

Culinary 331

Chapter 331: The Tricks and Secrets of Cooking Oil Braised Large Shrimp! Dundun's Desire for Revenge!

"Oil Braised Large Shrimp?"

Upon hearing the name of the dish, their relatives all revealed looks of anticipation.

It wasn't that they found the dish unusual; on the contrary, at celebrations for weddings and funerals in the Central Plains, Oil Braised Large Shrimp was a common sight. It was precisely because they ate it often that everyone wanted to compare Lin Xu's version to the ones typically served at celebrations and see if there was any difference.

Currently, the farmhouse restaurant in the scenic area was managed by Lin Xu's second uncle-in-law, Shi Wenming. He was a chef for village banquets in nearby towns. With business in the scenic area booming, he had recently taken charge of the farmhouse restaurant.

When he heard his nephew was going to make Oil Braised Large Shrimp, Shi Wenming immediately put down his wine glass and walked over, asking, "What seasonings do you need? I'll get them ready. Do you want tomato sauce? We just opened a big can in the kitchen, and we have Rice Vinegar too, also freshly opened."

Lin Xu smiled and shook his head. "Second Uncle-in-law, for the Oil Braised Large Shrimp I'm making, I use neither tomato sauce nor Rice Vinegar, yet it will definitely taste better than the versions made with them."

In the Central Plains, the Large Shrimp consumed are usually frozen, not fresh live shrimp. Hence, when making Oil Braise, Rice Vinegar or tomato sauce is often added to create a sweet and sour flavor, which helps mask any unfresh taste and texture of the shrimp. However, in reality, true Oil Braised Large Shrimp doesn't require these condiments.

Upon learning the method was different, Shi Wenming became curious. "Then how do you make it?" he asked. "May I watch? This doesn't involve any state secrets from the State Guesthouse, does it?"

As a chef, he was always curious about different cooking methods. Yet the mystique of the Fishing Platform State Guesthouse also made Shi Wenming somewhat nervous, afraid his nephew might disclose secrets that shouldn't be revealed.

Lin Xu said, "You can watch all you like, Second Uncle-in-law. There's no secret to speak of here. Even Big Aunt, Second Aunt, and Aunt-in-law, you can all come and watch. This dish is quite simple, and once you learn it, it will definitely be a highlight at family feasts."

Upon hearing how simple it was, the ladies couldn't sit still. They got up one after another to learn. Even Chen Meijuan was eager to try, but she was worried Shen Baobao might feel uncomfortable sitting alone among the relatives, so she suppressed her curiosity and continued eating with her beloved daughter-in-law.

Old Mrs. Lin watched this scene with a chuckle. "A harmonious family can lead to prosperity in all matters," she mused. "That saying is indeed true."

Before her retirement, she was a high school principal and held considerable prestige in the family. The unity among the Lin Family's relatives was largely due to Old Mrs. Lin's management and guidance. One could even say that the Lin Family's ethos of mutual help and support was established by Old Mrs. Lin. This was also why, as soon as the scenic area began to flourish, Chen Yuanyuan came to work as a ticket seller, Shi Wenming took charge of the farmhouse restaurant, and even Lin Xu's jobless uncle came to work as a gatekeeper. Relatives, after all, should help each other out like this.

Seeing the relatives gather around, Lin Xu didn't keep any secrets and began to prepare the Large Shrimp while explaining the techniques. "The shrimp bought today by my uncle are top-grade prawns, also known as *Penaeus*. They're large-sized and alive, so they must have cost a fair bit."

"The cleaning of the shrimp involves four parts: cutting the Shrimp Spear, removing the shrimp sac, snipping the legs, and picking out the shrimp line. I'll explain each step; there are tricks to it."

The so-called Shrimp Spear is the long, straight spike at the very front of the shrimp's head. When preparing shrimp, this part must be cut off; otherwise, it can easily prick one's mouth during consumption, leading to oral swelling, bleeding, or even infection. Cutting the Shrimp Spear shouldn't be done at the part connected to the head, as that wouldn't remove its base completely, and one would still risk being pricked by the spear hidden inside the head. To clean the Shrimp Spear properly, one needs to cut from under the shrimp's eyes, removing the eyes along with the antennae and about half the shrimp head.

Lin Xu explained as he demonstrated the technique. After removing the head, he continued down the body, snipping off all the legs. Then he snipped the tail to even it out, also making a small cut between the two fins of the tail fan, which was meant to make it easier to pull out the shrimp line.

After completing these steps, he inserted the scissors into the remaining part of the head and gently picked out the shrimp sac. Sometimes, the shrimp line would come out along with it. This was the purpose of making the cut at the tail. Even if the shrimp line didn't come out, it wasn't an issue. He would then make an incision below the second segment of the tail, gently cutting the shell open, and with a pick of the scissors, the shrimp line would come out.

"Remember, it's the second segment from the top," Lin Xu clarified. "Cutting open this part of the shell will leave the shrimp meat intact. During braising, the shell won't crack open, and the flavors from the seasoning will penetrate the meat through this opening."

The Large Shrimp needed for Oil Braised dishes are quite large. If not cut open, it's hard for the seasoning to fully penetrate the shrimp meat when braised with oil; even if it did eventually soak in, the shrimp meat would have long since overcooked.

Lin Xu's relatives nodded repeatedly as they listened. Even Shi Wenming, the village banquet chef with many years of cooking experience, listened intently. Although he had been cooking for many years, he had always just copied what others did, without truly understanding the reasoning behind the methods.

Now, listening to Lin Xu's explanation, he understood that to allow the shrimp meat to quickly absorb flavor while keeping the shrimp's body and meat intact, all one needed to do was cut open the shell at the second segment.

What an incredible trick!

After preparing all the Large Shrimp, Lin Xu set them aside and casually flattered his uncle, saying, "Uncle, these prawns you bought are just perfect. Even the procurement manager at the Fishing Platform couldn't necessarily buy prawns of such good quality."

Upon hearing his nephew's high praise, Chen Meide, Lin Xu's uncle, instantly beamed with joy and said:

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"You have no idea how much trouble I went through to buy these shrimp," Chen Meide declared. "I ran all over Seafood City and visited several shops before I finally found them. It took a ton of effort!"

Lin Xu's maternal grandmother, Old Lady Chen, couldn't help but glare at her son. "Your nephew is just paying you a compliment. Just accept it, will you? Why do you need to boast about your efforts?"

Chen Meide hastily offered some Soft-baked Tofu to his mother. "Mom, please have some food. Are you thirsty? Should I pour you a cup of tea?"

Old Lady Chen scolded him with a laugh, "You cheeky boy, can't even handle a bit of criticism, can you?"

Chen Meijuan and her two brothers, Chen Meide and Chen Meiliang, were the three siblings of their generation in the Chen family. The eldest, Chen Meide, held a minor bureaucratic post in Yinzhou City's Cultural Affairs Bureau. The second, Chen Meiliang, had in earlier years been known as a prominent poultry farming magnate in Yinzhou City, owning the largest chicken farm there.

An outbreak of avian influenza decimated his business overnight, even saddling him with over a million yuan in debt. After years of living frugally and with help from relatives, he had finally paid off all his debts. After his daughter, Chen Yuanyuan, began working at the scenic area, Chen Meiliang, who had just started to relax, also came over and willingly took on the role of reservoir manager. When he had nothing else to do, he would row around the reservoir in a small boat, almost like a recluse.

