracts, which enhances the marinating effect. If you're in a hurry to cook, you can also put them in the freezer for a quick six to seven minutes, and that will achieve the same effect."

TSK TSK, good thing I had the nerve to come here. Otherwise, where would I go to learn all these tips? Although sometimes you can get them through system tasks, no matter how many the system gives, it's not as satisfying as learning on my own.

Lin Xu took careful notes.

Seeing Huo Yifan start working with egg whites, he asked, "Are you getting ready to coat the Shrimp with batter?"

"Right, add Potato Starch to the egg whites and stop beating when they're about to but not quite frothy... Do you need to learn this too? Isn't an egg white batter the most basic kind?"

Is that so?

Lin Xu said with a smile, "I was just asking to see if you knew... Go ahead with your work; I'll check on how my dish is marinating."

Out of curiosity, Huo Yifan asked, "What are you cooking?"

"Steamed radish shreds with powder."

Upon hearing the name, Huo Yifan thought of the steamed vegetables his elders loved to make.

It involved coating radish shreds or vegetable leaves with a thick layer of dry starch and then steaming them. After coming out of the steamer, they would be shaken loose and tossed with aromatic oil and Garlic Paste before serving.

No way? This is the semi-final competition, and you're making just this one dish? Are you planning to forfeit?

Huo Yifan felt he understood the genius before him less and less.

Lin Xu returned to his own stove. He lifted out the radish shreds. They had released their water due to the brine and, when removed, looked almost like a handful of transparent hair.

He carefully rinsed the radish shreds twice in clean water.

To get rid of the excess brine.

Then he dried their surface with paper towels and laid them out in a bamboo basket, positioning a fan to blow them dry.

Meanwhile, Huo Yifan placed the egg whites he took out into a bowl, added two handfuls of dry starch, and a small spoonful of salt.

He then grabbed three chopsticks in his hand and started to beat the egg whites.

The more he thought about it, the less he understood Lin Xu's motivation and reason for making the radish shreds.

Should he go have a look at his stove? The moment this thought formed in his mind, it couldn't be easily shaken off. He was eager to see what Lin Xu was actually cooking.

He just came to see my station, so it should be fine for me to check out his, right?

With this thought, he carried the bowl, continually beating the egg whites as he walked over to Lin Xu's stove.

When he arrived, he happened to see Lin Xu spreading out the radish shreds in the bamboo basket.

My goodness! So finely cut. Are these really radish shreds? I almost thought he'd ripped off someone's wig.

A genius's words truly can't be trusted.

Initially, he thought that by making White Robed Shrimp, he could beat Lin Xu by a narrow margin. After all, the dish was great in appearance, name, and flavor.

But after seeing the radish shreds in the bamboo basket, he abandoned that thought.

No contest, no contest. Just those Knife Skills alone could deter countless chefs. How on earth did this freak manage such fine cuts? It's utterly demoralizing...

Lin Xu finished spreading out the radish shreds and, seeing Huo Yifan come over, quickly asked, "Good timing, I have a question for you. What should I do if the squeezed Shrimp still aren't clean even after washing with flour?"

Huo Yifan was dumbstruck. Don't ask me, I don't know! I'm such an idiot, really. I only knew Lin Xu was a great cook who loved to learn, but I didn't realize he was also an expert at playing possum... Damn it, he's fooled me again!

Chapter 302: Finally Stepping into the Beauty and Hairdressing Circle! This Round of Rewards is Interesting!

Huo Yifan carried the basin and went back.

He had originally come just to enjoy the excitement, but instead, he watched his own composure collapse.

If heaven gave him another chance to do it all over, I would definitely not develop any curiosity towards steamed radish strips, nor would I teach someone named Lin Xu the method of preparing White Robed Shrimp.

I wouldn't even come to the Fishing Platform to participate in this darned cooking competition.

Wasn't it good to be a little cooking genius in the Xia Palace?

Why run over here just to be humiliated?

And to have my defenses thoroughly broken down.

Just as Huo Yifan returned to his stove, Lin Xu wandered over again.

This time, however, he wasn't there to learn about White Robed Shrimp but to observe Guo Xinghai's stir-fried grouper slices.

Fresh grouper is actually best when steamed, as it allows one to taste the unique freshness of the grouper as well as the delicacy and flavor of its meat.

But for those who eat grouper frequently, getting tired of the same flavor is natural.

Therefore, other ways of preparing grouper emerged, including stir-frying.

When Lin Xu arrived, Guo Xinghai had just filleted the grouper and was carefully picking out the rib bones.

Seeing that there was still quite a bit of meat left on the fish frame, and thinking that his little one hadn't eaten yet, Lin Xu asked curiously, "Are you not going to use the meat on the fish frame?"

"Right, I don't need it... Are you that free?"

After Guo Xinghai finished removing the rib bones, he wiped off the mucus on the surface of the Fish Skin with a towel. Then, holding down the fish meat with one hand, he tore at the Fish Skin with the other, gave it a strong pull, and the entire piece of Fish Skin came off.

Next, he sliced off the red meat portion close to the Fish Skin, leaving only the white meat.

"My ingredients are processed and airing out right now. They need to dry before I can move on to the next step. If you don't need this, I'll take it. I'll steam it for my cat to try; it hasn't tasted grouper before."

Guo Xinghai: "..."

Your cat's diet is this luxurious now?

He placed the fish frame, rib bones, and Fish Skin on a plate and handed it to Lin Xu. "Then take it. Grouper bones are quite hard; make sure it doesn't get stuck in its mouth."

"It won't. My Dundun is very good at eating fish."

As Lin Xu passed by Huo Yifan's stove with the fish meat, he saw the pile of green shrimp that had their shrimp meat removed. He suddenly thought that since he was preparing grouper for his little one, he might as well let it taste top-tier freshwater shrimp too.

A bit of savory, a bit of mild—that makes a balanced meal.

"Master Huo, do you still need these green shrimp, the ones you've taken the shrimp meat from?"

"Don't need them... What do you want these for? To make shrimp oil?"

"No, it's for feeding my cat."

Huo Yifan: "..."

Anyone else who got their hands on such top-tier green shrimp would first think to make shrimp oil. And they wouldn't discard the shrimp shells after making the oil; they'd crush them and add them to fillings to enhance the umami flavor.

But this Lin Xu... he actually plans to feed them to his own cat.

Are all geniuses' thought processes this peculiar?

"Then take them."

He gathered the green shrimp shells and handed them to Lin Xu.

And so, Lin Xu returned to his stove with a plate of fish parts and a plate of shrimp shells.

He boiled a pot of water.

After the water boiled, he put the green shrimp shells in to blanch them. Once cooked, he took them out, placed a steamer rack in the pot, and then put in the fish parts from Guo Xinghai to steam.

When feeding cats, steaming meat maximally preserves its nutrients, much better than boiling.

When the boiled-red green shrimp shells had cooled enough to handle, Lin Xu put them on a disposable plate and handed them to a staff member, asking them to pass it to Shen Baobao.

Before long, a certain plump and adorable little one in the audience area started smacking its lips and eating the shrimp.

Once the fish was done steaming, the radish strips were also completely dried by the fan.

It was time to spray oil.

He filled a spray bottle with some edible oil and carefully spritzed it onto the radish strips in the bamboo basket.

Seeing this, fans in the live stream chat became curious again:

"What is Boss Lin doing now?"

"It looks like he's doing a hair treatment."

"Goodness, now that you mention it, it really does look like that! I use a small spray bottle for my hair treatment too."

"So, does this dish have something to do with beauty and hair care?"

"The way he fluffed the radish strips just now was exactly like how my hairstylist fluffs my hair."

"It's confirmed then! Boss Lin has crossed over into the beauty and hair care world for this round of the competition!"

