

Culinary 321

Chapter 321: Fried Fish Fillets! This Crystal Sugar Pork Knuckle is Delicious! Happy Engagement!

After mixing it all evenly again, a little cooking oil was drizzled in, followed by another quick toss. This would ensure the fish fillets separated quickly when poured into the wok.

While the fish was marinating, it was time to prepare the other ingredients.

Guo Weidong took out some red pickled peppers and several green pickled peppers, slicing them into rings.

While cutting, he said, "There are plenty of ready-made pickles in Building 18. If you need any, you can go get them. Although Old Dai isn't exactly reliable, he's quite generous in this respect."

Is this why you all still haven't gotten around to killing him?

Lin Xu thought sarcastically, deciding he should visit Building 18 later.

Pickles and dipping sauces are small matters. I just think Head Chef Dai is a nice guy and want to befriend him. Yes, purely to expand my social network.

After slicing the Pickled Peppers, Guo Weidong added them directly into the bowl with the marinating fish. Then, he put in a spoonful of marinated minced chili and some dried chili segments.

After that, he sprinkled a tiny bit of white sugar into the bowl.

"Fried Fish Fillets cook very quickly, needing to be out of the wok within twenty seconds of going in. Therefore, all necessary seasonings and ingredients must be combined with the fish beforehand."

So that's how it is. Lin Xu was also beginning to understand.

"The Pickled Peppers and minced chili used in the marinade already contain salt. So, now only a little sugar is needed to enhance the umami; no other seasonings are necessary."

"What about side vegetables?"

Guo Weidong said with a smile, "If you plan to sell this in a restaurant, I suggest you add some sliced onion and green and red bell peppers."

Lin Xu didn't catch on at first. "Why? Does it taste better with them?"

"No, it makes the portions look bigger, giving customers the impression of good value."

Lin Xu: "..."

So the reason Building 10's business is so good is because people think the food here offers good value for their money?

After the fish was well marinated, Guo Weidong set up a wok to start cooking.

He first seasoned the wok by swirling oil in it.

Then he added a spoonful of rapeseed oil and half a spoonful of lard into it.

"When cooking fish dishes, you can generally add some lard. This enhances the fish's aroma and also improves its texture."

Guo Weidong turned the stove's flame to maximum.

He also took the opportunity to remind Lin Xu, "Don't try this dish at home. A household stove doesn't have enough heat, and it's easy to turn the fish fillets into mush. Only a professional stove like this can cook the fish fillets quickly enough to achieve the desired quick-frying effect."

When the oil was about eighty percent hot, he used a ladle to stir everything in the bowl, mixing the fish fillets with the Pickled Peppers, minced chili, Scallion and Ginger evenly.

Then he poured everything into the wok at once.

After pouring the ingredients in, he gripped the wok handle with his left hand and, holding the ladle with his right, quickly tossed everything using deft, small flips of the wok.

The moment the ingredients hit the wok, a sour and spicy aroma unique to Pickled Peppers wafted out, followed by the slightly more pungent spice of the minced chili.

As Guo Weidong tossed the ingredients, the fish fillets, which had been tenderized by the marinade, quickly firmed up and curled slightly.

Once all the fish fillets were properly cooked, he lifted the wok from the heat and plated the dish.

From the ingredients hitting the wok to being plated, the entire process was one fluid motion. It was so fast that one might even doubt if the fish was fully cooked.

As he began to transfer the dish onto a plate, Lin Xu came to his senses.

"Use Cooking Learning Card!"

He had barely uttered this when the system prompt sounded in his mind: "Learning target: Guo Weidong. Current Skill is General Fried Technique. Do you wish to learn?"

Wow! My luck today is incredible! To think I learned the General Fried Technique just like that. So why wait?

"Learn!"

Soon, the system's prompt sounded again: "Host has consumed one Cooking Learning Card and acquired the Perfect Level General Cooking Technique—Fried. This Skill can be used to make all types of fried dishes. Congratulations to the Host."

Surprises always come when you least expect them. Lin Xu was somewhat numb to it. But thinking about his engagement today, this must be the system's engagement blessing.

After the Fried Fish Fillets were served, the fragrant, spicy aroma truly began to waft through the air.

The white fish fillets were coated with an appetizing Red Oil, and the bottom of the plate also held a generous amount of glistening red grease, looking incredibly tempting.

"Pickled Peppers and minced chili release Red Oil more easily, so these two were chosen for this dish instead of Doubanjiang."

Inhaling the wonderful spicy scent, Lin Xu didn't hold back. He picked up a piece of fish with his chopsticks and tasted it.

Hmm, spicy with a slight sourness from the Pickled Peppers, and amidst the sourness, a hint of sweetness. It tastes a bit like Yuxiang flavor, but not as cloyingly rich. In a word, delicious!

Lin Xu kind of regretted eating his mom's Egg Pancake that morning.

I should have eaten here instead. With this delicious dish, another two bowls of rice, or at the very least a steamed bun... wouldn't that be wonderful? Too bad all I can do now is stare at this delicious food and drool.

While he was contemplating, his phone rang.

He took it out and saw, to his surprise, that it was from his sister-in-law, Chen Yan.

"Are you at Fishing Platform now?"

"Yes, I'm at Building 10. What's up, Sister Yan?"

"Come to the lobby of Building 10. I'll give you the red envelope. My mom is planning to have our relatives try to find me a boyfriend at the engagement banquet. I can't handle that kind of public execution."

Lin Xu: "..."

Being pushed by elders to marry is indeed a very troublesome thing.

He was about to agree when he heard Chen Yan mutter disheartenedly, "I skipped breakfast because I was planning to eat a big lunch to get my money's worth from the gift I gave, and also to taste the Giant Grouper. But now, with my mom meddling..."

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Haven't eaten yet?

Lin Xu glanced at the Boiling Fish and the Fried Fish Fillets on the workstation.

There's a place to handle these two dishes now.

He said with a smile, "Just now, Chef Dai from Building 18 and Chef Guo from Building 10 each taught me a dish using Dragon meat. Both are freshly made. If you don't mind, I..."

He hadn't finished speaking when his sister-in-law's urging voice came through the phone, "Stop talking! Hurry and bring it over. I need to eat and leave before they arrive; I can't stay too long."

Lin Xu: "..."

She sounded so listless just now. How come she's so energetic the moment food is mentioned? Doesn't she care about her figure anymore?

He placed the two dishes on a large tray, then asked the steamed foods department for two servings of rice noodles and a bowl of seaweed soup, and carried them all to the lobby.

At the lobby entrance, Chen Yan, dressed in a blue floral print dress, saw Lin Xu approaching and quickly walked towards him.

Lin Xu led her to a dining area. As soon as he set the food down, his sister-in-law pulled out a thick red envelope and placed it on the table; it looked like it contained over fifty thousand.

"Wow, that's thick, huh?" Lin Xu remarked.

Chen Yan took a bite of rice and said helplessly, "Yesterday, Yueyue threatened to play matchmaker for me in front of all the relatives if I didn't give a big red envelope. I managed to dodge Yueyue, but I couldn't escape my own mom!"

"Ah, this..." Lin Xu was surprised. He hadn't expected the pressure from the elders to get married to be so intense. He laughed and said, "I don't even know how to comfort you..."

"Having these delicacies is the best comfort for me! Brother-in-law, you go ahead and get busy. This Dragon meat is really delicious. Next time our company has a group meal, I'll buy one too, and you can help me cook it then, okay?"