After preparing all the large shrimp, Lin Xu picked up a piece of ginger and sliced it, then diagonally chopped some scallions. As he worked, he said, "For Oil Braise Large Shrimp, you don't need tomato sauce or vinegar, but you do need scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil."

Scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil? Not only were the aunts and uncles confused, but even Shi Wenming, the village banquet chef, seemed puzzled by the unfamiliar term.

Lin Xu explained with a smile, "Scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil is oil fried with scallions, ginger, and Sichuan peppercorns. It removes fishy smells and other unwanted odors. You can make some and keep it at home. Add a bit when cooking seafood, and the flavor will be exceptionally brilliant."

As soon as they heard it could be added to seafood, everyone's interest was piqued.

"How do you make it, Lin Xu?"

"What's the ratio of these three ingredients?"

"What kind of oil is better? Can I use Soybean Oil?"

Lin Xu put the chopped scallions and ginger into separate bowls, then grabbed a handful of Sichuan peppercorns. "The ratio of scallions, ginger, and Sichuan peppercorns is 6:2:1," he said. "Proper scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil should smell of Sichuan peppercorns but have no numbing taste. This is ideal for seafood. As for the oil, any kind works except for rapeseed oil."

"Why can't we use rapeseed oil?"

"Rapeseed oil darkens too easily. The scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil would come out with a dark color, which affects the appearance of the seafood."

After explaining, Lin Xu added some peanut oil to the pan. Then he switched on the stove to heat the oil. When the oil was about 30% hot, he poured the Sichuan peppercorns into the pan and fried them over low heat.

When the oil in the pan heated further and started to smoke, he moved the pan away from the heat and immediately added the ginger slices. This not only reduced the oil temperature, preventing the Sichuan peppercorns from burning, but also released the ginger's aroma, which infused into the oil as its temperature fell.

Once the oil temperature in the pan had dropped, he returned the pan to the stove. Over low heat, he added the diagonally sliced scallions, frying them at a low temperature. This method extracted the ingredients' fragrance without altering their color.

"Properly made scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil will retain its original color after frying; this ensures it won't affect the dish's appearance."

When the scallion slices in the pan turned golden brown, Lin Xu placed a fine-mesh sieve over a large bowl and poured the oil from the pan through it. The filtered oil was the scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil.

The fried scallions, ginger, and Sichuan peppercorns didn't need to be discarded. They could be added to dishes cooked later in the afternoon to make the food even more fragrant.

After the scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil was ready, the preparations for the Oil Braise Large Shrimp were complete, and it was time to cook.

Lin Xu set up a wok. First, he heated the wok, then added cool oil and swirled it around to coat the surface; this prevents the shrimp from sticking during frying. Then he added a large spoonful of cooking oil and a small half-spoonful of the scallion and Sichuan peppercorn oil to the wok. He stirred them a bit to combine the two oils.

Next, he carefully arranged the prepared large shrimp one by one in the wok with the hot oil.

"Ouch, doesn't that scald your hand, Lin Xu?"

"That's right, don't burn yourself!"

"I'd never dare do this at home; I'm too afraid of getting badly burned."

"They say a good chef isn't afraid of heat. Looks like our Lin Xu has reached that level too!"

"Wenming, you're a chef too. Are you afraid of getting burned?"

"Me? I'm just a village cook with amateur skills, not a professional."

"..."

By the time Lin Xu had arranged all the shrimp, the oil in the wok had heated up completely. The large shrimp were seared to a vibrant red, and a rich, savory aroma wafted from the wok. Lin Xu held the wok and gently swirled it, ensuring the oil coated all the shrimp. Then, with a sudden, expert flick of his wrist, he performed a grand toss. The shrimp flew high into the air, flipped over, and landed back in the wok, still perfectly arranged without a hint of disarray.

"Wow, that was a beautiful move!"

"Every time I watch those master chefs toss food on TV, I'm so envious. I never thought our family would have someone who can do a grand toss too!"

"I wish I'd recorded that just now! Posting it would attract a ton of likes, wouldn't it?"

"Definitely! You know how popular Little Xu is online."

"Wenming, can you do that?"

"Well, I can... but after I toss them, I have to quickly pick up the shrimp that fell on the floor."

"..."

As everyone was chatting, Lin Xu began to explain the key points. "After flipping the shrimp, use a spoon to gently press down on the head of each shrimp. Squeeze out the tomalley into the oil, turning it into shrimp-infused oil. This makes the fried large shrimp even more savory."

He pressed down on the shrimp heads as he spoke.

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Soon, the golden oil in the pot turned into a ruddy shrimp oil from the shrimp heads.

This shrimp oil then re-fried the shrimp shells and Large Shrimp, making the already ruddy shells even more brilliantly red and enticing.

Once both sides of the Large Shrimp were fried, Lin Xu added a ladle of Rice Wine to the pot.

He then added a large bowl of water, one and a half small spoonfuls of salt, and a handful of Crystal Sugar, according to the amount of Large Shrimp in the pot.

Finally, he put in a handful of minced ginger and then covered the pot to let them braise.

High heat should not be used for braising, as it would overcook the shrimp meat. Low heat was sufficient.

"Aren't you adding scallions, Xiao Xu?" Second Aunt Lin Hongxia asked.

"No, adding scallions would create an unpleasant scallion odor. Minced ginger alone is enough."

"It looks so simple. I'll try it when I get back."

"I'll try it too. If I learn this, I'll have an extra signature dish for the family."

"Xiao Xu, teach us a few more dishes while you're home these few days. My colleagues have been teasing me lately, saying that my nephew works at Fishing Platform, yet I can't even fry Potato Strips properly."

"Me too. They always say the Potato Strips I cut are thicker than my fingers."

"My Potato Strips always turn mushy; they break apart as soon as I fry them. What should I do, Xiao Xu?"

"Xiao Xu, is there a trick to cutting strips?"

...

Lin Xu looked at his aunts, both maternal and paternal, chuckled, and said with a smile, "Just use a shredder. Buy one with small holes. After shredding, rinse the Potato Strips several times with clean water to remove the starch. This way, they'll have a crunchier texture when fried and are less likely to turn mushy... The most important thing is to fry a smaller portion at a time."

Seeing his relatives interested in this dish, Lin Xu promptly took two potatoes, deftly peeled them, cut them into fine strips, rinsed them twice with clean water, and drained them.

Next, he prepared some dried chili segments and chopped scallions, and cut some green and red pepper strips.

Then he set up the wok and began to cook.

He poured peanut oil into the wok and, before the oil was hot, added some Sichuan peppercorns. Once they were fragrant, he fished them out and then tossed in the dried chili and chopped scallions.

After frying until fragrant, he added the Potato Strips, stir-fried them a couple of times, then drizzled half a spoonful of vinegar along the edge of the wok.

"The earlier you add vinegar, the crunchier the Potato Strips will be. Also, if added early, the acetic acid evaporates, leaving only the vinegar's fragrance in the dish, making it taste even better."

He quickly stir-fried for a minute, then added a bit of Light Soy Sauce, followed by salt and a little sugar for seasoning.

Finally, he put in the cut green and red pepper strips.

He continued to stir-fry for thirty seconds to evenly coat the Potato Strips with the sauce.

He then removed it from the heat and plated it.

"That was quick! It's ready already?"

"This kind of professional stove has intense heat, which is ideal for stir-frying. If you're cooking at home, try using smaller portions and heating the oil more thoroughly; you can still achieve a good stir-fry effect."