"To learn a craft, go to Jingxi! Number one in beauty and hair care!"

"Wrong, it should be Lin Ji!"

"Right! To learn a craft, go to Lin Ji! Number one in beauty and hair care!"

Laymen could only enjoy the spectacle.

But the experts on the advisory panel had already figured out what was happening.

"If I'm not mistaken, next he should be sprinkling Potato Starch, right?"

It was only when Song Dahai saw this step that he finally realized Lin Xu was making steamed shredded radish.

Who would have thought! Such a simple and homely dish as steamed shredded radish could be made so exquisitely that it's even more exaggerated than the beauty filters on short video platforms.

No sooner had he spoken than Qiu Zhenhua pushed up his glasses and said, "This technique of spraying oil is really clever. It not only prevents the radish strips from absorbing water during steaming but also prevents too much oil from causing the starch to clump when it's sprinkled... It makes me want to try it myself."

He Baoqing asked, "Steamed shredded radish made this way certainly looks good, but in the end, you still have to toss it with sesame oil and Garlic Paste. Wouldn't that just ruin the whole effect?"

"Not necessarily!"

Xie Baomin felt a rush of joy.

He had never imagined his junior martial brother could make such a commonplace dish look so upscale; no wonder he hadn't chosen to make White Jade Lotus Root Strips.

This dish, if made well, would be every bit as stunning as White Jade Lotus Root Strips.

Seeing the other head chefs looking at him, Xie Baomin said,

Chapter 303: Finally Breaking into the Beauty and Hairdressing Circle! This Round of Rewards is Interesting!

"You guys really need to think outside the box. Since oil can be sprayed with a sprayer, why can't Garlic Paste and sesame oil be?"

As soon as he said this, everyone had an epiphany. Exactly. If oil could be sprayed, then sauces were even more doable.

It had to be said, although Xie Baomin usually liked to trick people, his culinary thinking was genuinely sharp. Many of the difficult or troublesome issues in cooking could always be resolved whenever that rascal was around. Unfortunately, he spent most of his time tricking people.

To use popular internet slang: A bit of conscience, but not much.

Guo Weidong said, "This method has given me new ideas. I think some dishes can be improved using a sprayer."

Upon hearing the praise, Xie Baomin gloated, "TSK, TSK, TSK. Look at Weidong, quick on the uptake. You guys are truly the dullest students I've ever taught..."

Just when everyone was starting to think highly of Old Xie, the man suddenly put on airs like a headteacher, instantly wiping out any good impression the head chefs might have developed.

After Lin Xu sprayed the oil, he sprinkled on some Potato Starch and gently patted it to make the excess starch fall off.

Having done this, he heated up the steamer. He placed a steamer rack inside, then laid a steaming cloth over it. Once steam began to rise, he carefully placed the radish shreds, coated with Potato Starch, onto the cloth. Then he covered the pot and began to steam.

By this time, Huo Yifan had also brought out the Shrimp from the refrigerator. He poured out the excess Scallion and Ginger water. Then, he used a paper towel to dab the Shrimp dry and immediately added the pre-mixed egg white batter, stirring to coat the Shrimp in a thin layer. After coating, he drizzled some cooking oil over them, followed by another stir. This way, the Shrimp wouldn't stick together when fried.

Meanwhile, Guo Xinghai was also coating the marinated fish slices. He sprinkled some Potato Starch over them and added an egg white. He mixed it thoroughly by hand until evenly coated, then drizzled

some cooking oil over it. The method was actually similar to the White Robed Shrimp. Both involved seasoning the ingredients, coating them in an egg white batter, and then frying.

Lin Xu planned to try making sautéed fish slices after mastering the White Robed Shrimp. If successful, that would be another specialty dish up his sleeve.

After the radish shreds had steamed for four minutes, Lin Xu lifted the lid. He carefully grasped the sides of the steaming cloth and lifted the entire cloth off the steamer rack. The steamed radish shreds were as white as jade, resembling strands of white hair.

"Isn't this just beautiful?"

"Oh my god! As a white hair enthusiast, I can't handle this!"

"Can someone attach it to my head? Please, pretty please!"

"I initially thought Boss Lin was being risky using White Radish for a savory dish, but now I realize it wasn't Boss Lin taking risks—it was my own lack of vision."

"If only it could be made into a wig! Wear it on your head, and you'd definitely be the star of any comic con!"

"Ha, if you wore it to a comic con, it'd probably get eaten by everyone."

When Lin Xu placed the radish shreds in a bamboo basket, the live broadcast chat instantly erupted. This was simply too beautiful. Even the most critical person would have to admit it was awesome!

It wasn't time to spray the sauce yet. He had to wait a bit longer for the surface temperature of the radish shreds to drop, making them drier so they could absorb more sauce.

Using this waiting time, he started juicing the peeled garlic.

A few minutes later, when the temperature of the radish shreds had slightly decreased, Lin Xu took a small spray bottle and began spraying the sauce over them.

"Old Xie really guessed it right."

"With just a spray, it's both flavorful and looks great. Really nice."

"Too bad we're in a competition, otherwise I'd definitely have to try some."

"Old Xie, maybe you can ask your junior apprentice brother to make it again sometime, so we can broaden our horizons a bit."

The head chefs chatted back and forth.

Xie Baomin didn't refuse. "Sure, you guys want a taste? That's easy enough to arrange! Oh, right, my junior apprentice brother is getting engaged tomorrow. Don't forget to bring a gift."

The head chefs: "..."

No wonder he agreed so readily. That damn rascal never misses a trick!

While talking, Xie Baomin was chatting with Shen Guofu on his phone. Learning that tomorrow's engagement party wasn't arranged yet, the senior apprentice brother perked up.

He said, "My junior apprentice brother's engagement party isn't arranged yet. Weidong, doesn't your Building Ten have that large table that can seat dozens of people?"

"Yes, the 56-person table, symbolizing the unity of the 56 ethnic groups."

"I'm booking it for tomorrow noon. The engagement party will be there."

"Okay."

Guo Weidong agreed and grabbed his phone to message the front desk manager, asking them to prepare the Ethnic Unity private room.

Once the venue was arranged, Xie Baomin turned to He Baoqing, the boss, and said, "I've bought that Giant Grouper. You better not let it die; its flavor will be much worse if it does."

"Don't worry, Old Xie, nothing will happen."

"Tomorrow, let Old Dai and Old Song help me prepare that Giant Grouper. Whatever's left after serving, we brothers will divide it among ourselves. It's been a while since we've had this; let's all have a taste."

Qiu Zhenhua couldn't believe his ears. "Old Xie, you're really too good to your junior apprentice brother, aren't you?"

Xie Baomin smiled. "My master can't come, so I have to put in more effort. On such a big day, our school has to make a good showing. I can't let my junior apprentice brother lose face."

Lin Xu still didn't know that his senior apprentice brother was busy arranging his engagement party.

Chapter 304: Finally Stepped into the Beauty and Hairdressing Circle! This Round of Rewards is Interesting!

He had just finished drizzling sauce over the shredded radish and arranged it on the plate when he sauntered over to Huo Yifan's stove, just as Huo Yifan was dropping the shrimp into the wok.

The fat in the wok released a rich lard aroma. This not only enhanced the shrimp's fragrance but, crucially, lard wouldn't color the food, ensuring the shrimp remained as white as possible.

The flame on the stove was turned to its highest setting. When the oil reached about seventy percent heat, he poured in the shrimp. He quickly stirred them to separate, then stir-fried them on high heat for one minute before pouring them into a colander to drain the oil. Finally, he transferred them to a clean white porcelain plate.

As he plated the dish, Lin Xu quietly used a Cooking Learning Card.