"No problem!"

Lin Xu found his mother and handed her the red envelope. "This is from Sister Yan. Give it to Yueyue when she arrives. I need to hurry back to the kitchen to prepare the Qingshui Furong; Yueyue's relatives want to see it being made."

「Back in the kitchen.」

Lin Xu no longer had the inclination to learn how to prepare the Giant Grouper. He quickly started preparing the Qingshui Furong and White Jade Lotus Root Strips. There were many guests today, so two servings of each wouldn't be nearly enough; he made six servings of both dishes.

「It was past eleven in the morning.」

The Shen Family relatives had all arrived. Lin Xu came out from the kitchen with Shen Baobao to greet the guests.

Shen Baobao said, "This is my aunt."

"Hello, Aunt," Lin Xu greeted.

"And this is my uncle."

"Hello, Uncle."

"..."

The Shen Family didn't have many relatives. Years ago, when the Shen Family had declined, interactions with relatives were few. Now that they had prospered, some past relatives tried to reconnect, but Shen Guofu didn't give them a warm reception, and so, over time, those ties were severed.

Han Shuzhen's family, however, had many relatives. The Han Family was a renowned medical family in Beijing. After retirement, Grandfather Han had been rehired at Jishuitan Hospital, and Grandmother Han at Xiehe Hospital. Han Shuzhen's siblings also worked in various major hospitals in Beijing. When the large family gathered, one might think Building 10 was hosting a high-profile medical seminar.

Apart from relatives from both sides, others close to Shen Guofu, like Tan Yajun, also came, each bearing a hefty red envelope.

Also present were Geng Lishan and Geng Lele; the family of his senior apprentice-brother, Xie Baomin; and a host of friends including Panda, Wu Kexin, Yue Liyue, Guo Xinghai, and Wei Qian.

Some brought red envelopes, while others brought gifts. The most valuable was a piece of calligraphy, "A Hundred Years of Happy Union," personally written by Geng Lishan. When these four characters were displayed, they drew everyone's attention, even attracting Grandfather Han.

Geng Lishan is notoriously hard to please, yet his granddaughter's husband gets along with him as if they were close friends despite their age difference. This young man is truly remarkable!

When the pleasantries were mostly over, the front desk manager of Building 10 led everyone into the "National Unity" private room. Upon entering, everyone was stunned by the enormous dining table at its center.

Once all the relatives had taken their seats, Shen Guofu picked up the microphone from the table. He thanked his friends and family, and then lavishly praised Lin Xu.

"Yueyue and Xiao Xu hit it off back in college. However, they both approached their relationship very cautiously and only truly got together after graduation..."

Yes, that needs to be explained clearly, he thought. To prevent anyone from saying later that his daughter rushed into an engagement right after graduating.

After Shen Guofu sat down, Lin Hongqi also stood up to give a speech. Old Lin had previously worked at the Investment Promotion Bureau, responsible for receiving foreign investors, so he was no stranger to such formal occasions. Furthermore, since this marriage alliance was agreeable to both families, the atmosphere was naturally very harmonious.

When all the requisite pleasantries had been exchanged, the banquet officially began.

First, various cold appetizers were served. Each type of appetizer was presented on four separate plates, placed simultaneously at the four corners of the large table. This was done to prevent the awkward situation where guests seated earlier might finish a dish before it could be rotated to those seated further along, leaving them with an empty plate.

After the cold appetizers were served, Lin Xu quietly got up, intending to head to the kitchen to start on the dishes he was responsible for. Just as he reached the door of the private room, he saw a pile of parting gifts stacked at the entrance.

There were "Queen's Gifts" from Building 2, "Prime Minister's Gifts" from Building 10, "President's Gifts" from Building 6, and "Saudi King's Gifts" from Building 15, among others. These were all gifts prepared for various international dignitaries who had previously stayed at the Fishing Platform, intended for them upon their departure.

To bolster his junior brother's standing, Xie Baomin had gathered all these pre-prepared parting gifts from the various buildings.

Xie Baomin explained, "Previously, Mr. Shen said one gift per family would be enough. But these parting gifts are too rare. When I mentioned it to Master just now, he immediately scolded me. He insisted on one for each person, so the bride's family can't say we're being stingy!"

"Thank you! Thank you, Senior Brother! And please thank Master for me!" Lin Xu said gratefully.

Today was Lin Xu's engagement ceremony, yet Xie Baomin seemed to be the busiest person there.

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Not only did he bring Chef Dai and several other head chefs to greet the guests upon their arrival, but he was also in charge of all the dishes for the engagement banquet. Now, even the parting gifts for the departing guests were already prepared.

Brothers couldn't do any better, right?

"Thanks for what? This is all part of the job... Aren't you supposed to go to the kitchen to prepare your dish? Go ahead. I'll finish these parting gifts and join you later."

Upon entering the kitchen, Lin Xu first finished making the Crystal Sugar Pork Hock and had a waiter serve it. Then, he began preparing the Qingshui Furong.

In the private room, when the Crystal Sugar Pork Hock was brought to the table, Shen Baobao stood up with a microphone and said, "Grandma, weren't you craving the Crystal Sugar Pork Hock made by Xu Bao? He came early today to make it, saying that our family gathering wouldn't be perfect without this dish."

Upon hearing this, Old Madam Shen was all smiles. "Good child, truly a good child... Yueyue, you mustn't bully him in the future, alright?"

Shen Jiayue: ?????? Huh? Are you all siding with him?

After expressing her feelings, Old Madam Shen said to Old Madam Han, who was sitting beside her, "Come and taste your grandson-in-law's cooking. It's much more delicious than what I make."

Old Madam Han wore gold-rimmed glasses and was usually very serious. But today, hearing how affectionate her grandson-in-law was, she happily picked up her chopsticks. With a gentle pinch, the pork hock's skin broke. She lifted a piece of the pork hock skin to her mouth.

After chewing twice, Old Madam Han exclaimed, "This skill is truly amazing, so delicious... Shuzhen, remember to bring Little Xu to our house on the weekend. He hasn't formally visited our home yet."

Han Shuzhen said with a smile, "If you want to eat his cooking, just say so directly..."

Old Madam Han glared at her daughter, then joined Old Madam Shen in eating the pork hock.

The others also tried it and all complimented Lin Xu's delicious pork hock.

"I thought it would be very greasy, but it's perfectly balanced."

"This flavor is simply divine."

"Delicious, so delicious! When Lin Ji's Food opens, will they serve this dish? If they do, I'd eat it even if it costs a thousand yuan per serving!"

"I have to admit, his skill is too amazing!"

"Xinxin, do you want to learn?"

"I'd better not. It would definitely be a disaster..."

While everyone was discussing in the private room, Lin Xu, busy in the kitchen, heard the system notification:

"The host has successfully made a Perfect Level Crystal Sugar Pork Hock that satisfied Old Madam Shen, completing the side mission [Crystal Sugar Pork Hock]. Reward: one Seafood Dish Upgrade Card. Congratulations to the host."

Phew... I finally completed the task. Lin Xu breathed a sigh of relief.

He immediately used this Dish Upgrade Card on the Chopped Pepper Fish Head.