Lin Xu then dished out the Potato Strips onto several plates.

Second Uncle-in-law Shi Wenming and Second Aunt Shi Hongxia immediately took them to serve to the other relatives.

"Come try, come try! Xiao Xu just whipped up these Potato Strips. The smell alone is making me drool!"

The relatives waiting to eat the Large Shrimp hadn't expected such a pleasant surprise.

After placing the plates on the dining table, everyone tried the Potato Strips and immediately began to praise how delicious Lin Xu's cooking was.

Liu Zhengyu tried some and said with a smile, "Cantonese cuisine values wok hei. A stir-fried dish lacking wok hei is a failure. I didn't expect Lin Xu to achieve wok hei even when casually stir-frying a plate of Potato Strips. His skill is truly exceptional."

Next to him, Zeng Xiaoqi took a big bite. "Delicious, delicious! I was planning on boasting to Boss Lin later to get him to treat me to crawfish. I didn't expect to taste his cooking ahead of time!"

She had just said it casually, but when Chen Meijuan at the next table heard it, she immediately instructed Lin Hongqi, "Since Reporter Zeng wants to eat crawfish, Hongqi, go buy some after your meal. There are a lot of us today, so buy plenty. Let everyone try Xiao Xu's crawfish."

She hadn't yet tasted the crawfish her son made. This was the perfect chance to satisfy her craving.

Upon hearing crawfish was on the menu, Shen Baobao, who was eating Scrambled Eggs with Earth Skin Vegetables, immediately said, "Mom, you haven't tasted the crawfish Xu Bao makes! It's super fantastic! Ah, just thinking about it makes my mouth water!"

"Then tonight, let Xiao Xu make it for you. Have him make plenty, so my daughter-in-law can eat to her heart's content."

Shen Baobao immediately rested her head on Chen Meijuan's shoulder and said coaxingly, "Thank you, Mom. You're so good to me."

Watching this harmonious mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship, the relatives all had knowing, aunt-like smiles on their faces.

Who would have thought that a daughter-in-law from Beijing would be so sensible. She was already calling her 'Mom' so naturally right after getting engaged.

In contrast, back in their hometown, many wives for whom a high bride price had been paid wouldn't even address their mothers-in-law properly half a year into the marriage. They'd call her 'So-and-so's mom' or just 'Hey,' as if they'd brought a revered ancestor home. There was truly no comparison!

At the stove, the Large Shrimp were still braising.

Lin Xu held the pot handle with one hand and, pressing down on the lid with the other, gently shook the pot a few times. This was to prevent sticking and also to allow the sauce to penetrate the shrimp meat more evenly.

When he judged the time was about right, he lifted the lid.

A rich, fragrant, and savory aroma instantly wafted from the pot.

"Wow, this smells so good."

"Xiao Xu's skill is really amazing."

"Just smelling this, I could eat two big steamed buns."

"No wonder he's a specially recruited chef at Fishing Platform; my nephew is truly amazing."

While the relatives were showering him with praise, Lin Xu used chopsticks to pick the Large Shrimp from the pot and arrange them on a plate. Just as he finished the presentation, Second Uncle-in-law Shi Wenming asked, somewhat impatiently, "Can we serve it now?"

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"Not yet, Uncle. We still need to pour the sauce."

After scooping all the large shrimp out of the wok, Lin Xu placed a strainer over a bowl and poured the broth from the wok through it, filtering out the minced ginger in the process.

He then poured the broth back into the wok and heated it over the fire, stirring it as it heated.

The broth thickened at a speed visible to the naked eye.

"The benefit of using crystal sugar is exactly this: the sauce reduces quickly and becomes shiny and bright, making it look prettier when poured over the shrimp."

Very soon, the sauce in the wok not only thickened, but its color also turned a ruddier hue.

This was the effect of the shrimp oil.

When the broth became thoroughly thick, Lin Xu scooped half a ladle of scallion and pepper oil into the wok, swiftly mixed it, and then carefully poured the mixture over the large shrimp on the plate.

After the sauce was poured, it was ready to be served and tasted.

The relatives looked at each other in surprise.

"So this is what Oil Braised Large Shrimp is supposed to be like? Does that mean the previous method of adding tomato sauce and vinegar is wrong?"

Lin Xu said with a smile, "It's not bad. When the shrimp aren't fresh enough, a sweet-and-sour flavor can greatly improve their taste. But with live shrimp, this method is better, as you can taste the fresh sweetness of the shrimp meat and still enjoy the crispy texture."

He didn't even need to say more. As soon as the relatives heard how magical the shrimp prepared this way were, they hurriedly took the plates away.

One plate for each table so that everyone could taste it.

"Grandma, Maternal Grandmother, please try my cooking."

After removing his apron, Lin Xu sat next to Shen Baobao and served one large shrimp to both Grandma Lin and Grandma Chen.

"My grandson's cooking smells so good."

Grandma Chen took a bite of the large shrimp and immediately gave a thumbs-up. "Delicious, delicious! My dear grandson's cooking is far better than both of his uncles combined!"

Chen Meide: ...

Chen Meiliang: ...

Mom, praise your grandson by all means, but why drag us into it?

Grandma Lin, beside her, tried a bite of the large shrimp from her bowl, and her eyes lit up. "When I first started working, I went to Beijing as a representative and had Oil Braised Large Shrimp once. It tastes just like this! I thought this method had been lost, but who would have thought my dear grandson could make it."

She took another taste and then continued, "Yes, this is the flavor! Savory and salty at first bite, with a hint of sweetness in the aftertaste. It's unlike the banquets around here, where they insist on making Oil Braised Large Shrimp taste like sweet-and-sour large shrimp."

Lin Xu said with a smile, "If you like it, I can make it for you every day."

Grandma Lin said with a smile, "That won't do. My dear grandson needs to run his business in Beijing. It's enough if your mother and the others can make it. Whenever Grandma misses you, I'll have them cook it for me."

This topic made Shen Baobao a bit wistful, so she quickly said, "No need, Grandma. Just tell us when you want to eat it, and we'll come back to make it for you. It's very fast by high-speed rail, as long as we don't bring Dundun along."

Just as she finished speaking, Dundun, who was walking by, raised his paw and stepped on her shoe.

A dirty cat paw print was left on her white shoes.

Shen Baobao's heart ached. "Oh no, my little white shoes! Stinky Dundun, did you do that on purpose?"

Dundun was sitting leisurely by the door, licking his paw.

What are you saying? This kitty doesn't quite understand, meow~

Looking aggrieved, Shen Baobao couldn't bring herself to punish Dundun and instead took her anger out on the Oil Braised Large Shrimp.

She picked up a large shrimp and, imitating Lin Xu, first sucked on the shrimp head, extracting the shrimp brains and the broth soaked within in one go.

"Wow, it's so succulent! This is indeed the right way to enjoy live shrimp!"

After sucking out the shrimp brains, she bit off the upper half of the shrimp shell and ate the remaining meat inside. Then, holding the main body of the shrimp with her chopsticks, she gently tugged, and the entire shell slipped off.

Eating the whole piece of shrimp meat, the sensation of its freshness, sweetness, crunchiness, and chewy texture was simply intoxicating.

"Delicious, delicious! Will Lin Ji have this dish on the menu in the future, Xu Baobao?"

"Yes, the traditional preparation of Oil Braised Large Shrimp is becoming rarer. I need to do my best to promote it, to prevent more people from mistaking sweet-and-sour large shrimp for Oil Braised Large Shrimp."