"One Superior Cooking Learning Card consumed, granting the host a Superior-level dish—White Robed Shrimp."

He finally got it. Lin Xu breathed a long sigh of relief.

Although the dish was famous, the seasoning was actually very simple: just a bit of salt in the scallion and ginger water used for marinating the shrimp, and a bit of salt in the egg white paste. That was enough.

The prepared White Robed Shrimp had a crisp texture and a fresh, clean taste. Upon entering the mouth, one could also feel the smooth tenderness of the egg white paste, all complementing its flawless, snow-white color.

After Huo Yifan plated his dish, Guo Xinghai also finished cooking his stir-fried grouper fillets.

Then, Zhuang Yizhou's Chicken Bean Curd and the other contestants' dishes also began to be taken out of the woks and plated.

The judges, who had been tantalized for a long time, immediately came down to start tasting and scoring.

Chen Meijuan, in the audience, was a bit nervous. "Can Little Xu's dish win first place?" she wondered.

At first, she thought it wouldn't be a problem, but now she realized that all the contestants' dishes were so perfect, and they were all meat dishes. Competing against meat dishes with a mere radish made her feel somewhat anxious.

"Don't worry, Meijuan. Little Xu is so talented; he'll definitely manage," Han Shuzhen comforted, though her own hands were clenched tightly, fearing the judges might give low scores.

After ending his chat with Xie Baomin, Shen Guofu focused his attention on the stage. "In terms of sheer presentation, Little Xu's dish is the most beautiful," he thought. "Who could imagine it was made from radish? I reckon it'll take first place, no question."

The seven dishes were neatly laid out on a table covered with a white cloth, each one beautiful.

Once the cameraman and Wu Kexin finished taking close-up shots, the judges, each holding a small plate and chopsticks, crowded around.

"Oh my, this Chicken Bean Curd is so tender."

"I never expected that imperial bird's nest could be incorporated into Almond Tofu."

"This Milk Soup Meatballs dish is really redefining my understanding of meatballs."

"The Winter Melon Box is also extremely exquisite. Inside is a mix of chicken mince and diced shrimp. The taste is truly fresh and delightful."

Compared to the last round, which was full of eggplant dishes, this round of the competition felt like a clash of titans. Each dish had nearly reached perfection.

Liu Zhengyu tasted the White Robed Shrimp, nodded, and said, "These shrimp are done brilliantly. The flesh is sweet and crisp, with absolutely no hint of fishiness. Magnificent."

After finishing the White Robed Shrimp, he turned his attention to the Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips on the table. "Years ago, I read in an ancient culinary text about a method of steaming radish shredded as fine as hair. I thought it was an exaggeration and asked many industry professionals, all of whom said it was impossible. Who knew I would actually see such a method today... Lin Xu, what is this dish called?"

"Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips!"

"Right, right, that's what the ancient text called it too... Good heavens, you've actually recreated a lost dish!"

He picked up a mouthful with his chopsticks. The first taste was garlic sauce. With a gentle chew, he could feel the soft, starchy layer coating the radish shreds, followed by the resilient texture of the radish itself.

After savoring it, Liu Zhengyu reflected on the dish again. He found its texture, taste, and appearance all flawless.

"It's truly a lost dish; the flavor is impeccable. However, for a simple radish dish to demand such high knife skills, it's no wonder it was lost."

Modern cooking values efficiency. Which chef would want to expend so much effort on a single radish? It was only because resources were scarce in the old days, coupled with the shortage of ingredients in winter, that chefs painstakingly worked on ingredients that could be stored for a long time.

After tasting all the dishes, the judges began to score.

This round of the competition, with no restrictions on ingredients and double the cooking time, allowed everyone to bring out their absolute best.

This directly resulted in very close scores.

Lin Xu received 9.9 points, tying for first place with Huo Yifan.

Zhuang Yizhou's Chicken Bean Curd, with its clear soup and beautiful flavor, earned 9.8 points, placing second.

Guo Xinghai's stir-fried grouper fillets received 9.75 points, narrowly taking third place by a margin of 0.05.

As for the other contestants, their scores were 9.7, 9.67, and 9.65 respectively—all very close.

After the scores were announced, the system's notification sound once again echoed in Lin Xu's mind:

"Host has secured first place in this round of competition, completing the fifth round of the serial task [Overcome the Challenges], and has obtained one Constitution Enhancement Card."

(Constitution Enhancement Card: A card that can enhance physical fitness, with an effect roughly equivalent to one month of scientific fitness training. Repeated use within one year yields no additional cumulative benefit.)

DAMN!

There are even cards like this?

The classic Chu Yunfei meme immediately popped into Lin Xu's mind: "You always manage to come up with something new.jpg"

Too bad its effects aren't cumulative.

Otherwise, if I used a hundred or eighty of them on myself, wouldn't I transform into a Super Saiyan on the spot?

After muttering to himself, the head judge, Liu Zhengyu, announced, "Congratulations to Lin Xu, Huo Yifan, Zhuang Yizhou, and Guo Xinghai for advancing to the final four championship. It is now noon, and the restaurant next door has prepared lunch. Will all guests please proceed next door for your meal. The competition will resume at two o'clock this afternoon."

The original plan had been to run the competition without interruption. However, with viewership ratings climbing and many in the audience clearly hungry, Zhen Wensheng decided to add a lunch break. This also provided an opportunity to keep television viewers engaged, hopefully boosting ratings even further.

After the announcement, everyone got up and headed to the restaurant for lunch.

Just as Lin Xu was about to look for Shen Baobao in the audience, the rather handsome Zhuang Yizhou suddenly approached him and asked, "Master Lin, shall we have lunch together?"

Have lunch together? Lin Xu wondered. Does he have something to ask me?

Lin Xu responded with a smile, "My parents and my in-laws are all in the audience. I need to have lunch with them. Is there something you need, Master Zhuang?"

Zhuang Yizhou looked slightly awkward, but he quickly took a deep breath and asked Lin Xu, "I want to switch jobs and work at your restaurant. Is that okay?"

WHAT?! Lin Xu was stunned. He hadn't anticipated that a head chef from Yanjing Hotel would want to join his restaurant; he felt like he must have misheard.

He checked the system page for the list of potential hires. Zhuang Yizhou's name was indeed there and highlighted.

But why would he want to leave Yanjing Hotel, where he has a good position, to switch to my restaurant? Lin Xu wondered. Out of curiosity, he asked, "Could you tell me why?"

Zhuang Yizhou didn't hide his reasons. "I'm seeing someone, and her family is from Beijing. Her parents insist that I buy an apartment in Beijing outright before they'll agree to our marriage. After a lot of persuasion, they lowered their standard, requiring me to have an annual salary of five hundred thousand. I make less than twenty thousand a month at Yanjing Hotel, so to reach that figure, I have to consider switching jobs."

Five hundred thousand? Lin Xu thought. An annual salary of five hundred thousand means a monthly salary of just over forty thousand. That's a bit high. That kind of salary would be enough to hire an executive chef from a five-star hotel.

Perhaps sensing Lin Xu's hesitation, Zhuang Yizhou added, "Personally, I don't demand that much. Thirty thousand a month would be fine for me. I also do live streaming sometimes and was hoping to leverage some of your popularity for extra income... But you can rest assured, I absolutely won't let it interfere with my regular work."

Lin Xu didn't agree, nor did he refuse outright. "I can't make this decision alone. Let me discuss it with our general manager, how about that?"

"Alright, alright! May I add your WeChat?"

After they added each other on WeChat, Zhuang Yizhou went to the restaurant to eat. He had barely left when Shen Baobao rushed over.

"Xu Bao, I missed you!"

Lin Xu embraced her. Then, together with both sets of parents, and led by his senior brother Xie Baomin, they went to a private room in the nearby restaurant.