Although I really want to upgrade the spicy crawfish, Lin Ji's Food is a large restaurant. Compared to spicy crawfish, which is highly popular at street stalls, Chopped Pepper Fish Head is a better seller for a restaurant like this. As for the spicy crawfish... I'll just make it when I get another task for it. With Dundun around, why worry about upgrades?

Once everything was ready, he found a few waitresses and had them help carry the prepared basins and Clear Soup to the private room.

Once inside the private room, Lin Xu carefully inverted the cups, which were tightly packed with Furong Chicken Slices, into six basins. He arranged them evenly on the lazy Susan, even intentionally stopping its rotation for better effect.

After setting everything up, six waitresses, each carrying a kettle of Clear Soup, poured the soup along the rim of each basin, stopping when it reached the marked line.

At that moment, everyone pulled out their phones, aiming them at the dishes on the table. No one spoke; no one was impatient. They all quietly waited for the moment the 'flower' would bloom.

Soon, the 'flowers' absorbed the Clear Soup, their 'petals' slightly parting and then blossoming open.

"Wow! It's so beautiful!"

"Nephew-in-law, how on earth did you do that?"

"I can hardly believe it! It actually blooms on its own."

"Beautiful, beautiful... but why didn't you snap your fingers today?"

"Isn't this dish sound-controlled?"

"..."

Hearing his relatives' questions, Lin Xu smiled and said, "It utilizes the absorbent properties of the Furong Chicken Slices. It has nothing to do with snapping my fingers."

Shen Baobao's uncle, Chen Yuejin, frowned. "That girl, Little Yan, was so adamant yesterday, telling me it was controlled by finger snaps! It made me practice snapping my fingers all night... Where is she? Why didn't she come?"

"Sister Yan said she had to go on a business trip for work and couldn't make it."

Upon hearing this, Chen Yan's mother, Shen Guofang, immediately said, "If she can't make it, then she can't make it. Dear relatives, I have a favor to ask. If you know any suitable young men, please don't forget our Yan'er. She's already thirty and still doesn't have a partner. It's making me sick with worry..."

Lin Xu and Shen Baobao looked down and chuckled.

Sister Yan is still so naive. Does she think she can avoid this public 'execution' just by not showing up? Impossible. Don't forget, relatives are masters of 'judgment in absentia'.

As he was thinking, Shen Baobao tugged at Lin Xu's fingers and whispered in his ear, "Hubby~~~~"

Lin Xu turned his hand and held hers, interlocking their fingers as he replied, "Wifey!"

"Heehee, let's never be apart, for all of eternity, okay?"

"Okay!"

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After admiring the blossoming flowers, the relatives contentedly put down their phones, picked up their spoons, and tentatively began tasting the Qingshui Furong.

They had all initially thought that such a crystal-clear broth would taste very bland.

However, upon tasting it, they were instantly captivated by its savory depth.

"Oh, this soup is exceptionally delicious and fresh!"

"Yes, it's so savory it could knock your eyebrows off! Simply unimaginable."

"It's delicious, truly delicious!"

"It looks like plain water, but who knew it could taste so rich."

"This culinary skill is just amazing."

"..."

Soon after, Lin Xu's White Jade Lotus Root Strips were also served.

This prompted yet another wave of amazement from the relatives.

Mrs. Shen was particularly satisfied with Lin Xu's cooking skills and said cheerfully to Mrs. Han, "Congratulations on having such an excellent grandson-in-law."

Mrs. Han returned the compliment in kind, "Congratulations to you too for having such a wonderful grandson-in-law!"

While the two elderly ladies were enjoying themselves, the Giant Grouper dishes began to arrive.

Braised Fish Lips, Salt and Pepper Fish Segments, Stir-Fried Fish Fillet, Crispy Fried Fish Intestines, Garlic-Exploded Fish Liver, Dry-Fried Fish Belly, Stewed Fish Backbone, Clear Soup Fish Balls, Steamed Fish Belly, Black Bean Sauce Fish Tail, Crispy Fried Fish Fillet...

A single fish was transformed into twenty or thirty different dishes, each portioned onto four plates.

With over a hundred dishes now served, the table finally looked bountiful.

By this time, Xie Baomin and the others, having finished their work, also came in. Xie Baomin first made a round of toasts to everyone before taking his seat to eat.

The executive chef of Fishing Platform had personally cooked and then went around offering toasts with a wine glass. This made Shen Guofu's relatives all the more satisfied with Lin Xu.

Whether Lin Xu was wealthy was, for the moment, beside the point. Such connections and networking alone set him far apart from ordinary people.

And let's not forget, in the corner sat a renowned calligrapher, currently vying with his granddaughter for food.

Although the Shen Family had many wealthy relatives, not a single one of them could have invited such a calligrapher to this kind of event.

Before their arrival, Shen Guofu had repeatedly warned his relatives not to look down on the Lin Family for being poor or for not being locals.

But now...

How could we dare look down on them? It's good enough that *we* aren't the ones being looked down upon!

Lin Xu, holding his chopsticks, tried each dish one by one.

It must be said, buying a Giant Grouper for such a banquet was quite a good deal. The creature was meaty all over, and one large Giant Grouper easily yielded over a hundred dishes.

And each part tasted completely different.

The Fish Intestines were crisp, the Fish Liver delicate, the belly meat rich, and the Fish Fillet juicy.

As they were eating, Chen Meijuan took out a few jewelry boxes from her bag and handed them to Shen Baobao, "Yueyue, according to the customs back in our hometown, the engagement requires the giving

of 'three golds.' I took some time to buy these for you the day before yesterday. Try them on and see what you think."

In Beijing, an engagement simply meant the two families having a meal together.

However, in the Central Plains, there was a tradition where the groom's family gave the bride three pieces of gold jewelry.

Although Shen Guofu had previously declined, Chen Meijuan was resolute. Other daughters-in-law received such gifts, so her own perfect daughter-in-law, Shen Baobao, absolutely had to have them too—and hers had to be even better!

Shen Baobao hadn't expected to receive three gold gifts in addition to red envelopes for her engagement. She quickly thanked Chen Meijuan and happily opened the jewelry boxes.

The first box contained a platinum necklace.

A diamond was embedded in the four-leaf clover pendant, sparkling under the light.

"Wow, it's so beautiful! I love it!"

Saying that, Shen Baobao swiftly put it around her neck.

After putting it on, she checked her reflection using her phone's front camera. It really looked beautiful!

The second jewelry box contained a charming platinum bracelet, encircled with a row of small diamonds, equally sparkling.

Shen Baobao unceremoniously slipped it onto her wrist.

After taking a few photos of her fair wrist with her phone, she opened the third jewelry box.

Inside was a pair of platinum diamond rings.

"Perfect, one for each of us," Shen Baobao thought.

She slid the ring onto her left ring finger. It was a perfect fit and matched the bracelet beautifully. Her mother-in-law had great taste in picking jewelry.

Once her ring was on, she urged Lin Xu to put on his.

After they both wore their rings, they put their hands together, showing off both rings, and then took a photo to post under the Lin Ji's Food online topic.

"We got engaged today! Can we get some blessings?"

No sooner had they posted it than comments began flooding in:

"Wishing you a harmonious union for a hundred years!"

"Wishing you grow old together!"

"Wishing you everlasting love!"

"Wishing you a joyful and content life!"

"Have five kids!"

"Have six kids!"

"Have seven kids!"

...

While Shen Baobao was busy liking the netizens' comments, Lin Xu, led by Shen Guofu, began toasting the relatives, wine glass in hand.