Lin Xu felt that as a person in the catering industry, he had a duty and responsibility to pass on traditional cooking techniques.

Just as he thought this, the system notification sounded in his mind:

"Host has decided to promote traditional cooking techniques, completing the Hidden Task [Promotion of Tradition]. Reward: Excellent Level Lifestyle Skill—Voiceover. Congratulations to the Host."

Voiceover?

I'm just a chef.

What am I supposed to do with this?

Lin Xu complained internally, feeling that the system's rewards were getting more and more unrestrained.

Could it be because Dundun had stolen too many rewards?

So the system was trying to compensate in other ways?

He sighed softly, then picked up a large shrimp and began to eat...

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"Lin Xu, your cooking skills are truly amazing!"

As the flavorful and delicious Oil Braised Large Shrimp hit his taste buds, Liu Zhengyu felt that coming here today was well worth it. It wouldn't matter if he had to sit for four hours on the high-speed train, or even eight hours, for that matter.

This flavor. This texture. Even in Beijing, there weren't many restaurants that could reach Lin Xu's level of cooking.

Nowadays, to chase profits, very few restaurants still use the delicate Ming Shrimp for this dish and instead use the thicker-shelled Kwei Shrimp or Black Tiger Shrimp.

Although the cooking technique is the same, the thin and crispy shell of the Ming Shrimp is something other species do not possess.

"This shrimp is so delicious. It wasn't in vain that I ran around all morning to buy it."

Chen Meide, relishing the Oil Braised Large Shrimp made by his nephew, only regretted that he hadn't bought more. He should have purchased all the Large Shrimp from the store.

Then they wouldn't have had to make do with just one or two shrimp each just to taste the flavor, which was hardly satisfying.

Aunt Qi Xiangzhi, seeing the yearning look on her husband's face, couldn't help but say, "Look at how much you're craving it. Aren't you afraid of being laughed at by your nephew's fiancée? We're making crayfish tonight, so you can eat your fill then."

Chen Meide wasn't too interested in crayfish.

He found peeling shrimp too troublesome, but then again, considering it was made by his nephew, he couldn't help but look forward to it.

If the Oil Braised Large Shrimp were that tasty, then the crayfish probably wouldn't be far off, right?

"Xiaoxu, I saw another shrimp dish online that seems similar to this one, but with the sauce continuously cooked off until dry before dishing out. What kind of shrimp is that?"

After witnessing his nephew's culinary prowess, Second Uncle-in-law Shi Wenming wasn't too proud to ask for advice.

He usually dealt with village feast chefs, who were all about the same level. When they occasionally exchanged ideas, they only talked about how to make a dish with less effort.

New and innovative methods weren't really his thing.

After all, for village feast chefs, the goal wasn't to pursue novel dishes but to satisfy the host's request by preparing delicious food without any mishaps.

Under these circumstances, not many chefs were willing to try new methods.

Shi Wenming didn't have many peers to discuss his work with.

Now that he had come across his knowledgeable nephew, he naturally became more enthusiastic.

"The one you're talking about should be the Dry-Fried Large Shrimp. You have to use Pork Bone Broth when making it. This not only gives a stronger fragrance, but the Pork Bone Broth also evaporates faster than water, making the reduction more complete."

Lin Xu hadn't made Dry-Fried Large Shrimp.

But he had seen Xie Baomin make it more than once, so he remembered the dish vividly.

Hearing his nephew's explanation, Shi Wenming decided to give it a try.

If possible, he would make Dry-Fried Large Shrimp a specialty dish at the farmhouse restaurant.

Hmm, even though the name of the restaurant was 'Farmhouse Cuisine,' it was necessary to include high-end and novel dishes. Only then would the business really boom, and who knows, people might even come specifically for the food in the future.

The reason for not offering Oil Braised Large Shrimp was that this dish demanded too much from the ingredients. Just getting live shrimp was troublesome enough.

Moreover, almost every village banquet featured this dish, and if served in the farmhouse restaurant, likely few customers would order it.

As he was pondering this, Shi Wenming noticed a few tourists with walking sticks approaching the restaurant's entrance. One of them asked, "Excuse me, do you have any meals available now?"

Hmm? Customers at this hour, looking for a meal? That was an unexpected surprise.

He quickly set aside his bowl and chopsticks, saying, "Yes, yes, yes. What would you like to eat? There's a menu on the wall."

But these tourists didn't look at the menu hanging on the wall. Instead, they were looking down at Dundun, who was playing with water by the pool at the entrance. One of them remarked, "This cat, why does it look so much like the Dundun raised by Boss Lin?"

"Right, just like Dundun. Though chubby, it's full of wit and charm."

"Isn't Boss Lin working at the Fishing Platform in Beijing?"

"Never mind that, let's take a photo first and claim we ran into Dundun. We'll fish for likes under the Lin Ji topic first and then... oh my! Boss Lin? Is it really you?"

These tourists were fans of Lin Xu.

Today, taking advantage of the weekend, they came to explore the renowned Longqi Mountain Scenic Area. They didn't expect to play so long on the mountain that they missed lunchtime.

After coming down from the mountain and seeing people eating at the farmhouse restaurant, they decided to check it out.

To their surprise, they actually ran into Lin Xu.

Lin Xu walked to the entrance and said with a smile, "I'm just bringing my fiancée to visit my hometown. We've just arrived and are having a meal with my relatives."

"Then let's take a photo together, Boss Lin. Today is our lucky day! To think we could run into you while randomly checking in here. The entrance fee was totally worth it!"

Lin Xu didn't refuse.

He held Dundun and took photos with the few fans.

After taking the photo with him, they took turns holding Dundun for another shot, then they went into the restaurant to order contentedly.

"We'll have Earth Skin Vegetables with Eggs, Bamboo Shoot Stewed with Free-Range Chicken, Stir-Fried Wild Vegetables, and a pot of rice."

After ordering, Shi Wenming became busy.

"Uncle, do you need my help?"

"No need, keep eating, Xiaoxu. These are all my specialties!"

Shi Wenming was excited to have business coming his way.

There usually weren't many customers during mealtimes, and tourists preferred to buy a cup of instant noodles rather than dining at the scenic area's restaurant.

Now that there were customers, he naturally wanted to cook with care.

While he was busy, several more tourists who had just descended the mountain arrived at the restaurant's entrance. One of them called out, "What dishes do you have now? Hurry up and get us something to eat, we're starving..."

Old Mrs. Lin said cheerily, "My dear grandson comes home, and even the scenic area's business gets better."

Lin Xu: "..."

This has nothing to do with me; it's all Dundun's doing.

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Who would have thought this little guy could bring popularity and business wherever he went? I remember yesterday at the engagement banquet, Guo Weidong was bustling about, muttering that the busier it got, the more customers there were. If fellow apprentices Xie Baomin, Dai Jianli, Song Dahai, and others hadn't helped out, the kitchen at Building 10 might have been a complete mess. Now everything's fine. With this little guy coming to the scenic area, business here has improved too. I'll have Mom take him to the ticket office later after we eat. Let's see if we can increase today's ticket sales even more.

When Second Aunt Lin Hongxia saw more tourists arriving, she didn't even stop to eat. She immediately took out her small notepad for taking orders and started greeting guests.

After the Lin family's relatives finished their meal, four or five more tables of customers arrived, much to everyone's surprise. This astonished not only Uncle Shi Wenming but also Lin Hongqi and Chen Meijuan.

