

Culinary 371

Chapter 371: Making Shrimp Pancakes for a Late Night Snack! Shen Guofu: Yueyue is truly a filial child!

"Dad, dad, have you ever tried black bean sauce braised eel?"

Once ashore, Shen Baobao immediately sent a message to Shen Guofu to inquire about the taste of this dish.

Shen Guofu, who was at home munching on Mixed Grain Pancakes, replied right away, "Yes, I have. The so-called braised eel is actually white eel, marinated in black bean sauce and then steamed. The flavor is so delicious that it's addictive. What's up, sweetie? Why are you asking about this dish all of a sudden?"

He truly lived up to his name as the little gourmet prince. He described the special features of the dish in just a few words.

After texting with his daughter and looking at the Mixed Grain Pancakes on the table, Shen Guofu sighed softly.

A day without meat is really hard to endure.

When are you coming back, son-in-law? Dad misses you so much!

「By the reservoir.」

After reading this message, Shen Baobao rapidly typed a reply, "Just now, Xubao's second uncle caught a wild eel from the reservoir as thick as a rolling pin. Xubao said he's going to make braised eel tomorrow, so I wanted to know if the eel would taste the same."

Wild eel?

Shen Guofu furrowed his brows and thought hard for a moment. I don't think I've ever had braised eel made with wild eel before.

But if it's made by his son-in-law, it should taste fantastic, right?

The moment he thought about Lin Xu's culinary skills, the little gourmet prince couldn't help but reminisce about all those delicious dishes he had eaten in the past. Without his son-in-law in Beijing, all he could do was chew on Mixed Grain Pancakes to get by.

Come back soon, son-in-law. Dad really misses you!

After his moment of reflection, he looked over his daughter's message again.

Braised eel made with that thick wild eel should be very tasty, right?

It's a pity Yinzhou is too far away. Otherwise, I'd definitely drive over tomorrow to freeload a meal.

Thinking about his daughter feasting at her son-in-law's house while he was at home chewing on Mixed Grain Pancakes, Shen Guofu's mood instantly collapsed.

He turned to Han Shuzhen, who was sipping on mixed grain porridge, and said, "Dear, I saw online today that eating more eel is good for beauty and health. How about we go to Fishing Platform's Building 10 tomorrow to eat black bean sauce braised eel? It will also replenish your trace elements."

Han Shuzhen took a bite of the small pickles on the table, "Old Shen, it's a rare chance for us to eat lean while Little Xu isn't around. Once he's back, it'll be all sorts of delicious food again."

Yes, and besides, our son-in-law's cooking is so good.

There's no need to eat out. What our own family makes is much tastier, isn't it?

When Shen Guofu heard his wife wasn't falling for it, he patiently tried to persuade her, "We don't know when Xubao will come back, but your beauty can't wait. We'd better go eat."

If he hadn't said anything, it would have been better.

The moment he spoke, Han Shuzhen glared at him, "Old Shen, are you saying I'm old?"

Shen Guofu: "..."

I... I... I... I just want to eat some meat! Why is it so hard?

Through a lot of coaxing and sweet-talking, he finally managed to bring a smile back to Han Shuzhen's face, "You just want to eat meat, why beat around the bush so much... Alright, we'll go tomorrow. Just don't eat too much. It'll also be a good opportunity for me to ask Chef Guo at Building 10 what soup is good for reducing uric acid. We need to figure out how to lower your uric acid levels."

Shen Guofu immediately perked up when he heard this, "Thank you, my dear wife. Nobody treats me as well as you do."

He picked up a Mixed Grain Pancake and took a big bite. Endure this meal today, and tomorrow will be full of delicious food!

However, just as he was chewing, his daughter sent another picture, "Dad, this is the braised rabbit meat we had today. We added lard when cooking it, and the taste is super amazing. You should try it too when you get a chance."

Braised rabbit meat?

Lard?

Shen Guofu glanced at the Mixed Grain Pancake in his hand. He couldn't swallow it anymore!

「By the reservoir.」

Shen Baobao, still unaware that a single picture had just sent her dad into an emotional spiral, was observing the day's catch.

Not one of the more than ten shrimp cages set yesterday was empty. Each one had caught its share of fish, shrimp, and small Loaches. The fishing nets, too, had caught two large silver carp weighing over twenty pounds each, and one Carp weighing over ten pounds.