The relatives, in turn, toasted them back.

The atmosphere was very harmonious.

「After the meal.」

Waitstaff entered in single file, cleared the table of dishes and drinks, and then served everyone a specially supplied internal tea.

The relatives chatted for a while longer.

Then, they rose and prepared to leave.

However, as they were leaving the private room, they found a pile of parting gifts at the doorway.

The front desk manager of Building Number Ten and several waitstaff were responsible for distributing them; every guest, adult and child alike, received one.

"These parting gifts are usually reserved for foreign heads of state or leaders who have stayed here; you can't buy them outside," Xie Baomin explained. "Thank you all again for attending my junior's engagement banquet. This is just a small token of our appreciation."

Dai Jianli also meticulously explained the differences between the various parting gifts, allowing everyone to choose for themselves.

This gesture thoroughly impressed the Shen Family's relatives.

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Tan Yajun took one and said half-jokingly, "This gift is really rare. I should have brought my wife and kids along."

Shen Guofu stuffed another one into his hands. "You're Yueyue's leader and also the first boss who supported Lin Xu. You deserve a double portion!"

Tan Yajun didn't stand on ceremony with him. After taking it, he said to Lin Xu, "Lin Ji better start business soon. The employees at the audit office can't eat the dishes you make; they're losing their motivation to work. From now on, whenever the audit office gets training work, it should tie up with Lin Ji."

"Thanks, Uncle Tan."

"What's there to thank? This is what I should do."

Relatives, each carrying a gift, left Building Ten. They were all praising the Shen Family for finding a good son-in-law and Yueyue for finding a good match.

When most people had left, Old Madame Shen stood up from the restaurant's sofa with Dundun in her arms, preparing to leave as well. During the meal, Xie Baomin had specifically steamed a piece of Dragon meat for Dundun. The little guy now had bits of meat all over his whiskers. After having his fill, he washed his face and was now curling up in the old lady's arms, dozing off.

"Mom, is he heavy? Shall I carry him?" Han Shuzhen, the grandma, hadn't had a chance to pet Dundun yet today. Seeing the old lady walking shakily with the little one, she hurried over to take him.

"No worries, no worries. I'll hold him for a bit longer. This little guy really is like a child. He was purring in my arms just now, even softly mumbling in his sleep."

Han Shuzhen would have been fine not hearing that, but it made her want to hold little Dundun even more.

After all the relatives had left, the Shen family also got into their cars, ready to head back. Knowing that there would inevitably be drinks today, Shen Guofu had specially arranged for a few drivers to come from the company.

Sure enough, following the engagement banquet, Lin Xu, Lin Hongqi, and Shen Guofu had each had some liquor. Chen Meijuan and Han Shuzhen had tried some special red wine served to heads of state at Fishing Platform. Only Shen Baobao had drunk juice mixed in-house at Building Ten.

Soon, the drivers brought around the G63 Lin Xu drove, the Bentley Shen Guofu drove, and the Alphard Old Madame Shen rode in. Pulling open the car doors, just as everyone was about to get in, Xie Baomin and Dai Jianli brought over the remaining gifts and packed them into the trunk of the G63.

"Aren't you heading back to your hometown, junior brother? Take these with you. Let the folks back home also taste our Fishing Platform's craft."

Lin Xu thanked him.

Xie Baomin said with a smile, "We're brothers; it's strange to talk like that. Just now, your sister-in-law was praising how beautiful the bride Lin Xu found is. She also had me remind you to visit our house when you're free."

"Sure, sure. Yueyue and I will visit you and sister-in-law once we're back from our hometown."

As they were speaking, Guo Xinghai came over from the restaurant with a bag. "Lin Xu, there are still a few pounds of Dragon meat left. Take them with you."

Oh? They had made over a hundred dishes, and there was still some left? But considering that almost every dish with Giant Grouper also had other ingredients, some even purposely made with pork belly, not pure Dragon meat, it wasn't unusual that some remained.

He took it, said goodbye to everyone, and then got in the car.

"Old Lin, if you're free this afternoon, come over to my place for some tea and familiarize yourself with the house."

Lin Xu and his wife rode in the G63. Han Shuzhen and Chen Meijuan got into the Bentley. Shen Guofu, not wanting to sit in the passenger seat, pulled Lin Hongqi into Old Madame Shen's Alphas.

Before Lin Hongqi could respond, Old Madame Shen, holding Dundun, spoke first, "Come over to our house, Hongqi. You've truly raised a good son."

Since the old lady had spoken, they naturally had to visit.

Upon hearing this, Shen Guofu immediately called the housekeeper at the villa. "Turn on the air conditioning in the living room. Also, fetch the top-quality Da Hong Pao from my study to brew. We will have esteemed guests soon."

Lin Hongqi said with a smile, "We're all family; there's no need for such formality."

"That's not right, Old Brother Lin. Precisely because we're family, we need to enjoy ourselves properly."

The cars sped all the way to the Shen family's villa. The drivers unloaded the gifts from the trunks and temporarily placed them in the villa's cold storage. These snacks were delicate and shouldn't be left in the heat for long.

After these tasks were done, Lin Xu, carrying the piece of Dragon meat, walked into the villa and turned to ask his mom, "We still have a few pounds of Dragon meat left. What's the best way to eat it?"

"Make dumplings!"

To people from North China, whether it's during festivals or family celebrations, a meal doesn't seem complete without dumplings. The varieties of dumplings are also numerous. Almost all ingredients can end up wrapped in dumpling dough at some point. Now, it was the Giant Grouper's turn.

Upon hearing they were making dumplings, Han Shuzhen, who wasn't much of a cook, instantly perked up. "What ingredients do we need? I'll have the maid fetch them now. There were so many people at noon, I felt like I didn't eat enough. I've been thinking about having something tasty for dinner."

Chen Meijuan said with a smile, "Let me see what we have at home. It's only making dumplings; we don't need to prepare anything special."

As the maid began pouring tea, Chen Meijuan followed Han Shuzhen into the kitchen. Aunt Liu, the chef, had the day off today, which fortunately avoided another competitive showdown. In the large vacuum refrigerator in the kitchen, a wide array of ingredients was clearly visible.

Seeing that there was shepherd's purse, Chen Meijuan said, "Then let's make shepherd's purse filling. It's not as overpowering as chives or fennel, so it's perfect for bringing out the deliciousness of the Dragon meat. We'll add some lard when making the filling; it'll taste absolutely fabulous."

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As she said this, Director Han became even more eager, "Then I'm definitely looking forward to eating it, Meijuan. If you need help, just let me know."

"No need for help, I can handle it all by myself."

It was still too early to start making dumplings, so Chen Meijuan put the Dragon meat in the refrigerator to chill, planning to start wrapping them around three or four o'clock. That way, the dumplings could be made and cooked fresh, which would make them taste even better.

While the two sets of parents sat in the living room, chatting over tea, Lin Xu was led upstairs by Shen Baobao.

They closed the door.

Just as Lin Xu was about to give his beloved Baobao a kiss, Shen Baobao threw the tote bag full of red envelopes onto the bed, kicked off her slip-on shoes, and dove onto the bed, urging, "Don't just stand there, hurry up and come here!"

After saying that, she dumped out all the red envelopes from the bag and casually opened one to start counting the money inside.

Lin Xu was speechless. You pulled me up here just to count red envelopes?