Indeed, a private room had been specially arranged for them, given the size of Lin Xu's family.

Once everyone was seated, Lin Xu took his phone out to the hallway to call Dou Wenjing.

Chapter 305: Sister Jing, Acting Like This Will Get You Called a Capitalist! A Dish Suitable for the Finals!

"Sister Wenjing, I've found another helper..."

The call connected quickly, and Lin Xu recounted to Dou Wenjing the entire story of Zhuang Yizhou wanting to jump ship to Lin Ji.

After listening attentively, Dou Wenjing asked, "He said he wants to leverage your popularity to do live streaming, is that right?"

"Right!"

"Okay, here's the plan. Send him my WeChat business card so he can add me. I'll discuss it with General Manager Chen and then talk with him about the specific details of his compensation. Is General Manager Chen at your place?"

Lin Xu glanced at his older sister-in-law in the private room, who was fighting with Shen Baobao over the orange steamed custard, and said with a smile, "Yeah, she's right here, competing with Yueyue over the food."

He only realized something after hanging up the phone.

Why would Sister Wenjing need to coordinate with my older sister-in-law about hiring a chef for the restaurant?

Could it be that they're going to have Zhuang Yizhou sign with both sides?

If that's the case, wouldn't Zhuang Yizhou be exploited both coming and going?

He took his mobile phone and entered the private room.

His senior fellow apprentice, Xie Baomin, was introducing Lin Hongqi and his father-in-law, Shen Guofu, to Building Number One's signature dish—Braised Petite Fragrant Pig, "These are free-range Tibetan fragrant pigs. The meat is tender and has less of a gamey taste than typical pork. It also carries a slight, fresh sweetness, much better than any Black Mountain pig or similar varieties."

"Is that right?"

Shen Guofu picked up a piece of Pork Trotter, placed it in his bowl, and said with a smile, "This Pork Trotter isn't much bigger than the Chicken Feet that Xiao Xu makes."

He tasted it and then immediately said to Lin Hongqi, "Oh, this really is good! Old Brother Lin, you must try some; it's delicious."

Lin Hongqi tried it.

He thought the pork was indeed tasty. It was much more tender than usual pork and quite flavorful.

Lin Xu sat down and started eating a bowl of rice.

While he was eating, He Baoqing came to the private room carrying a dish covered with a lid, "I didn't realize Master Lin's elders were here. My apologies. I just made a dish of stir-fried fragrant pork chops in the kitchen. Please, esteemed guests, have a taste."

Xie Baomin quickly introduced him, "Mr. Lin, Mr. Shen, this is Executive Chef He Baoqing from Building Number One, a good friend of mine."

Hearing that the Executive Chef from Building Number One had personally delivered the dish, Shen Guofu and Lin Hongqi quickly filled their glasses and toasted He Baoqing. Such executive chefs are influential figures in the culinary world and could become an important network and support for Lin Xu in the future. As Lin Xu's elders, they had to show adequate respect.

He Baoqing shared a drink with them, returned a toast, and then excused himself from the private room.

Well, it's a family meal. As an outsider, I should leave when it's time.

After He Baoqing left, Xie Baomin brought up the matter of tomorrow's engagement party.

"I've scheduled it in Building Number Ten. There's a gigantic table there. They say it can seat fifty-six people, but if we squeeze a bit, it could fit seventy."

Upon hearing about such a large table, Shen Guofu, who always favored grandiosity, immediately agreed, "Good, let's book that table. Tomorrow, all our relatives and friends will sit together. It'll be a great symbol of unity and celebration."

Xie Baomin took a bite of the stir-fried fragrant pork chop and continued, "Regarding the dishes, Building Number One just received a Giant Grouper this morning; that will be our main course. Additionally, Building Number Ten will also serve some of its specialty dishes."

Once Shen Guofu heard 'Giant Grouper,' he became excited and said, "Okay, let's have the Giant Grouper! I haven't had it in two years and have been longing for it. Chef Xie, although we're practically family, business is business. Tell us the cost."

Xie Baomin quickly waved his hand and said, "This morning, my master transferred several hundred thousand to me to take care of this. He's covering all expenses for the food and drinks at the engagement party, and I'm not even allowed to get involved."

This...

Lin Hongqi and Shen Guofu looked at each other.

Our two families are holding an engagement, and your master is paying for it? Isn't that a bit inappropriate?

Lin Xu picked up his phone and sent a message to his master, "Thank you, Master!"

His master quickly replied, "What's there to thank me for? Win the championship this afternoon; that will be the best way to thank me."

"Don't worry, I'll definitely get it!"

For today's competition, my parents traveled thousands of miles to be here, my parents-in-law specially took time off, Shen Baobao hasn't left my side, my senior apprentice has been bustling about, and even my master, thousands of miles away, is thinking of me.

Under such circumstances, how could I not win the championship!

"I discovered that the meat from the pig's rump is especially tasty—fatty but not greasy. Jiayue, try it; it's really delicious!"

Geng Lele had also come along to the private room for the meal. She was currently eating a piece of meat from the fragrant pig's hindquarters, marveling at its taste.

Lin Xu collected his thoughts and said with a smile, "That's the Belly Meat from the pig. The fat isn't greasy, and the lean meat isn't tough. It's perfect for making Fried Pork and Garlic Paste White Meat."

At the mention of these two dishes, Shen Jiayue's interest was piqued, and she asked, "So, can you make them?"

Lin Xu grinned and said, "Soon. Once Wei Qian starts working at the restaurant, I'll be able to learn."

Wei Qian excelled in making various pork dishes.

Lin Xu had already made his plans. In the future, for any dishes involving pork, he'd learn them from Wei Qian.

Everyone enjoyed their meal and chatted away.

Near the end of the meal, the front desk manager brought each person a small tureen of stewed Cubilose. Han Shuzhen was so delighted that she casually took Shen Guofu's portion as well.

Lin Xu, who didn't have much interest in such delicacies, passed his portion to his mother.

He didn't particularly care whether it actually replenished collagen, but seeing his mother so happy after receiving it was enough for him.

「After the meal.」

Hearing Lin Hongqi mention he had never seen a Giant Grouper, Xie Baomin immediately offered to take him to Building Number One's seafood area for a look.

Shen Guofu also wanted to see the size of this Giant Grouper, so the entire group decided to go along.

Just as they left the private room, Lin Xu ran into Zhuang Yizhou, who had finished his meal.

Chapter 306: Jing Jie, You'll Be Scolded for Being a Capitalist! Dishes Suitable for the Finals!

Unlike his worried demeanor from before the meal, Zhuang Yizhou's face was now wreathed in a happy smile. Upon seeing Lin Xu, he even made a detour to greet him.

"Boss, Director Dou and I have come to an agreement. I'll start working once the store renovations are complete. Just wait and see my performance then!"

Lin Xu was speechless. Did Sister Jing give him some kind of super stimulant?

After Zhuang Yizhou walked away, Lin Xu sent a message to Dou Wenjing, inquiring about their discussion.

"I offered him an annual salary of 300,000 yuan, with bonuses calculated separately. I also promised him that if he passes the probation period, he'll be guaranteed a contract with President Chen's Joyful Media and receive significant promotional backing from the company. He accepted."

Unbelievable...

Originally, Zhuang Yizhou had asked for an annual salary of 360,000 yuan, and she had just slashed 60,000 yuan right off the bat. That 60,000 yuan was essentially exchanged for a few words from his sister-in-law.

Sis, if the netizens found out about this, they'd definitely call you a capitalist!

After grumbling internally for a moment, Lin Xu put away his phone and, along with his whole family, followed Xie Baomin to the basement level of Building One, where their seafood section was located.