It was a pity I came in such a hurry and didn't live stream it.

Otherwise, I'd totally blow those outdoor foraging live streamers out of the water!

After packing the fish and shrimp into net sacks, and stuffing the wild eel, silver carp, and Carp into a woven bag, the group happily returned with a full load.

Back at the restaurant, they put the fish into the water tank.

Dundun promptly came over, looking ready to hunt. Unfortunately, the fish kept thrashing their tails one after another, turning him into a drenched cat.

Seeing this, Shen Baobao felt it was time to change her pet's perception of his stepmom. She pulled out a paper towel and approached, intending to dry Dundun off.

As soon as Dundun saw her coming, he immediately shook his head vigorously and flicked off the water from his body, then ran off to find Chen Meijuan.

The aspiring stepmom, all set to display her maternal affection: "..."

AARGH! You stinky Dundun, don't you run! Today, I'm going to make you feel the profound love of your stepmom!!!

Dundun took refuge in Chen Meijuan's arms, playing the good baby.

Shen Baobao, looking at the muddy spots Dundun had flicked on her, plaintively called out to Lin Xu, "Xubao, look what your son has done!"

"There's a washing machine in the apartment we're staying in. I'll help you wash it when we get back," Lin Xu said. "Honestly, you should know better than to get close to wet animals. They always shake themselves dry as soon as you approach."

Fortunately, Dundun was just a cat, and it was only water that splashed out of the fish tank. If it had been an Alaskan Malamute or a Siberian Husky that had just rolled in a mud puddle, his dear Shen Baobao's composure would likely have shattered even more spectacularly.

It made me think of that online joke I saw about an Alaskan Malamute falling into a manure pit.

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Tsk tsk... keeping a cat is so much better!

Putting his thoughts aside, Lin Xu carried the net full of river shrimp over to Chen Meiliang and asked, "Second Uncle, where should I put these shrimp?"

"There's an aquarium in the dining area. Just turn on the oxygen pump and put them in. That way, they'll still be alive when we eat them tomorrow."

Despite the restaurant's previously lackluster business, it had all the necessary equipment.

Lin Xu carried the shrimp into the dining area, turned on the oxygen pump, and then poured them in. Soon, most of the shrimp had spread out and swum away. But some of the smaller ones were floating on the surface, barely clinging to life.

To prevent these little shrimp from drowning, Lin Xu used a small hand net nearby to scoop them all out into a basin, then carried it into the kitchen.

Chen Yuanyuan, who was just about to finish her shift, asked, "Lin Xu, what are you planning to do?"

"These shrimp are nearly dead. I'm thinking of making some Shrimp Pancakes to take home as a late-night snack."

Hmm, we ate dinner quite early today. Maybe Baobao will get hungry around midnight. It'd be better to make these shrimp into pancakes now. Then, if someone's hungry later tonight, they can just heat them up in the microwave to fill their stomachs.

Even though microwaved pancakes aren't that tasty, they're surely better than instant noodles, right?

Upon hearing he was making Shrimp Pancakes, Chen Yuanyuan decided not to leave and followed him into the kitchen instead.

"My mom keeps nagging me that I can't cook. Since you're making Shrimp Pancakes, I'll learn from you. That way, when Mom visits, I can make some for her to try."

Lin Xu: "..."

Cousin Yuanyuan, are you really trying to learn how to make Shrimp Pancakes?

I'm almost too embarrassed to point it out.

I never expected that not only do I have a greedy sister-in-law in Beijing, but also a greedy cousin back home.

Both are the type who would rather stay single than compromise their taste buds.

When Shen Baobao heard about making Shrimp Pancakes, she also reluctantly came over. Her once pristine white T-shirt was now splattered with mud. Unable to vent her frustration on the culprit,

Baobao felt like an unappreciated stepmother and grew quite irritated. She decided to channel her anger into her appetite instead.

"Are Shrimp Pancakes hard to make?"

Shen Baobao planned to take notes to send to Aunt Liu, so she could make some at home for her Mom and Dad to try too.

Well, after all, I am my parents' sweet and considerate daughter.

"They're not hard to make; quite simple, actually."