"Finished eating. Where do you want to go play?" Lin Xu asked casually, wiping soup from Shen Baobao's face with a napkin.

"I want to go to Panshi Rock and hang a lock symbolizing our love. Can I, Xu Bao?"

Of course, she could. After all, this trip back was to have fun.

Right then, his mom was about to go outside the main gate to deliver food to Chen Yuanyuan, who was still hungry. Lin Xu said, "Take Dundun with you too. Yueyue and I are going to climb the mountain, so we can't bring him."

Chen Meijuan smiled and said, "Sure, sure, sure. This is a great chance for me to hold him and get my fill of cuddling him."

In Beijing, either Old Mrs. Shen or Han Shuzhen was always holding Dundun. She, as his grandmother, had hardly had any chances to hold him herself. Now that he was here with his grandma, she would finally get to cuddle this little cutie to her heart's content!

Chen Meijuan packed some food and placed it on the scenic area's electric four-wheeled utility cart. Then, she picked up the cat's litter box from the car and put it on the cart, also grabbing a few cat toys.

Afterward, holding Dundun, she was escorted by Second Uncle Chen Meiliang to the ticket office.

Meanwhile, Lin Hongqi had already changed into sneakers, ready to accompany Liu Zhengyu on a full on-site survey. Yes, upgrading to a 4A scenic area was the top priority; they couldn't neglect their honored guest.

Chen Meide, finding himself with nothing to do, once again took on the duties of purchasing manager. He planned to buy some crayfish so all the relatives at home could taste their nephew's cooking that evening. Learning his lesson from not having enough Oil Braised Large Shrimp last time, he planned to buy extra crayfish tonight. He'd also see if there were any other ingredients available and buy them as well. His nephew's visits were rare, so they definitely needed to try more of his cooking this time.

"Reporter Zeng, where do you plan to start shooting first?" Lin Xu looked at Zeng Xiaoqi, who had finished eating, and asked.

Zeng Xiaoqi, who was currently regretting overeating again, laughed as she replied, "In a bit, while there are still tourists around, we plan to film the water park below. We'll also get some aerial shots. The mountain scenery can wait until tomorrow morning."

"Alright, then we're off to climb the mountain. If you need anything, just let my family know."

My only request is to add more chili to the crayfish tonight... Thinking about the crayfish, Zeng Xiaoqi could hardly sit still. She needed to walk off her meal to make room for dinner!

Coming outside, Lin Xu first distributed the gifts he had prepared for the relatives in the car. Then, he took out Shen Baobao's suitcase. The girl had said she wanted to swap it for a backpack to make climbing the mountain less tiring.

Zeng Xiaoqi and the TV station's staff opened the trunk, took out the drone equipment and other recording devices, changing the batteries that needed changing and the memory cards that needed replacing.

They had eaten and drunk their fill.

「Time to get to work!」

After Shen Baobao changed into her backpack, Lin Xu said goodbye to the relatives holding their gifts and accompanied the girl on their mountain climbing trip.

"Is the backpack heavy? Let me carry it."

After selecting and using the Constitution Increase Card from his inventory, Lin Xu immediately felt his body become stronger. Walking became much easier, and the definition of his muscles grew more noticeable. Good stuff.

As he spoke, he took Shen Baobao's backpack and discovered, to his surprise, that it was extraordinarily heavy.

"What's so heavy in here?"

"Nothing, nothing! Maybe I should carry it after all?"

"How can I let my wife carry it? I'll take it."

Lin Xu assumed it just contained a few bottles of mineral water and didn't think much of it. He slung the backpack on, took Shen Baobao's hand, and they headed towards the mountain path.

Heehee, Xu Bao called me his wife! Shen Jiayue was delighted, and her steps became lighter.

Before long, the mountain stairs appeared. Beside the path, signs in Chinese, English, Japanese, and Korean indicated the mountain's scenic spots and their respective distances.

Lush trees completely blocked the sun, and a cool mountain breeze drifted by, cool and refreshing.

"Wow, this is so comfortable! I wish I could live here forever."

Shen Baobao glanced at a sign and said to Lin Xu, "Qingfeng Pavilion is 700 meters away. Let's rest there. Just hearing the name makes it sound so cool and refreshing."

"Sure, but don't push yourself if you get tired."

While the young couple was climbing the mountain, those tourists who had taken photos with Lin Xu posted them on Lin Ji's Food's page. Soon enough, various replies started pouring in.

Liang Mountain's Aridness: No way! Are you guys that lucky?

Nine Billion Girls' Nightmare: You should post some photos of the scenic area! If it's pretty, I'll go spend a couple of days there next weekend.

Invisible Chicken Wings: Dundun's reluctant face is so adorable! I really want to squeeze him!

Spring Breeze Cannot Blow You: AHHH! I really want to pet Dundun; I could smother him with affection until he cries!

Great Mahayana Stage cultivator: He actually let you hold him? During the competition the other day, that little guy was so snooty he wouldn't even let us touch him. Why the different treatment?

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Lin Daiyu Uproots the Weeping Willow commented, "Is there a possibility that some people spent money on the Lin Family's turf, and you didn't?"

The Great Mahayana Stage cultivator replied, "No way, Dundun is *that* family-oriented?"

The High Priest of the Meow Meow Sect chimed in, "Do you all think Dundun's 'fortune-bringing cat' nickname is just for show? Back when Lin Ji first opened, even if it was unwilling, it would let paying customers pat it a couple of times."

I'm Dundun's Die-hard Fan admitted, "My Dundun has sacrificed so much for this family, I'm crying my eyes out!"

...

「Two hours later.」

Lin Xu and Shen Baobao arrived at the cliffside hotel halfway up the mountain.

"Wow, the view here is really nice! Shall we stay here tomorrow night?" Shen Baobao asked.

"Sure, wherever you want to stay, I'll stay with you," Lin Xu replied.

They had already decided to camp out at the tent base tonight; Shen Jiayue was even planning to count the stars as she drifted off to sleep.

Well, we'll enjoy getting close to nature for a bit, then stay at the cliffside hotel tomorrow night. As for the day after, naturally, it'll be the Demon Cave!

The two took a short break, and a vendor selling water nearby brought them bottled water and beverages.

"Your mom mentioned in the group chat that you can pick any drink you like, eat whatever snacks you want, and put it on her tab. It's a shame it's not the season yet—the wild chestnuts aren't ripe. Otherwise, I'd definitely make a couple of bowls of wild chestnut jelly for you to try."

The vendors in the scenic area were all locals from nearby villages.

They paid a certain fee each month to set up stalls on the mountain and sell snacks, local specialties, beverages, and other things.

So, these vendors were always very enthusiastic whenever the young boss of the scenic area came by.

Lin Xu didn't stand on ceremony, grabbing two bottles of ice-cold cola before continuing up the mountain with Shen Baobao.

Hmm, it's already almost five. We'd better hurry to the top to hang our lock, or the mountain paths will be too difficult to navigate once it gets dark.

Lin Xu had just used a Constitution Enhancement Card on himself, while Shen Baobao exercised daily.

Both were in good physical shape.

Realizing there wasn't much time, they both quickened their pace up the mountain.

By six-thirty, they had finally climbed to the summit.

"Whew, I'm exhausted! Climbing non-stop for over an hour is really tough," Shen Baobao panted.

She finished the cola in her bottle, then took two sips from the one in Lin Xu's hand before gleefully rushing towards the massive rock not far away.

"WAHAHA, so this is Pan Stone Rock! What a huge stone!"