Passing through a long freshwater area, the group arrived at the seawater section and saw the Giant Grouper swimming back and forth in a massive tank.

"Wow, it's huge! You've gone to a lot of trouble, Master Xie."

Shen Guofu was overjoyed. He snapped several photos in front of the tank.

Afterward, he posted them to his Moments:

"The main course for my daughter's engagement banquet tomorrow. What does everyone think?"

He had many foodies among his Moments contacts. As soon as he posted it, comments started pouring in:

"Where's the engagement banquet, Old Shen? I've known Yueyue since she was little. I definitely have to give a gift tomorrow."

"Count me in! How could I miss such an event?"

"I was just telling a friend how amazing your son-in-law's cooking is. I'll be sure to give a big red envelope tomorrow."

Shen Guofu replied to the messages with a wide grin.

Meanwhile, when Dundun saw the fish, he immediately leaped down from Han Shuzhen's arms.

He arched his back before the tank, fur bristling, and let out a series of low growls, as if he had spotted prey. He was completely oblivious to the fact that the fish could swallow him whole in one bite, its mouth alone larger than his entire body.

Lin Xu chuckled, picked up the little fellow, and said, "That thing could swallow you in one gulp, and you're still trying to provoke it? We'll be eating it for lunch tomorrow. How about I give you a few extra pieces then, huh?"

Only then did Dundun settle down.

Chen Meijuan remarked, "This little one is really like a child; you have to coax him." She then took Dundun from Lin Xu's arms and cradled him.

Well, after his maternal grandma had held him for so long, it was his paternal grandma's turn to enjoy a cuddle.

The group strolled around the seafood section, observing various colorful groupers, crabs larger than a man's palm, and lobsters and mantis shrimp as thick as an arm.

The sight made the group, who had just eaten their fill, feel a bit hungry again.

「At one fifty in the afternoon.」

The group returned to the banquet hall.

"You've got this! Go, go!" Shen Baobao exclaimed, giving Lin Xu a loving hug. She hoped he would win the championship smoothly.

Chen Yan wrinkled her nose in disgust. "Ew, gross!"

She was just about to mock her younger cousin and future cousin-in-law a bit more when Shen Baobao cut in, "Cousin, I'm getting engaged tomorrow. You'd better prepare a big red envelope for me. Otherwise, I'll announce to all our relatives and friends tomorrow that you're looking for a match!"

Chen Yan was rendered speechless. How is that any different from a public execution? AAARGH, you little brat, how can you be so cruel?

She had considered not coming tomorrow, but the thought of that huge, plump Giant Grouper in the seafood section made her reconsider.

Fine, a red envelope it is. I'll just think of it as paying for the meal. I won't eat anything starting this afternoon. That way, I can really go all out at lunch tomorrow, eat my fill, and even pack some leftovers to take home. I'm determined to eat back the value of that red envelope!

「Back at the competition venue.」

Guo Xinghai was in the rest area, playing on his phone. Seeing Lin Xu, he smiled and said, "I've done all I can. The rest is up to you..."

Lin Xu replied, "Don't just focus on the judges and scores. Cooking isn't only about pleasing others; the most important thing is to please yourself, to find joy in it."

When Lin Xu first opened his restaurant, his main thought was making money. But as his understanding of cooking deepened, he found himself enjoying it more and more. Just standing by the stove, even doing nothing, gave him a sense of commanding the entire world.

Pleasing yourself? Finding joy in it?

Guo Xinghai mulled over Lin Xu's words. The more he pondered them, the truer they seemed.

Throughout today's competition, from the first round until now, he had been fixated on the scores, constantly thinking about how the judges would rate him. Although he had cooked with care, the entire process was predicated on pleasing the judges.

Would the judges like this level of doneness? Would it score higher if it were more tender? Would shredded ginger be better than minced?

His mind was so preoccupied with these considerations that there was no room left for his own style.

Lin Xu, on the other hand, treated the judges like his regular customers. When he was making the Yangzhou Fried Rice, he'd glanced at the judges' figures.

Hmm, they look like they usually eat quite well. I'll add a bit more lard to make it even more satisfying for them.

"I understand now. Thank you, Lin Xu," Guo Xinghai said sincerely, feeling as if a fog had lifted.

Not long after, Huo Yifan and Zhuang Yizhou also arrived.

Zhuang Yizhou, having secured a new job, was in a more relaxed state now. He commented, "This next round will be tough. The judges just ate lunch, so they're not as hungry as they were before. When they were starving, anything would have tasted delicious."

Chapter 307: Sister Jing, you'll be criticized as a capitalist! Dishes suitable for the finals!

Huo Yifan nodded. "It depends on what the judges require. Try to make some refreshing, non-greasy dishes."

Soon, the well-fed judges filed in.

The staff brought in a new rack laden with various ingredients, including a whole Jinhua Ham, stock, Fatty Intestines, tofu, and more.

It was the final round of the competition.

The supply of ingredients was now unrestricted.

Liu Zhengyu, holding a microphone, said to Lin Xu and the other three contestants, "The next event is the final four showdown, which is also the last round of the competition. There are no specific requirements for this round. You just need to prepare one dish within three hours. Let's begin, young men."

That simple?

The online viewers and the audience at the venue, still speculating about the round's requirements, were all somewhat slow to react.

But Lin Xu and the other three showed no signs of relaxation.

Because the more freedom they were given, the greater the variables.

At the consultants' desk.

Xie Baomin said with a smile, "Today's competition topic is really tricky. Every previous round had been a specific challenge with various restrictions, but this final round suddenly offered complete freedom. The contestants might not be able to adapt immediately."

Dai Jianli, seated behind him, asked, "Old Xie, what do you think Lin Xu will make?"

Xie Baomin took a sip of his tea. "It's really hard to say; we didn't discuss this at all during the meal."

Qiu Zhenhua asked, "Will he make Qingshui Furong?"

Xie Baomin was about to say it was impossible when he saw his junior brother take a pot of stock from the rack, along with a large pack of Chicken Breast and a box of eggs.

This...

Is his junior brother really planning to make Qingshui Furong?

But he had only seen it made once!

Mastering Qingshui Furong after seeing it only once? That would be sheer genius, wouldn't it?

Even though Xie Baomin had already witnessed Lin Xu's genius, he still found it unbelievable at this moment.

"These are the ingredients for Qingshui Furong, right? Old Xie, you really must have secretly tutored your junior brother. With Qingshui Furong on the table, the outcome of the competition is self-evident."

Such a perfect and beautiful dish. Every time it was made, it amazed the foreign dignitaries dining in Building No. 2. The wives of the state leaders would even want to take a photo holding the dish.

After Lin Xu finished picking his ingredients, Huo Yifan took that Jinhua Ham, along with some lotus seeds and Crystal Sugar.

"It seems Huo Yifan is going to make Honey Roasted Square. That's his father Huo Yuanchao's signature dish. I wonder how much of his father's true skill he has inherited."

Guo Weidong sighed. Then, noticing his nephew take a kitchen knife and cut off the thickest part of all the Fatty Intestines, he immediately understood his nephew's intention. "He's going for Nine-Turned Intestines. That's pretty good. If it weren't for Qingshui Furong, he might actually be able to give Huo Yifan's Honey Roasted Square a run for its money."

Zhuang Yifan was the last to choose. He took a box of Lactone Tofu, a small piece of Ham, fresh bamboo shoots, and other ingredients.

This is...

"He's not going to make Wensi Tofu, is he?" Xie Baomin immediately commented. "This kid is probably giving up; that's why he chose Wensi Tofu."

Wensi Tofu was well-known and visually appealing. However, compared to Honey Roasted Square or Nine-Turned Intestines, it was more than just a tier below; it was also less complex than the Chicken Bean Curd he had made in the previous round.