Lin Xu added some water to the basin and rinsed the small river shrimp. These shrimp were very small, making it impossible to devein them. He just needed to wash them a couple more times to remove as much dirt from their surfaces as possible.

After washing, he drained the water. He placed the small river shrimp on the cutting board and chopped them roughly.

"Why are you chopping them?" Chen Yuanyuan asked, somewhat curious. She hadn't initially planned on learning, but since her cousin said it was simple, she decided to give it a try. It'd be a good way to appease her mom.

Lin Xu explained, "If we don't chop these small shrimp, their shells might burst when we cook the pancakes. This would make the pancakes look unappetizing, and bits might even splatter onto your face."

The small river shrimp didn't need to be chopped too finely. A rough chop was enough before moving on to the next step. He added some Scallion and Ginger water, salt, and an Egg to the basin, mixed it evenly, then added some low gluten flour and stirred it into a slightly thick batter.

Once everything was prepared, he placed a flat pan on the stove. When the pan was hot, he greased the bottom with a layer of oil and then used a spoon to ladle the batter onto the hot pan, placing half a

spoonful every few centimeters. Once the bottom of the pan was covered with dollops of batter, he carefully spread each one with a spatula, forming them into small, shrimp-filled pancakes.

Soon, the batter in the pan gradually solidified, and the small river shrimp inside also turned an enticing red. Lin Xu brushed oil on the surface of the pancakes and then flipped them over to continue frying. When both sides were golden brown, he carefully transferred them onto a plate and then began frying the next batch.

"It smells so good."

"So savory and fragrant; they look really tasty."

Shen Baobao and Chen Yuanyuan couldn't bear to wait any longer. Each grabbed a piece, blew on it to cool it down, and popped it into their mouth.

"CRUNCH..."

The crispy texture immediately whetted their appetites. Even though their stomachs were full, they felt a renewed urge to eat, as if their stomachs were proclaiming, 'Help me up, I need to keep working!'

"Wow, delicious!" Shen Baobao praised aloud, picked up a few more, and happily went to the dining area to give some to Chen Meijuan. "Mom, you've got to try this; these Shrimp Pancakes are so good."

But when she saw Dundun in Chen Meijuan's arms, she immediately narrowed her eyes.

You little brat, just you wait until I get my hands on you!

Dundun blinked gently, putting on an adorable look for Baobao.

Shen Baobao: "..."

AARGH, why am I even angrier now!

Returning to the kitchen, Lin Xu's second batch was almost done. Chen Yuanyuan was packing Shrimp Pancakes into a takeout box from the restaurant, clearly planning to take some too.

Lin Xu said, "Yuanyuan, if you eat so much at night, you'll turn into a ball."

Chen Yuanyuan lightly swatted her cousin's arm. "Even if I turn into a ball, it'll be your fault for making such delicious food! Besides, aren't you two eating them tonight as well? Why aren't you worried about turning into balls?"

As soon as Chen Yuanyuan finished speaking, she suddenly remembered that her cousin and his wife, Shen Baobao, lived together. She instantly felt a wave of jealousy from their public display of affection, and even the Shrimp Pancakes in her takeout box suddenly seemed less appetizing...

AARGH! My annoying cousin is always showing off his relationship!

It's so infuriating!

She didn't wait for Lin Xu and Shen Baobao, and drove off home by herself in a small commuter vehicle.

Lin Xu was quite puzzled. "What suddenly got into Yuanyuan?"

"I don't know. My older sister Yan also used to get suddenly cranky like this; it's probably a common affliction for older, single women."

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The young couple had no idea it was because of their own nauseatingly affectionate behavior. They even seriously analyzed it for a while.

After making the Shrimp Pancake, Shen Baobao took a photo and sent it to Aunt Liu, instructing, "Auntie Liu, this is the Shrimp Pancake my husband made. I'll send you the recipe later. Remember to make some for my parents to try when you have time."

Aunt Liu had just finished cleaning the kitchen. Seeing the photo, she replied, "Alright, Yueyue."

While she was responding to the message, Han Shuzhen came to the kitchen with a teacup, intending to make some corn silk tea for Shen Guofu.