She walked around it, examining it.

The iron chains hanging from the rock were already adorned with numerous small locks. Most were heart-shaped, but there were also various cartoon designs, largely purchased from the nearby stall.

The stall selling locks was run by a distant maternal cousin of Lin Xu.

Seeing Lin Xu approach, his cousin immediately came over with drinks. "Little Xu, quick, you and your girlfriend should have some water to rehydrate. Want to hang a lock? I just got a new batch in this morning, including some with zodiac designs."

Lin Xu was about to pick a lock to follow the local custom.

But to his surprise, Shen Baobao declined, saying, "No need, no need, I've brought one."

Huh? She brought one? Lin Xu wondered.

"Hand me the backpack. I'll hang up our lock. I brought this one all the way from Beijing," Shen Baobao said.

Only then did Lin Xu realize why the backpack was so heavy.

He took off the backpack and opened it. Inside, he saw a brass lock as large as half a brick.

Holy crap! I always thought the backpack just had a few bottles of water in it. I never expected her to stuff such a treasure inside!

Lin Xu's cousin had been about to promote the locks he wholesaled, but the moment he saw this brass lock, he immediately clammed up.

Such a large, rust-proof brass lock... Even if the iron chain rusts through, this lock would probably still be fine, right? Tsk, tsk, tsk... Is my nephew's girlfriend planning to be locked together with him even in the next life?

After retrieving the lock, Shen Baobao, oblivious to the astonished looks from Lin Xu and his cousin, circled Pan Stone Rock again while holding the lock with both hands. She then selected an unoccupied iron chain to hang it on.

"Xubao, let's lock it together, okay?"

"Sure!"

Lin Xu walked over, and together, he and Shen Baobao solemnly fastened the heavy brass lock, which weighed several pounds, onto the empty iron chain.

After it was locked, Shen Jiayue grabbed the key, prayed earnestly for a moment, and then tossed the key into a nearby mountain ravine.

Lin Xu watched her antics with a mixture of amusement and exasperation. Smiling, he asked, "Where did this lock come from?"

Shen Baobao replied, "This is the lock from the equipment room door at the villa... My dad likes everything big, so he even bought the largest size for the door lock. That door isn't used much anyway, so I just took it off."

Lin Xu was speechless. Baobao, are you serious? Is this really okay?

「Meanwhile, at the Shen Family's villa.」

Shen Guofu stood at the door of the equipment room, looking bewildered at the missing door lock. "How can such a large door lock just vanish? Get the housekeepers to search again! I refuse to believe that big brass lock could just grow wings and fly away..."

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After securing the lock, the young couple sipped the drinks offered by a cousin and watched the sunset while enjoying the mountain breeze. They also stopped by a small temple nearby to burn incense, praying for the health and well-being of both their families before starting their descent.

"Time to go back and eat some crayfish!" Shen Baobao exclaimed.

They had eaten quite a lot before climbing the mountain. However, after a few hours of activity, that food had long since been digested. Now Shen Baobao felt like she could eat half a cow.

"How about we find a stall up ahead and buy you some snacks?" Lin Xu, worried this girl might become ill from hunger, suggested with a smile.

But she immediately vetoed the idea. "No way! There's only so much room in my stomach, and I want to eat the delicious food you make. I don't want anything else!"

"All right, then we'd better hurry up," Lin Xu said.

To ensure Shen Baobao could eat crayfish as soon as they got down the mountain, Lin Xu opened the family group chat to check if the crayfish had been purchased. If they had, he would ask the family to start cleaning them so he could start cooking seamlessly once they were back.

As soon as he opened the family group chat, he saw that his eldest uncle had posted a picture of crayfish. "I bought all the super large crayfish, more than sixty pounds of them," the message read.

The message had just been sent when Chen Yuanyuan quickly commented in the group, "Uncle, there are so many people in our family, how is sixty pounds going to be enough? Don't forget I didn't even get one shrimp at noon, so it wouldn't be excessive for me to have a double portion, right?"

In less than a minute, Chen Yuanyuan withdrew her message. Her father, Chen Meiliang, had just posted a picture of a freshly caught silver carp from the reservoir, weighing more than twenty pounds.

If sixty pounds of crayfish wasn't enough, what about adding a twenty-plus pound silver carp? Lin Xu thought, unable to help but laugh. Were his uncles going overboard? It worked out well, though, since it gave him the opportunity to cook Chopped Pepper Fish Head. He had acquired this Technique but hadn't used it yet. With all the relatives here today and Shen Baobao hungry, it would be the perfect chance to liven things up by making it!

After checking the group messages, he was about to put away his phone when his uncle, Lin Hongjun, also posted a picture that seemed to be taken at a lamb stall. "I'm really sorry about today," Lin Hongjun wrote. "I had to organize a summer swimming safety drill at the school and couldn't make it back until now. I just bought a whole lamb; Lin Xu, you take care of it."

Lin Hongjun was the head of political education at Yinzhou City Experimental Middle School. For other teachers, summer was a time to relax. But for Lin Hongjun, it meant continuously working on student safety education, making him even busier than when classes were in session.

"WOW! Tonight's dinner is going to be so lavish, isn't it?" Chen Yuanyuan, who had just been complaining about not having enough crayfish, immediately posted a bunch of drooling emojis.

And it didn't stop there. Right after Lin Hongjun posted about the lamb, Lin Xu's aunt, Lin Hongxin, posted a picture of two large geese. "Little Xun's grandfather raised these big geese back home," she explained. "He heard Lin Xu's wife was visiting, so he specially gave me two to bring over."

Lin Hongxin worked for the development zone's administrative committee. She had an inspection there at noon, so she couldn't come over earlier. That's why she made a special trip to bring two fat geese, making up for missing the welcome banquet for her nephew's wife.

Lin Xu told everyone to start preparing the crayfish: clip the heads, remove the gizzards, and devein them. That way, he could get straight to cooking when he got back. As for the large silver carp, it can be cleaned after I get back, he thought. There's going to be so much to eat tonight...

After instructing his aunts on preparing the crayfish, Lin Xu showed Shen Baobao the group chat photos on his phone. The girl immediately started salivating. "I want to eat crayfish! I want to eat a big fish head! I also want to eat roasted whole lamb and iron pot stewed goose! WAKAKA! These are all the things I want to eat!"

To express gratitude to the relatives, Lin Xu deliberately pulled Shen Baobao into the family group chat. As soon as she joined, she sent a wave of thanks, touching the relatives who saw it. They all felt proud that Lin Xu had found such a sensible and polite wife.

「At the scenic area's ticket office.」

Chen Yuanyuan, who was originally nibbling on a small pastry to tide her over, had now tossed her usually favorite snack back into the drawer. With such a sumptuous dinner ahead, why would I eat a small pastry? Am I crazy?

Not far from her, Chen Meijuan was sitting on the sofa, playing with Dundun and a bouncing ball. She threw the ball far away, and Dundun would chase after it like a little beast, pinning it down with his paws to stop it from bouncing. Then he would gently kick it back to Chen Meijuan's feet.

"Oh my, my little treasure is so smart! No wonder your grandma wouldn't let go of you every time she held you. Such a clever and sensible little guy, this grandma loves you too," Chen Meijuan cooed. She had never expected that playing with this little creature would feel like babysitting a grandchild.

As she was playing, more tourists arrived. This group numbered in the dozens. Not only did they want to buy tickets to enter, but they also planned to stay at the Cliffside Hotel. Chen Yuanyuan was busy for a

while, finally getting all their tickets sorted out, while Chen Meijuan called the park's shuttle to pick up the tourists and take them in.