Down below.

The head chef from the Yanjing Hotel, who was responsible for their team, sighed softly.

Securing third place was highly unlikely now.

Originally, everyone had been vigorously planning to surpass Fishing Platform.

But they hadn't expected such a result.

When this competition was being planned, the heads of these hotels catering to foreign guests had even considered organizing a competition for middle-aged chefs after defeating Fishing Platform, aiming to completely knock Fishing Platform off its pedestal.

However, their young chefs had now been thoroughly dominated by the opposition. If they switched to middle-aged chefs, they would likely be beaten even more severely. After all, Fishing Platform's eighteen head chefs were renowned, and surpassing them would not be easy.

Thinking of this, the head chef left the WeChat group called "Siege at Guangming Peak."

In the audience.

Whether it was Lin Xu's family or his fans, everyone was curious about what Lin Xu was planning to make.

"He picked the same ingredients that Zhuang Yizhou used for Chicken Bean Curd. He's not planning to make it again, is he?" Lu Lu asked curiously.

Zhu Yong handed her a cup of lemon tea, then said, "Impossible. Boss Lin isn't as silly as you."

As Lu Lu looked up, Zhu Yong immediately sensed a murderous intent in her eyes and quickly added, "This cup of lemon tea is \$399 a cup; it's an exclusive internal supply."

Indeed, he was afraid that this Lin Daiyu, seemingly capable of uprooting willow trees with her bare hands, might splash it in his face.

Upon hearing the price, Lu Lu quickly took a sip. "Wow, it's so good!"

Afterward, she transferred \$400 to Zhu Yong on WeChat.

\$399 for the tea; the rest was for the errand.

She would have given more; after all, this tea wasn't something you could just buy with money outside.

But his one comment had reduced the errand fee to a single dollar.

Sipping the delicious lemon tea, Lu Lu asked, "What do you think Boss Lin is going to cook?"

"Hard to say. I can only tell it's some kind of clear soup-based dish because the steps he's about to take are identical to preparing the 'kai shui,' or clear broth, for a dish like Poached Chinese Cabbage."

Lu Zhishen, sitting nearby, overheard their conversation and sighed silently.

He changed his online nickname from "Zhishen Burying Flowers" to "A Monk's Compassion."

From today onwards, I will detach from the mundane world, sever ties with earthly desires, and live a life of great freedom.

Just as he was pondering this, a girl next to him nudged him. "Handsome, I just created a fan group for Lin Ji's Food. Scan the code and join, will you?"

The girl's sweet smile made Lu Zhishen's heart, which had been quiescent for but a second, begin to thump wildly again...

To hell with compassion, I'm returning to secular life!

"Yueyue, what is your brother-in-law making?"

"I don't know. He hasn't really made such complex dishes before. But he said he's going to win the championship, and I believe he can do it."

Chen Yan knew her brother-in-law wasn't just bragging. However, one opponent was preparing Nine-Turned Intestines, and another was making Honey Roasted Square.

Ordinary dishes simply couldn't compete against those two; she hoped her brother-in-law wouldn't stumble.

The company had already prepared a video celebrating Lin Xu's potential championship win, ready to be released the moment he clinched the title.

If he didn't end up winning, all their efforts would be for nothing.

Shen Jiayue thought for a moment and sent a message via WeChat to her senior, Xie Baomin, "Senior, senior, what dish is Lin Xu making? Will he not win the championship?"

Soon, Xie Baomin replied, "He's probably making Qingshui Furong, a stunningly exquisite dish that my master originally created to please his first wife. Prepare to celebrate the championship win!"

Qingshui Furong?

A dish Master originally created to please his first wife?

Stunningly exquisite?

Upon reading this message, Shen Baobao's heart rippled with emotion.

Master went to such lengths for his wife. Could Lin Xu also try to please me a little too? I've been so forward; won't you make a little effort for me?

At the stove.

Lin Xu, who was removing the sinew from the Chicken Breast, glanced back at his Shen Baobao.

Ever since his mother's first visit, he felt he owed this girl a proper confession. Perhaps today, with this atmosphere, was the right time to finally do it. They were getting engaged tomorrow. He didn't want Shen Baobao to go into it with any regrets. With this in mind, he decided to add a little innovation to this Qingshui Furong dish...

Chapter 308: May our lives blossom against the wind like this flower! "Qingshui Furong?"

Upon hearing this dish's name, both Lin Hongqi and Shen Guofu were somewhat puzzled.

However, Han Shuzhen and Chen Meijuan were more excited.

"Yueyue, what does the name of this dish mean? Could it be that eating it beautifies and nourishes the skin?"

Shen Baobao was also curious.

She said to her mom and mother-in-law, "My senior brother didn't mention it, and I haven't seen what it looks like either."

Under the Lin Ji's Food topic online:

Wind Chilling the Butt: Feels like Boss Lin is going to make a big move again.

Blind Taxi Driver: Definitely. The ingredient selection is the same as Chicken Bean Curd, but Zhuang Yizhou just made Chicken Bean Curd. So there can be only one truth! (pushing up glasses)

Meow Meow Sect High Priest: Little-known fact, guys: Boss Lin is going to prepare a dish called Qingshui Furong. It was created by his master back in the day... For more insider news, remember to join our Meow Meow Sect! Firsthand information will be at your fingertips!

West Second Flag's Strong Brother: Lele, you should focus all your effort on studying. I reckon you could easily get recommended to Yao Class.

Meow Meow Sect High Priest: Holy fire shines brightly, holy fire dazzles! Curse Strong Brother, may your hair thin!

West Second Flag's Strong Brother: ...

Meow Meow Sect High Priest: Anyone want to join our Meow Meow Sect? If so, squeak.

Meow Meow Sect High Priest: The group has beautiful ladies!

West Second Flag's Strong Brother: Request to join the group!

Wind Chilling the Butt: Request to join the group!

Mulan Big Brother Requesting URL: Request to join the group!

Blind Taxi Driver: Request to join the group!

「...」

At the stove, Guo Xinghai was carefully washing the intestine heads he had just cut from the large intestines.

After Lin Xu's guidance, he no longer placed the judges' feelings and thoughts as his top priority when cooking. Instead, he focused completely on his own feelings. This was also why he chose to make Nine-Turned Intestines today. He hadn't had much chance to cook this dish since learning how. So today, with the organizers providing the ingredients, he decided to let loose and truly practice making this dish.

The dish Nine-Turned Intestines doesn't mean it's cooked nine times or anything similar. The restaurant owner who created this dish simply liked the number nine. Plus, the method of preparing the intestines is complex, resembling the Daoist Nine-Turn Golden Pill in its intricacy. Hence, the name Nine-Turned Intestines.

When Guo Xinghai practiced, he used to loop the intestines together to make thick, bundled intestines for cooking Nine-Turned Intestines. However, the proper method for this dish involves using only the thickest small section of the intestine head. This way, the texture is rich and delicious, tasting heavenly and leaving an unforgettable aftertaste. As for bundled intestines, the texture isn't as good. The bundled parts are layered, and although thick, they lack the unique richness of the intestine head.

However, a pig only has a small section of intestine head, and one serving of Nine-Turned Intestines requires the intestine heads from several pigs to make enough. This is why Guo Xinghai was usually reluctant to use intestine heads for practice. The cost was too high, and he was unwilling to spend so much. But today, he didn't need to worry about such things. Today was the competition, and all ingredients were provided by the organizers. So Guo Xinghai cut off all the intestine heads, preparing to thoroughly indulge his craving for making Nine-Turned Intestines for once.

While scrubbing the intestine heads with flour, he turned to glance at Lin Xu at the adjacent stove, who was preparing meat paste, and felt a bit surprised.