Seeing her, Aunt Liu hurriedly opened the photo Shen Baobao sent to show her, "Director Han, this is what Yueyue just sent. She asked me to make it for you two when I have time. Will you be home for dinner tomorrow night?"

Han Shuzhen hadn't paid it much attention at first. But once she saw the crispy fried pancake and the red river shrimps wrapped inside, her appetite was immediately piqued.

Just then, Shen Baobao sent another message, "These Shrimp Pancakes can be eaten with salt and pepper, chopped chili, or even with tomato sauce. They can be sweet or salty, fragrant or spicy, extremely versatile."

Versatile? After reading this message, Han Shuzhen imagined the taste of the Shrimp Pancake and couldn't help but swallow.

She had thought that dining light for the past couple of days was pretty healthy. But upon seeing the shape and color of the Shrimp Pancake, Director Han immediately craved it.

She thought for a while and then asked, "Sister Liu, can we still buy small river shrimps at this time?"

Aunt Liu was startled, "At this time? It should be fine... I'll go buy some now. I can have Xiao Lin give me remote guidance to make it. It's perfect for you and President Shen to taste-test."

"Okay, then. Go buy some small river shrimps and give it a try. If it's delicious, we'll have another dish to serve guests at home."

After Aunt Liu left, Han Shuzhen returned to her room, a bit crazed.

AHHHH! This darn girl, she must have sent it over to mess with people's minds, right?

With a displeased face, she spoke to Shen Guofu, who was lying on the couch playing a matching game, "Guofu, you really did raise a good daughter!"

Shen Guofu: "... Did you always say Yueyue takes after you when she was little?"

He got up and asked, "What's going on now?"

Han Shuzhen, dispirited, recounted how the photo she just saw had thrown her off balance. Listening to her account, Shen Guofu internally exclaimed, What a good daughter!

Haha, I thought I'd have to wait until tomorrow for meat, but now I can have it sooner! My daughter, Shen Guofu's own girl, is truly a treasure! For this filial piety alone, I must buy her a car this year, high-end or not.

While he was excited, Shen Guofu noticed Director Han's dejected face and quickly took her hand, softly saying, "Honey, you don't have to be like this. It's all that stinky girl Yueyue's doing. Wait till she comes back, and you'll see how I'll deal with her!"

After some comforting, Han Shuzhen finally emerged from her emo state; she had maintained a healthy diet for two days only to have her defenses completely broken by a single photo.

Meanwhile, Shen Guofu was pondering to himself, If I get Yueyue to send some pictures of delicious food every day, wouldn't I be able to happily eat meat every day?

No sooner had this thought occurred to him than he could no longer contain himself. Yep, I'll get in touch with Yueyue while my wife goes down for her exercise, to strike a deal first. If my wife asks later, I'll just pass the blame to Yueyue. That girl has spent so much of our money, it's time for her to carry the can for a while.

Unexpectedly, after he finished eating the Shrimp Pancakes and talked to Shen Baobao about this, Shen Baobao took a screenshot of their conversation and sent it directly to her mom.

Hmph! I'm mom's little sweetie. Don't even think about making me do something to trick mom!

Shen Guofu, who was lying on the sofa and savoring the taste of the Shrimp Pancakes, soon received a message from Director Han, "Guofu, I found a dance titled 'Compendium of Materia Medica' that's really suitable for you to learn. Come downstairs and try it out. It's simple; you'll get it after one try!"

Before long, the sounds of Shen Guofu's wails could be heard from the fitness room in the basement of the Shen Family villa.

「In the morning.」

Lin Xu drove Shen Baobao downstairs for breakfast. More precisely, to make breakfast.

Shen Baobao ate too many Shrimp Pancakes last night, and her stomach was a bit upset. Because of this, Lin Xu thought it was time for the young miss to eat some wild vegetables and coarse grains to cleanse her system.

When they arrived at the restaurant, Mom had already prepared the wild vegetables, which she had also purchased from nearby villagers.

"Xu, what are you planning to do with these wild vegetables? Do you need Mom's help?"

Chen Meijuan placed the selected wild vegetables into the sink and, following Lin Xu's plan, also prepared to cook some Grain Porridge made from ground corn.

"I'm planning to steam some wild vegetable buns and mixed grain buns. We've been eating too much rich food recently, so it's time for something lighter. Besides, it's Grandma's birthday today, and I want her to try my cooking too."