Once the tourists were inside, it was time for the ticket office to close.

As Chen Yuanyuan was tidying up the accounts, she muttered, "The business was too good this afternoon, wasn't it? Right before closing, we sold nearly twenty thousand yuan worth of tickets and accommodation fees. At this rate, our scenic area really needs to expand."

Chen Meijuan replied, "We do intend to expand. Right now, you can only return the same way after reaching Pan Stone Rock, can't you? Your uncle and I are planning to build another mountain road. It would lead down from the other side of Pan Stone Rock, directly into the valley. We'll then build additional boardwalks along the river in the valley, all the way to the tent camp."

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"Wow! This is quite the splurge!"

Chen Yuanyuan was full of anticipation for the future of the scenic area.

At that moment, her Eldest Uncle, Chen Meide, returned in his Tiguan, having bought the crayfish.

Chen Yuanyuan and her young niece/nephew at the ticket office immediately shut down the computers and AC, locked the door, and, carrying Dundun, got into Chen Meide's car.

Arriving at the Farmhouse Restaurant, Lin Hongxia, Eldest Aunt, and Second Aunt had already prepared scissors and a large iron basin for cleaning the crayfish.

Everyone carried the crayfish out from the trunk. They had been cleaned by an ultrasonic washing machine, so there was no need to rinse them again; they could directly start preparing them with scissors.

Chen Yuanyuan didn't like doing this sort of thing. Preoccupied with the thought of eating, she wasn't in the mood to play with her younger cousins. So, she drove the electric four-wheeler, used for shuttling guests, to pick up Lin Xu from the Cliff Hotel.

Well, the sooner my cousin comes down the mountain, the sooner we can eat crayfish.

And it wasn't just crayfish; there were also bighead carp as fat as piglets that made one's mouth water just looking at them.

She drove past the visitor center, followed the concrete road toward the base of the mountain for a while, and then a small, winding mountain road appeared.

This road was built during the construction of the Cliff Hotel and was typically used for delivering vegetables and by tourists staying there.

She climbed up the winding mountain road, honking the horn at every turn.

After about ten or twenty upward bends, the Cliff Hotel came into distant view.

Chen Yuanyuan drove the electric four-wheeler to the mountain road leading to Dragon Head Peak. Just as she stopped and was about to call her cousin, she saw him walking down from the mountain hand-in-hand with a stunningly beautiful girl.

"Cousin Yuanyuan? Aren't you at the ticket office? What are you doing here?"

Lin Xu was somewhat surprised to see Chen Yuanyuan.

"What else? I want to eat the crayfish you're making as soon as possible! Get in quickly, both of you. The whole family is waiting for dinner."

"Yueyue, this is my cousin, Chen Yuanyuan. She's the Director of the Ticket Office at Longqi Mountain Scenic Area."

Chen Yuanyuan: ...Cousin, there's no need for such formalities among family, right? The whole ticket office is just me. How am I a Director?

"Nice to meet you, Cousin Yuanyuan. I'm Shen Jiayue."

"You're so beautiful, Shen Jiayue! If Lin Xu ever bullies you, just tell me. I'll help you deal with him. I made him cry several times when we were kids."

Lin Xu: ...Just because I called you 'Director,' did you have to bring that up?

He directly retaliated, "Cousin Yuanyuan, it's about time you found a boyfriend. All our relatives are here. How about I rally everyone to help you find someone?"

Chen Yuanyuan immediately caved, "No, no! You've only just come back. Don't you worry about such trivial things for me."

Heh! Turns out everyone's afraid of being publicly shamed, Lin Xu thought.

He figured he could introduce Chen Yuanyuan to Chen Yan, Shen Jiayue's older sister. Both were considered prime marriage candidates by their relatives and should have a lot in common. Since both their surnames were Chen, perhaps they were even from the same family five hundred years ago.

After they boarded the electric four-wheeler, Chen Yuanyuan turned the vehicle around and headed down the mountain road.

"Where are you two staying tonight? Do you need me to inform the front desk to keep the best room in the Cliff Hotel for you?"

"No need. We're staying at the campsite tonight. My mom even bought a Little Yellow Duck outdoor tent especially for us."

"Oh, quite romantic, huh?"

Chen Yuanyuan smirked at her cousin, then fell silent and concentrated on driving.

「When they returned to the Farmhouse Restaurant.」

Eldest Uncle, Eldest Aunt, and other relatives had also arrived and were all helping to prepare the crayfish.

Meanwhile, an idle Dundun circled a cage containing a large goose, occasionally stalking or bowing. Clearly, the little fellow had found new prey.

A group of Lin Xu's younger cousins were filming Dundun with their phones.

They dared not provoke the large goose, and Dundun also looked fierce, so they could only watch from a distance.

After Lin Xu got out of the vehicle, he greeted the relatives and then quickly scooped up the chubby little cat just as it was about to pounce on the large goose.

"Son, those are true village tyrants. They're not something your little self can mess with."

Even adults are wary of countryside geese, yet this naive little kitten dared to approach them? It truly lacked a harsh lesson from reality!

Holding a clearly disgruntled Dundun, Lin Xu walked over to the water basin. Inside, a bighead carp weighing over twenty pounds suddenly thrashed its tail, startling Dundun.

However, the little fellow immediately jumped down, landed on the edge of the basin, and circled the large bighead carp inside, looking as if it had found new prey.

Compared to geese, cats prefer fish.

Lin Xu didn't bother with it.

He saw a whole, skinned sheep hanging nearby and said, "If you want to eat roast whole sheep today, it won't be possible. This needs to marinate overnight for the flavors to soak in. I suggest we have it for lunch tomorrow. What does everyone think?"

Marinate it tonight, roast it tomorrow morning, and it would be ready to eat by noon.

Moreover, Liu Zhengyu and Zeng Xiaoqi would be leaving tomorrow.

The roast whole sheep would be a perfect farewell meal for them.

Shi Wenming, who was sharpening a knife to butcher the goose, asked in disbelief, "Well now, Nephew, you really know how to roast a whole sheep? You have to teach me! Then our scenic area will have a real showstopper dish."

"Sure. As long as it's thoroughly marinated, it's not that difficult."

The relatives naturally had no objections. There was more than enough delicious food for tonight, so roast whole sheep tomorrow sounded great.

Lin Xu planned to prepare the fish head dish first. After he was done with that, he would marinate the sheep.

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He lifted the big bighead carp out of the sink. Holding a kitchen knife, he went to the tap and used the back of the knife to harshly smack the fish's head, stunning it.

Then, he chopped at the fish tail, letting the blood out. This would effectively reduce the fishy smell and make the fish meat whiter and more tender.

After these preparations, he started to scrape the fish scales off and remove the gills and innards with the kitchen knife.

This fish was big enough; just its belly brimming with fat Fish Roe, heart, liver, and Fish Bladder was enough to fill a large bowl.

Later, it would be perfect for making a "Boiled Fish Miscellany," giving the relatives a taste of his skills.

It was a pity there was no time to deal with the Fish intestines; turned inside out and cleaned, they too would have been delicious quickly stir-fried.

After cleaning the bighead carp, Lin Xu held the kitchen knife and made a cut four fingers wide behind the fish head to remove it.

The main ingredient for Chopped Pepper Fish Head was ready.