Clearly, that was to be used for Clear Soup. Considering the ingredients Lin Xu had picked earlier, could he be making Chicken Bean Curd? No, Zhuang Yizhou made that last round; Lin Xu wouldn't repeat it. Could it be he had some new tricks up his sleeve? In the previous competition, Lin Xu had used White Jade Lotus Root Strips to beat him soundly. Whatever he was about to make now was likely another secret dish from Building Two. Sigh! Having a great master is truly enviable. He could always present dishes unavailable on the market. Unlike my own Number Ten Building. Although it was the most successful transformation at Fishing Platform, and the restaurant was often fully booked, its downside was the total lack of secrets. It had no confidential dishes. It had completely become just a high-end restaurant.

「Elsewhere.」

Lin Xu had prepared all the Duck Meat Mousse, Pork Meatball, and Chicken Meatball in one go. Time was tight. He couldn't afford to be as leisurely as his senior brother had been before. Everything had to be ready before the competition ended.

At that moment, the stock in the small pot on the stove was boiling again, and he had once again lowered its temperature to around sixty degrees. This was the optimal temperature to add the Duck Meat Mousse. He turned on the stove's burner and casually poured the prepared Duck Meat Mousse into the pot. After adding it, he turned down the heat. This allowed the temperature in the pot to rise slowly, which would better help the Duck Meat Mousse absorb the tiny particles suspended in the stock.

Soon, clusters of the mousse floated to the surface of the soup, and more and more appeared. Lin Xu carefully skimmed them out with a slotted spoon and placed them into a small bowl. After all the Duck Meat Mousse was skimmed out, he passed the stock through a large colander lined with white cloth. This was to filter out as many dregs from the soup as possible. Once it was clean, he turned off the heat. He allowed the temperature of the stock in the pot to drop slightly, preparing for the next round of filtration.

After finishing these tasks, Lin Xu picked up the Chicken Breast, just about to remove the sinew to prepare for frying Furong Chicken Slices, when he noticed Huo Yifan standing to the side, arms crossed, watching his actions.

"Damn, you startled me! Is yours done?"

Huo Yifan said, "Honey Roasted Square is quite simple. Just split the Ham, take the top part out, boil it until soft, then slice the lower half. Pair it with lotus seeds and Crystal Sugar, and steam it. No need to keep an eye on it constantly."

Chapter 309: May our lives blossom against the wind like this flower!

Why is it that for the final round of the cooking competition, I need to make various purees of meat from scratch? I'll have to learn how to make Honey Roasted Square after this. If there's another competition, I can also stroll around leisurely, pretending to be a judge patrolling the event.

"Lin Xu, which dish are you planning to make with Clear Soup?"

Like everyone else, Huo Yifan was also curious about what Lin Xu would cook, so he came over to ask right after he finished his work.

Lin Xu said with a smile, "Boiled Cabbage in Clear Broth!"

Boiled Cabbage in Clear Broth?

Huo Yifan looked at the ingredients Lin Xu had prepared. Apart from Eggs and meat, there was no sign of any cabbage.

"Where's the cabbage?"

Lin Xu pointed to the Chicken Breast he was removing the sinew and membrane from and the Egg in his hand, "Here, I'm working on it right now."

It seems he's cooking up some innovative dish; no wonder he's so confident. I heard that Building No. 2 of the Fishing Platform has the most special dishes, and they are usually kept secret. If it hadn't been for Lin Xu making White Jade Lotus Root Strips in the last competition, many people inside the Fishing Platform wouldn't even know such a dish existed in Building No. 2.

While Huo Yifan was watching Lin Xu's techniques, Guo Xinghai, who had just put the pig's large intestine on to boil, and Zhuang Yizhou, who felt it was too early to start working, also gathered around.

The three of them stood with arms crossed, watching Lin Xu work.

This made Lin Xu feel like he was being scrutinized by construction Supervisors while working.

"If you three aren't busy, it'd be nice for you to go have some tea and take a break. Staring at me like this, you're acting like overseers."

Zhuang Yizhou said with a grin, "We just want to learn from your skills."

"There's nothing much to learn about this Clear Soup, just be generous with the ingredients... Pity I can't let you give me a hand, otherwise I would've assigned each of you a task."

「At the judges' table.」

The Chief Judge, Liu Zhengyu, watched in amusement as all the finalists crowded around Lin Xu, shooting the breeze.

In other competitions, the tension would be palpable by the time it got to the finals. Even if it was just for show, they'd create an atmosphere of intense rivalry. Yet these young competitors seemed as if they were dropping by a friend's house for a chat. Not only was there no sign of tension, but they were even eager to offer their help. It didn't resemble a competition in the slightest!

With some time on his hands, he took out his phone and slowly started to look up information on Lin Xu.

This young man is talented and polite, always seeming collected and composed, with the air of a gentleman. No wonder Mr. Lishan had such high praise for him last time; a young man like this is indeed quite likable.

Online information about Lin Xu was quite comprehensive, mainly thanks to the fans of Lin Ji's Food who summarized everything very well. From their first customer Li Qiang to Panda Pan Da who created the topic of Lin Ji's Food, everything was clarified in detail.

As he scrolled through, he suddenly discovered that Lin Xu's family owned a scenic area.

A scenic area? Isn't that within my own jurisdiction?

As the Chairman of the National Tourism Association, Liu Zhengyu was immediately energized.

He searched for Longqi Mountain Scenic Area in Yinzhou City on a travel group buying platform and checked out the photos. The scenery was quite impressive, featuring a reservoir, a canyon, and cliffs. The Panshi Rock on the mountaintop, specifically designed for young couples to hang locks, was also well-designed.

Other scenic areas would have locks on the railings, which could easily collapse due to the weight of too many locks, creating a safety hazard. Therefore, it was necessary to regularly clear away the rusted chains. However, Lin Xu's family simply installed chains on a huge boulder at the summit for this purpose, allowing for even more locks without safety concerns.

After reviewing the photos of Longqi Mountain Scenic Area, he looked at the reviews. Everyone said that the 29.9 yuan admission fee was an incredible value for money. Moreover, the biggest feature of the scenic area was that one could either enjoy trendy attractions or just go hiking. The areas were clearly divided and didn't interfere with each other.

After flipping through a few pages of reviews, Liu Zhengyu murmured to himself, "This scenic area isn't bad, huh? But why is it only rated 3A?"

Aside from being the Chairman of the National Tourism Association, he was also a member of the national authority for grading scenic areas.

Seeing that Lin Xu's scenic area had good infrastructure and even hotels and guesthouses, he contacted the staff of the grading committee, "Get me the files for Longqi Mountain Scenic Area in Yinzhou City."

If they haven't applied for a 4A rating yet, then I should give Lin Xu a heads-up. After all, having enjoyed a meal prepared by him, it's only right to give something back in return.

Soon, the staff replied, "Longqi Mountain Scenic Area in Yinzhou City submitted an application for 4A evaluation at the end of May. However, because the audit team has been too busy, they haven't had a chance to visit yet. It's likely they'll have to wait until the end of September..."

What? They've already applied?

Liu Zhengyu frowned.

Isn't that efficiency a bit too slow?

No wonder the comment section was full of remarks about how Longqi Mountain, a 3A scenic area, was outclassing other 4A sites.

He wanted to vent his frustration, but considering that the staff were just following regulations, he replied instead, "Today, send the files for this scenic area to my office. I'm planning to visit Yinzhou City soon, so it's perfect timing to conduct the review. If everything checks out, we can grant them their certification."

"Okay, Chairman Liu, I'll prepare the files as quickly as possible."

With this matter settled, Liu Zhengyu drummed his fingers on the table.