"Okay, then you go ahead with it. I'm going to the visitor center to check the recent accounts with your dad."

After Chen Meijuan left, Lin Xu took some coarse grain flour made from ground sorghum and soybeans, added some cornflour, and mixed it with Baking Powder to form a dough. The purpose of adding Baking Powder was to make the steamed buns softer and improve the texture.

After kneading the coarse grain dough, Lin Xu washed and drained the wild vegetables. He gave them a slight chop, then added flour, table salt, and a little baking soda, mixing it all to form another dough. Adding baking soda helps make the wild vegetables softer and more delicious. The table salt was to provide a base flavor for the wild vegetable buns.

Once both doughs were ready, Lin Xu took a steaming tray, laid it with silicone steaming cloth, and began making the wild vegetable buns.

Grabbing a piece of dough from the bowl, he first rolled it into a ball. Then, holding it in the palm of his left hand, he used his right thumb to gently press inward while turning the ball. Once the ball was shaped like a cup, the wild vegetable bun was ready. He carefully inverted it onto the steaming tray, then started making the next one.

After all the wild vegetable buns were made, Lin Xu used the same method to make the mixed grain buns as well.

Then, when the steamer was ready, he placed both types of buns inside and began to steam them.

"This for breakfast? Will I even be able to get it down?" Shen Baobao, seeing the buns Lin Xu was making, remembered the days when she ate Mixed Grain Pancakes at home. This made her, already lacking appetite, feel even less inclined to eat.

Why are we suddenly living so austerely?

Lin Xu, holding some peeled garlic, said while smashing it, "Don't worry, I'll make a Soul Dipping Sauce in a bit, guaranteed to make you want more after you've tried it."

"Really?"

With trust in her husband, Shen Baobao's anticipation was once again piqued.

Seeing her lazing around, Lin Xu said, "If you're not busy, help me send a message to Guo Xinghai, asking him for the exact procedure and tips for removing the fishiness when making 'Fermented Black Bean Braised Eel'."

My all-capable husband actually needs to seek advice from someone else?

After speaking, Lin Xu realized he might be ruining his image, so he added, "I'm just testing his research in this area to see if he knows more than me..."

Chapter 374: Who Knew Cornbread Could Be This Delicious? Eel in Black Bean Sauce, the Panlong Eel Version!

"Hmm... I knew it!"

Shen Baobao immediately took Lin Xu's phone and tapped out a message to Guo Xinghai.

It wasn't long before she received a reply:

"The eels you're asking about have a stronger earthy taste compared to other varieties. It can be much improved by washing it a few times with salt and Cooking Wine. Also, when marinating in black bean sauce, don't forget to add Garlic Paste and White Pepper powder—the effect is unexpected... Why are you suddenly asking about this, Lin Xu? You're not trying to test me secretly, are you?"

Wow! He figured it out!

"Xu Bao, Xu Bao, how should I reply?"

Shen Baobao found this quite amusing. The two of them, one posing questions and the other answering, both understood each other... Wait, why were they so in sync?

"Tell him you just casually asked because you're cooking eel today and were wondering about it."

Once he knew the method, Lin Xu was greatly relieved and immediately began preparing the dipping sauce for the wowotou.

In the past, wowotou were eaten to fill the stomach, so there wasn't much sophistication to them.

But now, people eat wowotou either as snacks or for dieting purposes. While paying attention to nutrition, they also try to improve the taste and texture of the wowotou.

This led to the development of various dipping sauces and side dishes.

Every region has its own way of eating wowotou: some use Chili Oil, some use garlic sauce, and others use grandmother's fried vegetables.

What Lin Xu was going to make now was a dipping sauce with a Central Plains flavor.

This sauce was based on a farmer's home-fermented watermelon soybean paste, sautéed with garlic, millet chili, Hangzhou pepper, dried chili, scallions, and other ingredients.

The taste was salty and savory, extremely appetizing, and great for accompanying meals.

Others might not know, but he had never gotten tired of it since childhood.

After preparing all the necessary ingredients, Lin Xu went to the storage room and scooped up a generous half bowl of the fermented watermelon soybean paste that his second uncle-in-law, Shi Wenming, had made from a jar.