He laughed and sat on the edge of the bed, taking a red envelope and starting to open it.

The Shen Family was wealthy, and the red envelopes they gave were quite unique, generally containing specific auspicious amounts like 6,666, 8,888, or 9,999—rather than simple round figures. Several of the elders even gave five-figure sums. This caused Shen Baobao some trouble in her task of counting money.

Besides cash, there were also red envelopes that contained bank cards or various sorts of gold jewelry. For example, Chen Yan's mother, Shen Guofang, gave an engagement gift of a gold bar numbered with Shen Baobao's birthday, weighing 200 grams—feeling quite hefty in hand.

"Finally finished counting, so tiring!"

Shen Jiayue massaged her sore wrists, forced herself to perk up, and started to put away the stacks of money on the bed, preparing to lock them in the room's safe. However, seeing Lin Xu lying beside her, the girl immediately slumped to the side. "Ah, I'm dying... in urgent need of mouth-to-mouth..."

Lin Xu chuckled, rolled over to lie face to face with Shen Baobao, and soon they were kissing, not parting until their breaths grew short.

After the life-saving mouth-to-mouth, Shen Baobao's spirits were lifted again.

She opened the large wardrobe in the room, and it was only then that Lin Xu saw the small fridge-sized safe similar to those in hotels.

"Is everything in here money?"

"Not at all, they're just some things I've collected."

After entering the password, Lin Xu leaned closer to have a look and found all kinds of quirky items inside: a stack of photos, a very familiar basketball wristband, and other various knick-knacks. This is...

He looked at the pictures. The first one was of himself sleeping on a desk, drooling. The second was Shen Baobao taking a selfie next to his sleeping self, flashing a peace sign. His own unflattering sleeping face and the quirky Shen Baobao made for a stark contrast. The third was him wearing a basketball uniform, playing on the court...

With each photo, Lin Xu was reminded of the little moments from his school days. He wrapped his arm around Shen Baobao's slender waist and teased, "You've secretly taken so many photos, so you're a stalker pervert, huh?"

Shen Jiayue was speechless. Dare you talk about me like that, you stinker?

She rolled over and pinned Lin Xu to the carpet. Without a word, she began to kiss him passionately all over.

After a while, as the alcohol started to hit, Lin Xu lay down on the bed and fell deeply asleep. Shen Baobao lay beside him and, just like during their school days, she took a bunch of selfies with Lin Xu as her backdrop.

「Four o'clock in the afternoon.」

After waking up, Lin Xu spent some more time being affectionate with Shen Baobao before they went downstairs hand in hand, preparing to make dumplings in the kitchen.

It was only when they reached the living room that they realized his sister-in-law, Chen Yan, had arrived at some point.

Shen Baobao asked curiously, "Huh? How did you get here?"

"Auntie said there would be dumplings with Dragon meat tonight; I've never had them before, so I drove over to try..."

Chen Yan looked at the two of them, practically glued to each other, and wordlessly pursed her lips. Get rid of that lovey-dovey smell on you. It's enough to choke a person to death!

Lin Xu took a sip of the tea on the coffee table and then proceeded to the kitchen.

Seeing his mother had already prepared the dough for dumplings and was now mincing the filling, she said, "Your mother-in-law praised the wonton filling you made last time for being particularly delicious, so you should season the dumpling filling this time, and I'll just take care of mincing and rolling out the dough."

"Okay."

Lin Xu didn't stand on ceremony with his mother. He took the washed Scallion and Ginger to the side cutting board and sliced some Scallion and Ginger strands. Then, he put them in cold boiled water and squeezed them a few times, letting the juice from the Scallion and Ginger thoroughly infuse into the water.

By the time his mother had finished mincing the Dragon meat, the Scallion and Ginger water was also ready.

Lin Xu added some Light Soy Sauce to the meat filling, a little bit of oyster sauce, two teaspoons of salt, and a teaspoon of Five-Spice Powder, and mixed it all up to blend the seasonings evenly. He then slowly incorporated the Scallion and Ginger water into the meat filling.

"Son, why didn't you put any Cooking Wine?"

"You shouldn't put Cooking Wine in meat filling; it can easily turn sour. We should use Scallion and Ginger water instead. If the meat has a strong odor, we can also use Sichuan peppercorn water."

As his cooking experience grew, Lin Xu had summarized some of his knowledge. For example, no matter what kind of filling is being used, it is not appropriate to use Cooking Wine. This is because the wine cannot evaporate, so it can't remove the odd flavors from the fillings and will only make the meat turn sour. For instance, if you want the meat filling to gel, add salt. Otherwise, use a mixture of Scallion, Ginger, and salt water instead of salt granules.

When the meat filling was almost ready, Lin Xu added the chopped shepherd's purse and some white lard. Regardless of what kind of fish is being prepared, adding a bit of pork fat will definitely produce an unexpected effect.

Chapter 327: Still have a piece of Giant Grouper meat? Then let's make dumplings! Quick, I need artificial respiration!

After adding lard, adding some chicken fat will make the meat filling's flavor richer, much better than adding Chicken Essence or Flavoring.

After stirring well again, the dumpling Filling was ready.

Once the dough had rested, Chen Meijuan began to roll out the wrappers while Lin Xu prepared to fill the dumplings.

Just at this moment, Chen Yan and Shen Baobao came over to help. To avoid criticism, they both washed their hands meticulously.

Originally, with Chen Meijuan rolling the wrappers and Lin Xu filling the dumplings, they definitely could have finished before five o'clock.

But with the counterproductive help from the two "helpful assistants," it wasn't until six in the evening that all the dumplings were finally wrapped.

Lin Xu affectionately wiped the flour off Shen Baobao's face, saying, "Alright, go wash your hands and get ready to eat dumplings. Do you want sour soup or dry mix? If you want sour soup, I'll start preparing the Chili Vinegar now."

"Sour soup, sour soup! Last time Wu Kexin said the sour soup dumplings were super delicious, I've been wanting to try them."

"I'll have sour soup too!"

"Me too, me as well!"

"..."

With everyone wanting sour soup dumplings, Lin Xu hurriedly prepared some Chili Vinegar and let it cool, ready to be added to the dumpling broth later.

After the Chili Vinegar was ready, Lin Xu sliced some Potato Strips, washed them twice with clean water to remove the starch, then blanched them in boiling water before cooling them again in cold water.

He then drained the Potato Strips and placed them in a basin, seasoning them with Light Soy Sauce, fragrant vinegar, salt, and other condiments. He then sprinkled a small handful of dried chili sections on top and splashed hot oil over them. This created a dish of hot-oil-dressed Potato Strips, perfect to accompany the dumplings.

Apart from the Potato Strips, Lin Xu also made dishes like garlic butterfly shrimp, cold bitter chicory salad, sweet and sour cucumber strips, and refreshing radish strips.

By the time Chen Meijuan had finished cooking the dumplings, these side dishes were also ready.

Following the steps his master had used last time to make sour soup dumplings for Wu Kexin and Panda, he added dried shrimp, purple laver, Chili Vinegar, and dumpling broth to the bowls, then ladled the cooked dumplings into them.

A serving of sour soup Giant Grouper and shepherd's purse dumplings was ready.

After being brought to the dining table, Han Shuzhen, who had been eagerly awaiting, and the two "helpful assistants"—who had mostly been a hindrance—gathered around, ready to dig in.

"Wow, this smells delicious!"