Should I mention this to Lin Xu or not? Speaking up directly might seem like I'm fishing for gratitude, which isn't appropriate. But if I don't mention it, how will I justify enjoying Lin Xu's hospitality in the future?

Chapter 310: May our lives blossom against the wind like this flower!

This young man's Yangzhou Fried Rice is truly exceptional, and I didn't get enough of those Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips earlier. I really want to find an opportunity to try them again. After some thought, he decided to first get the audit done. Then, when it came time to issue the license, he'd coincidentally

reach out to Lin Xu. Thinking this, he couldn't help but let out a laugh. For Old Liu, to satisfy his cravings, to actually be using such tactics on a young man... If this got out, those old friends would probably laugh their teeth off, right? But there was no helping it; who could blame him for loving gourmet food?

Shaking off the thoughts, he saw that the contestants had finally stopped crowding around Lin Xu, boasting and chatting casually. Lin Xu had already finished straining the soup and was now wrapping the meat purée used for straining in cloth, suspending it in the soup pot.

Well, well! He even knows how to "wake up" the soup? Many chefs don't know this step, yet this young man knows it. No wonder he can recreate lost dishes.

Then he saw Lin Xu set up a wok with oil. This made him a bit surprised.

This... Why use a wok with oil? Could it be that he isn't making Chicken Bean Curd? If he were making Chicken Bean Curd, by now he should have the Clear Soup boiling and be pouring the prepared Chicken Meatball into the pot, where it would quickly float up like bean curd. But now he's actually using an oil wok!

Liu Zhengyu's curiosity was instantly piqued. He stopped playing with his phone, sat in the judge's seat, and quietly watched Lin Xu's operation.

「On the consultants' side.」

Seeing Lin Xu set up the oil wok on the stove, Qiu Zhenhua said, "It's Qingshui Furong, as expected. The other day, Old Xie made it in front of me; his steps were exactly the same as Lin Xu's."

The moment Guo Weidong heard this, he immediately frowned. "Xie Baomin, you're too much! You said you'd trade your Qingshui Furong for my roast suckling pig, but you didn't call me to watch when you made the dish."

Song Dahai said, "That guy even planned to trade his Qingshui Furong for my Pot Stew Giant Yellow Croaker."

"And me! Last time he planned to exchange his Qingshui Furong for our Building 9's signature charcoal-grilled Beef Tongue."

"He also wanted to trade for our Building 5's Bamboo Shoots Furong Soup."

The group of executive chefs chattered, only then realizing that Xie Baomin had actually traded one Qingshui Furong for the signature dishes of all the buildings.

Isn't this too much? What would happen once Building 2 incorporated all the other buildings' signature dishes? And they'd end up with Qingshui Furong they couldn't profit from, because those dishes weren't yet allowed to be served to regular customers at the Fishing Platform and were reserved for foreign guests.

Xie Baomin helplessly pursed his lips. "You guys can learn other dishes too; everything in Building 2 is open to you, alright?"

Dammit, even if it's all open, it's useless! Most of the dishes in Building 2 are banned, and for those sold in the restaurant, each building has similar dishes, so there's no need to learn them. We'll never trade dishes with this scoundrel again! Otherwise, we'd definitely be taken for a ride.

After a round of criticizing Xie Baomin, everyone went back to watching the competition.

By now, Lin Xu had already fried the Furong Chicken Slices, soaked them in hot water, and was currently using his kitchen knife to cut out petals.

Wu Kexin stood beside him and asked in a low voice, "Can I film these steps?"

This dish was clearly original, so she needed to ask before taking close-up shots, not to cause any trouble for Lin Xu.

As he worked, Lin Xu said, "You can film. Very few people's Knife Skills can match mine anyway."

These words instantly set off a frenzy in the live broadcast room.

"Boss Lin rarely says this kind of thing; he must be really enjoying himself today!"

"Up to now, I still can't tell what dish this is, let alone what the final result will be, but I'm just so excited because I feel like I'm witnessing a miracle!"

"Me too, me too! I feel like Boss Lin is about to pull off something big!"

"Gotta say, Boss Lin's Knife Skills are really good. With one cut, a complete petal comes out... wait a minute, a petal?"

"Earlier, Huo Yifan asked what dish he was making, and he said 'Boiled Cabbage.' Could it be that the cabbage leaves are made out of Furong Chicken Slices?"

"Think bigger! Maybe he turned the Furong Chicken Slices into a lotus flower!"

"OMG! Can't wait!"

Netizens were looking forward to it with great anticipation. The audience below, including Shen Jiayue and others, was even more eager.

Chen Meijuan gripped Lin Hongqi's hand tightly, fearing her son might make a mistake. Han Shuzhen also hugged Dundun tightly, whispering softly into the little one's ear, "Dundun, you've got to bless your daddy for his success, okay!"

After Lin Xu finished making the chicken slices, he took a cup with a slightly wider opening and tucked the petals into it one by one. He stuffed four layers of petals in total and also added a cluster of stamens in the middle. Once he was done, he placed the cup upside down in the center of a white porcelain plate. When he lifted the cup, a perfect flower bud appeared on the plate.

Although the dish was not yet complete, the audience and fans below couldn't help but burst into applause, cheering for Lin Xu's magical skills. Lin Xu then took a cotton string and tied it around the middle part of the flower bud.

After finishing these tasks, he checked the time; the competition was nearing its end. The other contestants had also finished their dishes. He reheated the Clear Soup and poured it into a kettle.

When the competition was about to end, he carefully carried the white porcelain plate to the judges' table for tasting and cautiously poured the reheated Clear Soup into it. The hearts of the on-site audience and netizens were in their throats. They were all waiting for the flower bud in the middle to bloom. However, after Lin Xu poured the Clear Soup, the flower bud didn't move at all.

"What's happening? Is it a flop?"

"DAMN, DAMN, DAMN! I'd rather my boss live ten years less than see this dish fail!"

"Everything was so perfect before; how could there be a mistake at the last step?"

"What's going on? I'm so anxious!"

"Boss Lin, hurry up and do something! Why is there no movement?"

The on-site audience and judges also looked anxious. What went wrong? Why did it flop? If the flower doesn't open, then this dish won't be perfect and won't score high!

"Old Shen, what's happening here?" Han Shuzhen didn't dare to watch, fearing her son-in-law hadn't done well.

Shen Guofu tried to steady his breathing. "Stay calm, everyone stay calm. Even if this dish is ruined, we can't let Xiaoxu feel pressured."

Shen Baobao clutched Chen Yan's hand tightly, her palms slick with nervous sweat.

「Just then.」

Lin Xu picked up the microphone on the table, turned it on, and said to the audience below and the live camera, "Hello everyone, I am Lin Xu."

Bullet comments flew across the live stream.

"Oh no, he's not going to concede, is he?"

"My tears are welling up! Hurry up and fix it, please don't concede!"

"Exactly! While there's still time, hurry up and fix it!"

"OMG! I can't bear to watch!"

"I can't watch either; I'm ready to flip my phone onto the table."

The comments poured in.

Lin Xu continued to speak, "Tomorrow, I will be engaged to the girl I love the most. All this time, I haven't spoken proper words of love to her, and I even owe her a confession."

Shen Baobao's mouth fell open; she hadn't expected Xiaoxu to bring this up.

The fans also hadn't expected Boss Lin to be getting engaged to the boss lady tomorrow. But if you're going to get engaged, get engaged. Don't just concede like that!

"Today," Lin Xu went on, "taking advantage of my master's creation, the Qingshui Furong, I want to say to her: Yueyue, whether we are poor or rich, I will walk with you hand in hand. I hope our life together will be like this flower, blooming against the wind!"

Having said that, he snapped his fingers towards the flower bud on the table.

In the clear-as-water soup, the flower bud cracked slightly, and the white petals began to bloom, one after another...