Shen Baobao watched this with curiosity. "With so many ingredients, the sauce must be delicious, right?"

Lin Xu pinched the girl's collagen-filled cheeks and said with a smile, "At the very least, it should whet your appetite."

After bringing over the fermented watermelon soybean paste, he immediately set up the wok to start cooking.

He poured a bit more peanut oil into the wok than he usually would for stir-frying.

When the oil was hot, he first added the dried chili segments from the bowl and stir-fried them briefly to bring out their aroma. Then, he added scallion segments, Hangzhou pepper, millet chili, and smashed garlic cloves, and continued to stir-fry.

Once these were just barely cooked through, he poured in the scooped fermented watermelon soybean paste and then added two small spoonfuls of White Sugar to the wok.

Since the fermented watermelon soybean paste was already quite salty from the curing process, only White Sugar was needed during the stir-frying. Besides balancing the saltiness, the White Sugar also enhanced the umami flavor of the dipping sauce.

After adding the White Sugar, he turned the heat down low.

By simmering it gently, the fermented, moldy taste in the paste was cooked out, leaving only the rich, savory aroma of the soybean paste. This made it irresistible, whether served as a dip for steamed buns or wowotou, or even as a condiment for porridge.

"Wow, my grandma used to make this kind of dipping sauce too! I could eat two flower rolls every time..." Shen Baobao said, her interest piqued as she inhaled the delicious aroma of the sauce.

Lin Xu, while stirring the contents of the wok with a spoon, said, "If you want to eat it in the future, just tell me. I'll make it for you."

"Thank you, Xu Bao."

Shen Baobao wrapped her arms around Lin Xu's waist from behind, resting her head on his shoulder. She had cherished her feelings for him for four years, and now she finally felt Xu Bao's passionate and warm response.

Thank you for letting me experience all the beautiful things in life.

As the young couple was enjoying their affectionate moment, Chen Yuanyuan's voice came from outside the kitchen.

"Is breakfast ready? I'm so hungry..."

Yuanyuan saw her younger sister-in-law tightly hugging her cousin. Though she had felt quite hungry a moment ago, she now let out an involuntary belch.

"You two continue, I... I didn't see anything."

After saying that, Yuanyuan, feeling rather solitary, went off to find Dundun to play with.

"Dundun, call your auntie!"

Dundun was speechless. Beijing has one ditzy great-aunt, and it turns out my hometown has a ditzy aunt too. Life is SO hard for this cat!

Interrupted by Chen Yuanyuan, Shen Baobao shyly and quickly let go of Lin Xu.

Lin Xu continued to stir the paste in the wok.

When the fermented watermelon soybean paste was first added to the wok, the oil and paste were separated.

But after stir-frying and continuous stirring, the oil had fully emulsified with the paste, and the originally somewhat thick paste had thinned out a little.

After stir-frying for a while longer, as the water content reduced, the paste in the wok thickened again.

When the aroma of the soybean paste became even more intense, Lin Xu turned off the heat and used a spoon to transfer the richly fragrant, stir-fried paste into a large bowl.

This bowl of fermented watermelon soybean paste, a taste that many from the Central Plains yearned for, was now ready.

Besides the fermented watermelon soybean paste, Lin Xu also used minced garlic to prepare a garlic-paste-infused sesame oil and a hot chili oil, enriching the variety of dipping sauces for the wowotou as much as possible.

Once everything was ready, the wowotou in the steamer cabinet were also cooked.

After turning off the heat and letting them steam for two more minutes with the residual heat, he pulled the steaming tray out from the cabinet.

He placed the steaming tray on the worktable, covered it with another empty steaming tray, and then, with Shen Baobao holding one end, they carefully flipped it over. He then removed the steamer cloth, and all the cooked wowotou were neatly arranged on the new steaming tray to cool.

After all the wowotou were laid out, the cornmeal mush was also ready.

Shen Baobao bounced excitedly to the visitor center to call her father-in-law and mother-in-law. Breakfast was about to begin.

"Hmm, this soybean paste is well made. It smells delicious."

Chapter 375: Could Steamed Corn Bread Be This Delicious? Eel Version of Black Bean Sauce Coiled Dragon Eel!