"The side dishes are well made too. I can't believe you steamed a serving of shrimp in such a short time."

"These Potato Strips look quite unique; I'll have to eat several helpings."

While the three of them were murmuring to each other, Shen Guofu, who had been playing billiards with Lin Hongqi in the gym on the basement floor, also came over.

"Brother Lin, let's have a few more drinks tonight, eh? On a day of great celebration like today, it's not right to drink just once."

His in-law's words also stoked Lin Hongqi's craving for alcohol. "Dumplings with liquor," Lin Hongqi declared, "the more you drink, the more you enjoy! Let's have some then."

People who like to drink always find a multitude of reasons to drink, but Lin Xu, who didn't enjoy alcohol, took a seat next to Shen Baobao and his sister-in-law, preparing to drink fruit juice instead.

"Oh my, these dumplings are so flavorful!"

"Indeed, they're super tasty!"

"I thought one small bowl would be enough, but now it looks like I need two!"

"There are plenty of dumplings. I'll cook more for you once you finish."

"The side dishes are also delicious; they're the perfect complement to the dumplings."

The Giant Grouper meat was inherently very flavorful. Encased within the dumplings, this richness couldn't dissipate, making the taste even more intense.

Moreover, with lard added when preparing the Filling, the savory umami and fragrant aroma blended, creating an irresistible combination that made everyone want to eat more and more; they simply couldn't stop.

After the dumplings were eaten, the housekeeper came to clean up.

Shen Baobao pulled Lin Xu along, using "watching a movie" as an excuse to head down to the home theater.

As soon as they entered, this girl immediately wrapped her arms around Lin Xu's neck, exclaiming, "Quick, Baobao needs artificial respiration!"

Lin Xu was speechless.

You think I'm a breathing machine, huh?

He silently grumbled to himself, then leaned in for a kiss...

Chapter 328: Taking Shen Baobao back to the hometown! A series of unexpected encounters at the entrance of the scenic area! [Request for Monthly Ticket]

「Morning.」

After Lin Xu got up, his mother had already prepared their meal.

Today, they were having tofu pudding.

Last night, after returning from the Shen Family's place, Chen Meijuan had soaked some soybeans. In the morning, she used a soy milk machine to turn them into soy milk, filtered it, and then followed an online tutorial to make a smooth, fragrant tofu pudding.

Besides the tofu pudding, there were also small fried dough sticks, vegetable pastries, sugar cakes, and fried sliced steamed buns.

Well, they were going back to their hometown today. Instead of letting the leftover steamed buns in the fridge go to waste or get freezer burn, it was better to slice and fry them.

After washing up in the bathroom, Lin Xu sat down at the small dining room table.

"If you want it sweet, add sugar; if you want it salty, add the savory pickle relish."

Chen Meijuan handed him a pair of chopsticks and then continued eating.

Lin Xu looked at the bowl of tofu pudding and immediately added a spoonful of a savory topping stewed from soybeans, minced celery, and minced pickled vegetables. This was a common way of eating tofu pudding in the Central Plains, and this particular kind of topping was also frequently added to other local dishes like savory soybean porridge.

He stirred the tofu pudding and savory pickle relish in the bowl with a spoon and then took a bite.

The light fragrance of the tofu pudding and the savory aroma of the pickle relish combined perfectly. The soft soybeans and crisp minced celery enriched the tofu pudding's texture.

He picked up a small fried dough stick and took a bite with the pudding. It was absolutely wonderful!

After finishing a dough stick, Lin Xu tasted the vegetable pastries his mother had fried.

The filling of chives and eggs also contained chopped dried tofu and dried shrimp, lending it a delicious savory flavor. Paired with the pastry's crispy yet tender crust, it brought Lin Xu right back to the joy of savoring his mother's home cooking during school vacations.

Chen Meijuan muttered as she ate, "The weather forecast said it's going to be up to 40 degrees today. After we finish eating, we'll pick up Yueyue and leave."

This time, because they had to take Dundun, they couldn't take the high-speed train and had to drive back instead.

Beijing was over five hundred kilometers from Yinzhou.

Without traffic, they could get there in five or six hours.

After finishing a bowl of savory tofu pudding, Lin Xu served himself another. Then, betraying the savory camp, he added a spoonful of White Sugar to it.

He had a long drive ahead of him today. He couldn't eat too much salty food, or he'd easily get thirsty.

After eating and drinking their fill, they packed the clothes they needed. They also gathered a few of Dundun's favorite scratching boards and cat toys, brought his small blanket, and prepared a disposable litter box for the car so the little fellow could use the toilet on the way.

After Chen Meijuan tidied up the kitchen, she finished packing their luggage.

Once everything was ready, they turned off all the appliances in the house, locked the door, and went downstairs.

When they got downstairs, they loaded their things into the car. Chen Meijuan held Dundun, and she and Lin Hongqi sat in the back seat.

Lin Xu put on his sunglasses, drove out of the residential complex, and turned onto the North Fourth Ring road, heading towards the Shen Family villa.

Just as he arrived at the villa entrance, he saw Shen Baobao under the shade of a tree by the gate.

The girl had her hair in a high ponytail and was wearing a white baseball cap, a white T-shirt, denim shorts, and white sneakers. She was perched on a large suitcase covered in various cartoon stickers, idly gazing towards the intersection.

Seeing the car approach, she propped herself up with the suitcase handle, her long legs scrambling to move it towards the car. As she moved, she wailed dramatically, "Uwaah! You're finally here! My mom kicked me out early this morning and wouldn't let me stay in the house!"

Then you must have really annoyed your mother-in-law... Lin Xu silently grumbled to himself about Shen Baobao. He then got out of the car and put the suitcase she'd been riding into the trunk.

Afterward, he went into the Shen Family's house with his parents to bid farewell to his parents-in-law.

"Yueyue started packing before five this morning. If she couldn't find something, she'd start yelling. She nearly drove us crazy."

When the Lin Family of three entered, Han Shuzhen was eating a chicken breast sandwich, while Shen Guofu was grimacing as he drank his coix seed porridge.

Clearly, this "healthy" meal was making his father-in-law suffer.

Lin Xu went to the cold storage room and moved all the gifts they had stored there the previous day into the car.

While he was busy, Shen Guofu brought over two more cases of Moutai and some high-end sweets and other things, stuffing the trunk until it was completely full.

Seeing that his daughter was already in the front passenger seat with her seatbelt fastened, Shen Guofu instructed, "Be polite when you get to Yinzhou. Don't be as unruly as you are at home."

"I know, Dad! You and Mom behave at home too, okay? No sneaking snacks! I'll bring you back yummy treats when I return!"

"Alright, alright. You should set off now while it's still cool. It'll get hot later."

Once his parents were in the car, Lin Xu bid farewell to his parents-in-law, "Dad, Mom, we're leaving now. We'll call you to let you know we've arrived safely."

After they bid each other farewell, Lin Xu drove away.

Watching the car disappear into the distance, Han Shuzhen sighed softly, "Why do I feel so empty now that they've left?"

Shen Guofu chimed in from the side, "I feel empty too..."

Eating these diet meals is torture! Son-in-law, you all have to come back soon!

Lin Xu drove onto the West Fourth Ring road, found a gas station to fill up the tank, and then followed the GPS navigation onto the Beijing-Hong Kong-Macao Expressway, heading straight for Yinzhou.