As for the Fish on the body, it wouldn't go to waste either. Later, it would be sliced into thin pieces to be made into Fried Fish Fillets, Boiled Fish, and Sweet and Sour Fish Fillets, which his younger cousins liked.

The fish bones would be boiled to make a tofu soup.

Hmm... After arranging everything for the whole fish, Lin Xu took a large cleaver and split the fish head from the top.

There was more meat where the top half of the head connected to the spine. Splitting it from the top allowed the thick part to be spread to the sides, making it easier to steam through.

After splitting the fish head, he first removed the teeth and the whole set of soft tissues inside the mouth, then used the kitchen knife to scrape off the black membrane inside.

Next, he scored the thick parts with a crosshatch pattern. Especially on both sides of the spine, the score lines had to be deep to ensure the meat would steam through.

After scoring, Lin Xu chopped up a small bowl of Scallion and Ginger, poured in half a bottle of Rice Wine, added salt and pepper, and squeezed it several times until the Scallion and Ginger released their juices. Then, he applied it evenly inside and out of the fish head.

To make the fish head tasty, it had to be fully marinated; that way, the eventual dish would be exquisitely tender and delicious.

After evenly spreading the marinade, he placed the fish head head-up and skin-down on a tray, which would make it marinate better.

In order to keep the Fish as fresh and tender as possible, he also placed the tray in the refrigerator's chilling compartment.

With that done, Lin Xu also mixed some dough, planning to make some handmade noodles.

Once the fish head was steamed, the broth would be mixed into the noodles, a taste that would surely whet every relative's appetite.

After preparing the dough, he was busy slicing fish fillets and chopping bones, bustling around tirelessly.

Outside the kitchen, Shen Baobao sat next to her mother-in-law Chen Meijuan, peeling garlic and listening to the relatives chitchatting about household trivialities.

This gave her a sense of being fully integrated into the Lin Family.

"Baobao, how can we let you peel garlic? Put it down, I'll do it," Chen Yuanyuan said, walking over.

"Xu Bao said we need a lot of garlic for the Garlic Minced Crayfish," Shen Baobao replied, looking up.

Chen Yuanyuan had originally intended to act the part of a good host and let her cousin's wife, a guest from afar, rest. She hadn't expected her to start with such a public display of affection.

Xu Bao... She calls him more intimately than Third Aunt and Third Uncle-in-law do.

"Are you and my cousin college classmates?"

"Yes, we were in the same class."

"My cousin said he didn't date anyone during his four years of university. Is that true?"

"It's true."

"Why?"

"Because I clung to him, so other girls didn't dare approach."

Chen Yuanyuan was speechless.

Why do I feel full already, even though I haven't even tasted my cousin's crayfish yet?

As she was muttering to herself, Zeng Xiaoqi and her colleagues returned with the filming equipment.

"Wow! So many crayfish! Boss Lady, I'm really benefiting from your presence today!"

Shen Baobao said, "It's not just crayfish; we also have a big fish head and stewed goose. You've all worked hard filming today, so we're making some delicious food to treat you."

After saying this, she pointed at the hanging sheep. "There was supposed to be a roasted whole sheep too, but Xu Bao said it needs to marinate overnight to taste good, so the roast sheep has been postponed until tomorrow noon."

"Wow!" Zeng Xiaoqi felt this trip was truly worthwhile.

To show her respect for the meal, Zeng Xiaoqi, who normally wouldn't lift a finger for housework, also sat down and started peeling garlic.

While the three amateur garlic-peeling girls were busy, Lin Xu, in the kitchen, had already marinated the fish fillets and put the chopped fish bones into the pressure cooker to start on the Milk Soup.

Once he was done with these preparations, Lin Xu looked at Shi Wenming and asked, "Uncle, is there any chopped chili in the kitchen?"

Chopped chili? Shi Wenming, who had just finished plucking the goose, thought for a moment and said, "We actually don't have any. How about I have someone go buy some for you now?"

Lin Xu shook his head. "Forget it, I'll use fresh hot peppers instead."

When making Chopped Pepper Fish, chopped chili is the first choice. However, in its absence, fresh hot peppers can also be used. If prepared correctly, it can even be more delicious than dishes made with actual chopped chili.

He found some red millet chilies and some green Chilis.

Besides these two types of peppers, other necessary ingredients included dried fermented black beans, Ginger and Garlic Mince, and perilla leaves.

Dried fermented black beans add a rich, savory flavor to the dish, while perilla leaves can neutralize any fishiness and enhance the fragrance, also making the Fish texture more tender and juicy.

After chopping all these ingredients finely, Lin Xu heated a wok. He first stir-fried the chopped dried fermented black beans in hot oil until aromatic, then added the Ginger and Garlic Mince and the chopped red millet chilies, stir-frying until fragrant.

Finally, he added the chopped perilla leaves, along with Steamed Fish Sauce, oyster sauce, white sugar, salt, and a bit of Rice Wine for extra aroma.

Once everything was fragrant, he scooped it out.

Then, he stir-fried the green Chilis in the same manner.

This way, two kinds of chopped chili—one red and one green—were ready.

He took the fish head out of the fridge and removed the Scallion and Ginger from it.

Next, he laid a few chopsticks in the tray to act as a rack and placed the fish head, skin side up, on them.

He doused one side with the red chopped chili and the other with the green chopped chili.

After pouring the chili mixtures over it, he placed the fish head in the already boiling steamer to begin steaming.

A regular fish head only needs to be steamed for eight minutes. However, since today's fish head was exceptionally large, Lin Xu decided to steam it for twelve minutes and then let it rest in the steamer with the heat off for an additional three minutes. This would ensure the meat was cooked thoroughly and would be more delicious.

During this time, he made the Boiled Fish Miscellany, Fried Fish Fillets, and sweet and sour fish fillets.

When frying the fish fillets, because the quantity was so large, he set some aside and made dry-fried fish fillets with a salt and pepper dip.

After finishing these various Fish dishes, the over sixty jin of crayfish were finally cleaned and prepped.

Lin Xu asked his uncle, Shi Wenming, to fry the crayfish first. Meanwhile, he went to the stove, opened the steamer lid, and a wonderful spicy scent mixed with the unique umami of Fish wafted out from the pot.

"Wow, it smells so good!" Shen Baobao exclaimed. Holding the peeled garlic, she came to the kitchen door, immediately captivated by the appetizing aroma.

Lin Xu then took out the fish head, which had been resting in the steamer for over three minutes.

Shen Baobao curiously asked, "Can we eat it now?"

"Not yet," Lin Xu replied. "There's one last step."

Lin Xu placed a wok on the stove, added a bit of lard and a little Seasoning Oil, and heated it. Then, he poured the hot oil over the Chopped Chili Sauce on the Fish.

TSSSS...

The hot oil poured over the chopped chili made a delightful sizzling sound.

The spicy fragrance billowed up once more.

While he was doing this, Shen Baobao was filming with her phone.

After the oil-pouring process was finished, she had also completed her video.

She posted the video under the Lin Ji's Food topic. As soon as it was successfully uploaded, replies from netizens came flooding in:

"Damn, that's a massive Chopped Pepper Fish Head!"

"That fish head looks bigger than the wok!"

"Oh man, I want to eat that!"

"I'm eating instant noodles right now, and I couldn't help but order Chopped Pepper Fish Head for delivery."

"Me too... Boss Lin, please rein in your incredible skills! All of us buddies are waiting to go check in at Lin Ji's!"

"SOB SOB SOB... Boss Lin has successfully made me cry from craving it so much..."