Lin Hongqi arrived at the restaurant, and smelling the delicious soybean paste aroma, he couldn't help but recall bringing soybean paste to school in a canning jar during his school days.

Back then, many students came from financially struggling families, and a jar of soybean paste was treated like a treasure. Students would even carry it during class for fear of it being stolen if left in the dormitory.

If it were lost, not only would two weeks' worth of meals be gone, but they would also get a scolding at home.

Canning jars were valuable and usually only received as gifts from relatives during festivals. If one was lost, the family would have to somehow find another...

Reflecting on those difficult times and seeing the joyful scene of his family now, Lin Hongqi felt deeply moved.

Life had indeed gotten much better.

"Dad, here's your porridge."

As he was reflecting, Shen Baobao brought over a bowl of corn porridge and placed it in front of him. This made Lin Hongqi even more satisfied with his current life.

Who would have thought that a child from our Lin family could marry a girl from a wealthy Beijing family?

Standing nearby, Chen Meijuan also felt deeply moved. "How great it would have been to have a jar of soybean paste like this when we were in school."

Lin Hongqi passed her a pair of chopsticks with a smile, "What? Is my mom's cooking not enough for you?"

When they were in school, Lin Xu's grandfather was a minor official, and Lin Xu's grandmother was also teaching at a school. Their family had relatively better conditions.

During his time in boarding high school, Lin Hongqi used to share the food and drinks he brought from home with Chen Meijuan, the most beautiful girl in his class. Sometimes he even went hungry to make sure Chen Meijuan was fed.

They secretly fell for each other.

Romantic relationships among students weren't allowed at that time. Not only would the school impose punishments, but even both families would strongly object.

When Chen Meide and Chen Meiliang, who had just started working, heard that a teacher's child was pestering their little sister, they immediately became furious and rode their bicycles straight to the Lin Family's village.

They intended to teach Lin Hongqi a lesson and warn him to stay away from their little sister.

The brothers pedaled tens of miles. Just as they arrived in the village, the Lin family was hosting a house-raising event.

The stew from the large communal pot, filled with fatty meat, and the soft, fluffy steamed white buns instantly tempted the tired and hungry brothers.

The brothers, who had originally come to cause trouble, suddenly felt that it wasn't a bad thing for their sister to be with such a well-off family. They abandoned their thoughts of fighting and, rolling up their sleeves, began to help with the house-raising.

Afterward, each of them devoured two bowls of the hearty stew and four large buns.

Lin Hongqi's grandmother initially disagreed with him getting engaged so young. She believed that with a bit of effort, Hongqi could easily get into university.

But now, the girl's side was being so proactive. Hearing that her family had ridden dozens of miles on bicycles just to help with the house-raising, they felt it wouldn't be right not to formally ask for her hand in marriage. So, they found a middleman to make the proposal and sent over two entire pig legs as gifts.

Well, they had traveled so far to help. Regardless of the outcome, sending the two pig legs felt like the right thing to do.

The Chen Family hadn't expected things to turn out this way. But the pig legs had already been delivered to their house, and Meijuan was very satisfied with the boy. Moreover, their two children had even helped with the house-raising. So they agreed!

And just like that, Lin Hongqi, who was still in his second year of high school, got engaged to his classmate Chen Meijuan. The two of them were always seen together, making all the teachers and students at school incredibly envious.

"Wow! Mom and Dad's love story is so romantic!" Shen Baobao exclaimed, starry-eyed after hearing the story.

She initially thought her engagement to Lin Xu right after graduation was abrupt. However, now that she knew her mother-in-law had gotten engaged in her second year of high school, it seemed what the young people were doing now was just following in the footsteps of the older generation.

She mimicked Chen Meijuan, picking up some watermelon soybean paste with her chopsticks, spreading it inside her steamed bread, and taking a bite.

WOW! Mixed grain steamed bread with soybean paste is so delicious! If only I had known, I would have asked Aunt Liu to make some soybean paste to go with the mixed grains I was eating at home back then.

Chen Yuanyuan dipped a wild vegetable steamed bread into the Chili Oil and said as she ate, "I really didn't expect my dad and my uncle to have done something so embarrassing. When they arrive later, I have to interview them properly, asking why they sold out my third aunt for a bowl of the communal pot stew."