"Woohoo! This is my first road trip with Xu Bao!"

Shen Baobao, in the front passenger seat, was as excited as Andy Dufresne escaping Shawshank, gesticulating wildly. One moment she was taking selfies by the window, the next she was turning around to tease Dundun in Chen Meijuan's arms. She simply couldn't stay still.

Chapter 329: Taking Shen Baobao Back to Hometown! Consecutive Encounters at the Entrance of the Scenic Area!

「Two o'clock in the afternoon.」

「At the entrance of the Longqi Mountain Scenic Area in Yinzhou City.」

Liu Zhengyu, having traveled from afar, was sitting in a sedan, reviewing information about the Longqi Mountain Scenic Area.

A staff member from the Yinzhou City Tourism Bureau sat in the front passenger seat. Seeing Liu Zhengyu's interest, he smiled and said, "President Liu, I'm acquainted with Old Lin from this scenic area. How about I give him a call now and have him come out to welcome you?"

The sudden visit by a high-ranking official from the National Tourism Administration's Scenic Area Rating Committee made this staff member somewhat nervous, unsure whether it was a good or bad thing.

That Old Lin you mentioned is still in Beijing right now... Liu Zhengyu muttered to himself, then said, "No need. I'll buy a ticket later and inspect the software and hardware facilities inside. If they're up to standard, we'll issue them the 4A license in the near future. You all can head back; I expect I'll be here until dark."

Although the scenic area wasn't large, he needed to inspect several key attractions, such as Pan Rock, the Cliff Hotel, and the Tent Base.

Well, even if I were to help Lin Xu by pulling some strings, it would have to be on the condition that the scenic area meets the quality standards.

After declining the Tourism Bureau staff member's offer to accompany him, Liu Zhengyu opened the car door and stepped out.

Once the Tourism Bureau's car had departed, he slung his bag over his shoulder and strode towards the scenic area's ticket office.

It was the hottest time of day, so there weren't many people buying tickets; just a few children wearing swim rings, squeezed by the ticket window with their parents. They looked like they were preparing to go to the water park within the scenic area.

As an authority in tourism, Liu Zhengyu knew very well that despite many online complaints about how internet-famous attractions supposedly devalue a scenic area, for most sites, these attractions were actually the high-profit ventures. The water park, for instance. Besides allowing children to cool off, it also boosted sales of related merchandise like swimsuits, swim caps, swim rings, and water guns. This all translated into profit.

While he was reflecting on this, the parents with the children had already purchased their tickets and were heading with them towards the main entrance of the scenic area.

Liu Zhengyu approached the ticket window and said to the attendant inside, "One ticket, please."

The ticket seller was a girl in her twenties. She asked without looking up, "Did you drive here?"

"No."

"Without a parking fee, the total is thirty-nine yuan and ninety cents. Twenty-nine yuan and ninety cents for the entrance ticket, and ten yuan for insurance."

Upon hearing this, Liu Zhengyu promptly scanned the payment code with his phone.

While waiting for his ticket to print, he heard the sound of brakes screeching at the entrance of the ticket office, followed by two honks from a car horn.

The ticket seller immediately pulled open the window and shouted outside, "Third Aunt, you've finally arrived! I'm busy right now. Let me finish printing this ticket, and then we can talk!"

Liu Zhengyu smiled faintly. Small scenic areas are often like this; the staff aren't professionally trained and tend to be rather informal. But Longqi Mountain was already doing quite well. Last year, when he visited a newly developed scenic area for inspection, the ticket seller there was busy peeling peanuts while also issuing tickets, showing no professionalism whatsoever.

Just as he was thinking this, he turned his head and saw Lin Xu walking into the ticket office carrying a box of snacks.

When their eyes met, expressions of surprise appeared on both their faces.

"Eh? President Liu?"

"Lin Xu?"

What's going on? Lin Xu was quite astonished. If he hadn't just participated in the food competition the day before yesterday, he would hardly have believed he could bump into the President of the National Tourism Association here.

Liu Zhengyu wasn't secretive. Patting the documents in his hand, he said, "I saw that your family's scenic area submitted its 4A application quite a while ago, but it hadn't been reviewed yet. Since this falls under my purview, I came to personally inspect it. If everything is satisfactory, you could receive your 4A license as early as next week."

"Oh my, that's wonderful! Thank you so much, President Liu. My parents were just discussing the approval process on our way here."

At this point, Lin Hongqi and Chen Meijuan also got out of the car. They hadn't expected to run into Liu Zhengyu here either. Upon hearing that he had come to review their scenic area, Lin Hongqi hurried over to shake his hand.

Chen Meijuan, meanwhile, called out towards the ticket window, "Yuanyuan, quickly refund him for the ticket."

"Sure, Third Aunt. Where's Lin Xu's wife? The whole family is waiting inside. My grandma and Grandma Lin have prepared a huge spread. They said no one is allowed to eat until you arrive. I've just been nibbling on a small roll to keep from starving..."

Chen Yuanyuan was Lin Xu's maternal cousin, twenty-five this year. She used to work as a cashier in a large supermarket in Yinzhou City. After the scenic area's business picked up, she came to work as a ticket seller here.

"Oh, my poor niece, you've really been put out. Here, take this box of snacks. It's from the Fishing Platform, the kind they serve to foreign presidents; ordinary people can't buy it..."

Chen Yuanyuan had initially wanted to refuse, but upon hearing her aunt mention how precious it was, she quickly accepted it and reverently placed it inside a locked drawer.

While they were chatting, Lin Hongqi retrieved the keys to his Toyota Prado from the ticket office and planned to drive Liu Zhengyu into the scenic area. He had come all this way, and for such an important matter as the scenic area's rating; they absolutely had to show him proper hospitality.

"We're heading in now, Yuanyuan. I'll have someone bring you something to eat in a bit."

"Okay, Third Aunt. You all go ahead."

Chen Yuanyuan had wanted to get a look at her new cousin-in-law, but when she peeked, she saw that his wife hadn't gotten out of the car. So, she sent a message in the family group chat: "Third Aunt is back! I haven't seen Lin Xu's new wife yet. Remember to send me a photo later. I'm not allowed to eat the good food yet, but you have to at least let me see what she looks like, right?"

Chapter 330: Taking Shen Baobao Back to Hometown! Consecutive Encounters at the Entrance of the Scenic Area!

Lin Xu returned to his car and nudged Shen Jiayue, who was still fast asleep in the passenger seat.

"Stop sleeping, Baobao, wipe off your drool. We're about to meet my family's elders."

Shen Baobao, deep in her slumber, jerked awake upon hearing this. She looked around and then said in a daze, "Are we here already? Wow, this place is beautiful!"

But the thought of meeting the Lin Family's elders had her quickly pulling out a small mirror from her bag, checking her reflection, wiping clean the saliva at the corner of her mouth, and tidying the hair at her temples.

After Lin Hongqi and Chen Meijuan drove in with Liu Zhengyu, Lin Xu was preparing to follow when he saw a business van with a Beijing license plate, covered in dust, approaching from the rearview mirror.

Hmm? Could it be another acquaintance from Beijing?

He waited for a moment. As the vehicle drew closer, he recognized Zeng Xiaoqi sitting in the passenger seat at a glance. This...

He opened his door, stepped out, and waved to Zeng Xiaoqi in the passenger seat.

Zeng Xiaoqi, who had just woken up, saw someone waving in the distance and mumbled to the driver with a smile, "I've been really craving Boss Lin's cooking recently; I see him in everyone. Look at the person waving up ahead; he looks so much like Boss Lin... Hey, isn't that him?"

When they reached the ticket office entrance, Zeng Xiaoqi got out of the car.

After exchanging pleasantries, Lin Xu asked, "Have you guys eaten yet?"

"Not yet. The GPS led us to the wrong place earlier, and we just found our way here."

"Let's go then. My grandmothers have prepared a big spread of food. Let's go in and eat first. Driver, just follow my car in."

After everyone got back into their cars, Lin Xu drove, leading the TV station's interview van to the scenic area's main entrance. Once he honked the horn, his maternal uncle, who was responsible for watching the gate, hurried over to greet him. Lin Xu handed over a pack of Zhonghua cigarettes he had prepared in advance.

"We're going inside to eat, Uncle. We'll chat after the meal."

"Go on, go on. Everyone at home is waiting."

After driving in, Lin Xu drove past the tourist center and turned into a courtyard with a sign for a farmhouse restaurant. This was one of the scenic area's restaurants, specializing in farmhouse cuisine. At this time, Lin Family relatives were under the shade of trees in the yard, some sitting, some standing, chatting while enjoying the mountain breeze.

When Lin Xu's car pulled in, all the relatives gathered around.

"He's here, he's here! Xiao Xu has finally arrived!"

"We've all been anxiously waiting!"

"Where are the two grandmothers? Weren't they just chattering about their grandson's wife? Quick, find them. Our guests have come from so far; we mustn't neglect them."

"Exactly. They've traveled such a long way. It would be awful if we were cold or neglectful. That would make them feel terrible."

"The red envelopes? Are they all ready?"

"..."

When Lin Xu got out of the car and saw the relatives crowding around, he quickly greeted everyone. He then went around to the other side of the car to put an arm around Shen Baobao, who looked a bit panicked.

"Yueyue, this is my eldest maternal uncle."

"Hello, Eldest Maternal Uncle!"

"Hey, hello, hello! This is a red envelope from your eldest maternal uncle. It's just a small token."

"Thank you, Eldest Maternal Uncle!"

"Yueyue, this is my second maternal uncle."

"Hello, Second Maternal Uncle!"

"..."

The proceedings were pretty much the same as Lin Xu's first visit to the Shen Family; he just had to greet each person in turn. However, the difference was that Lin Xu hadn't received any red envelopes at the Shen Family last time, whereas now Shen Baobao's hands held a stack of them.

While they were exchanging pleasantries, Lin Xu's grandmothers came over. The two elderly ladies, chattering about their 'grandson's wife'—each using their own term for her—pulled red envelopes from their pockets.

After greeting them again, just as everyone was about to go inside, Lin Xu suddenly heard scratching noises on the glass. He turned to realize that Dundun, the little guy, was still in the car. He hurriedly opened the car door to carry the little one out.

At the sight of him, Lin Xu's grandmother couldn't hide her delight. "Oh, this little guy, looking all clever and mischievous! Come here and let me hold you."

As she reached out, Dundun immediately leaned out from Lin Xu's arms. The old lady delightedly took Dundun and held him close.

By this time, Zeng Xiaoqi and her companions had already gotten out of the car, while Lin Hongqi and Chen Meijuan also led Liu Zhengyu, who had finished looking around the tourist center, into the courtyard of the farmhouse restaurant.

After the introductions, Lin Hongqi said, "We're all starving, so let's eat and talk. President Liu, Reporter Zeng, I'm afraid this humble meal is a bit simple, please don't mind."

Liu Zhengyu and Zeng Xiaoqi quickly replied with polite remarks.

Arriving at the dining room, they saw several tables had already been set, with the hot dishes covered by inverted bowls and plates to keep them warm. After all the covers were removed, everyone took their seats and began to eat. Both the visitors from afar and the Lin Family relatives were famished by this time. Once seated, they picked up their chopsticks and started eating.

The dishes on the table consisted mainly of wild mountain greens, accompanied by pork from well-fattened farm-raised pigs or free-range chickens. Whether pan-fried, stir-fried, braised, or deep-fried, the flavors were surprisingly delightful, and Shen Baobao ate with great relish.

Liu Zhengyu, Zeng Xiaoqi, and the others also ate happily. Initially, seeing the plain appearance of the dishes, they hadn't expected them to taste very good. But upon tasting them, they discovered these unpretentious farmhouse dishes were exceptionally delicious, possessing flavors that even renowned restaurants in Beijing couldn't replicate.

No wonder city dwellers love eating at farmhouse restaurants; these flavors are truly out of the ordinary... Liu Zhengyu mused as he ate.

As a foodie, he had sampled delicacies from many places. In the past, however, he had mostly eaten at formal restaurants and grand hotels. Now it seemed to him that the cuisine of such establishments was rather limited. The flavors of these farmhouse dishes were in no way inferior, and their ingredients were even more distinctive.

"Lin Xu's wife is really stunning!"

"Indeed, so beautiful. I think she's prettier than those online celebrities who use beauty filters."

"Our Lin Xu is handsome too, right? The two of them look so well-matched sitting together."

"It's true; they look like celebrities."

"She's much prettier than celebrities. Remember when we saw some celebrities in the city last time? They looked great in online photos, but in reality, their skin was rough and sallow, they had faces full of blemishes, and short legs—no taller than one meter fifty-something. They can't compare to Lin Xu's wife at all."

"..."

During the meal, the relatives continued to shower Lin Xu and Shen Jiayue with compliments. Shen Baobao felt a bit embarrassed by all the praise.

While they were eating, Lin Xu noticed Dundun had wandered off to a corner by himself, so he went over to take a look. Upon closer inspection, he discovered a basin in the corner filled with live shrimp, and they were quite large. Dundun was currently using his paws to bat at the Large Shrimp in the water.

"Grandma, what are these Large Shrimp for?" Lin Xu asked curiously, scooping Dundun into his arms to prevent the little guy from splashing water everywhere.

Hearing him mention the Large Shrimp, Lin Xu's grandmother suddenly recalled, "Oh dear, those are the live shrimp your eldest maternal uncle brought this morning! He said they're best cooked fresh, but I got so busy I completely forgot... How about I make a dish with them now? It's Little Yueyue's first visit to our home; we can't neglect her, can we?"

Lin Xu said, "Please, Grandma, you stay seated and eat. I can cook them. Besides, it'll give all the elders and relatives a chance to taste my cooking."

At the mention of cooking, the relatives suddenly remembered that Lin Xu had just won the championship in a competition the day before yesterday.

"Oh, then I absolutely must try Xiao Xu's cooking!"

"Me too! I have to taste how delicious a champion's dishes are."

"Wasn't President Liu the head judge back then? President Liu, is Xiao Xu's cooking really that good?"

Liu Zhengyu was currently eating chicken braised with bamboo shoots. Hearing this, he smiled and said, "He's the most skilled young cook I've ever met. To be honest, one of the main reasons I came all this way and got involved was to taste his cooking again."

When they heard their family member being praised so highly, all the relatives were overjoyed.

"Xiao Xu, President Liu has praised you so highly. What dish are you planning to prepare today?"

Lin Xu looked at the basin of live shrimp and, with a smile, announced the name of a dish that had to be prepared with fresh shrimp, "Oil Braised Large Shrimp!"