Lin Xu took a sip of his porridge and chuckled, "You'd better not ask."

"Why not, bro? Don't you think it's interesting?"

"It's interesting for sure, but there's a high chance my uncles will turn the topic to your marriage. Then the whole family will start pestering you about getting married again."

It seems it's time for my sister-in-law to teach Yuanyuan some skills on how to stay inconspicuous in a crowd. Why would she draw attention to herself like that? Isn't that just making herself a target for the relatives? Lin Xu thought.

Chen Yuanyuan instantly pursed her lips.

Sigh! Being single, I don't even have the right to gossip at home. Luckily, there's still delicious food to comfort my wounded soul... I'll just be an inconspicuous freeloader today, avoid being seen by the relatives, so I won't be dragged out as a bad example compared to my cousin.

Although today's meal was simple, it was quite delicious.

The wild vegetable steamed bread had a unique, fresh plant-like taste and was extremely tasty. The mixed grain steamed bread, with added soybean flour, became more fragrant the more one chewed.

These two types of steamed bread, paired with three different styles of dipping sauces, were simply incredible.

"It's so delicious! I didn't have much of an appetite initially, but this steamed bread and soybean paste just make me unable to stop. Mom, won't you mind if I eat too much?"

"Silly child, why would Mom mind you eating too much."

Chapter 376: Could Steamed Corn Bread Be This Delicious? Eel Version of Black Bean Sauce Coiled Dragon Eel!

Seeing her daughter-in-law relish the wowotou, Chen Meijuan said to Lin Hongqi, "When you have a moment, ask around to see who has sweet potatoes growing. Get some tender sweet potato leaves, and I will steam some sweet potato leaf wowotou for Yueyue. I'll also stir-fry some sweet potato stems and blanch some leaves..."

These were all ingredients quite coveted in the city.

While her daughter-in-law was at home, she wanted to cook these dishes a few more times for her to enjoy the novelty.

Right in the midst of eating, Shi Wenming returned from buying groceries.

"Wow, you steamed so many wowotou! Lucky I didn't eat Bianfen Cai in the street, or I would have missed this meal."

Today was Grandma Lin's birthday celebration, requiring many ingredients. Consequently, Shi Wenming hurried over in his car right after his grocery shopping.

Today, all the relatives attended, even more than the number from two days ago when they welcomed Shen Baobao.

There were many vegetables to prepare, so starting early was necessary.

After the meal, Chen Yuanyuan biked alone to the ticket office. Chen Meijuan stayed to help in the kitchen, while Dundun kept circling around the sink, trying to catch prey as a birthday gift for the family's elder.

Before long, the relatives started arriving one after another.

To not disrupt the restaurant's business, they used the second-floor dining room for the birthday celebration.

When the restaurant was first built, they felt one floor wouldn't be enough, so they added a second. However, the second-floor dining room hadn't been used until now.

Lin Xu, wearing an apron, was busy cooking in the kitchen.

Today, since it was a birthday celebration, there were many dishes to prepare: White Robed Shrimp, Almond Tofu, White Jade Lotus Root Strips, Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips, Qingshui Furong, Milk Soup Tofu, Double Pepper Fish Head, Sweet and Sour Ribs, Pickled Pork, Oil Braised Large Shrimp, Crystal Sugar Pork Shank...

As a child, Lin Xu had eaten so many dishes made by his grandmother.

Today, on her 70th birthday, Lin Xu wished he could cook every Perfect Level dish he knew for Grandma to try.

All the hard work and busyness were for the comfort and peace of mind of the family, after all.

More and more relatives arrived. The gifts they brought varied widely. There were local specialties, nutritional supplements, and also gold and silver jewelry.

For a birthday celebration, what mattered most was the happiness of the elder.

While Lin Xu was busy, his maternal uncle Chen Meide came in carrying a box of Horse Hoof. "Xiao Xu, someone gave me a box of Horse Hoof yesterday. You figure out how to eat them when you're free. I really can't grasp how to deal with this southern ingredient."

Horse Hoof?

Lin Xu immediately remembered he still had the task of making Horse Hoof Cake for Shen Baobao that he hadn't completed yet.

He'd consider the recipe later. It would be good to make it while celebrating Grandma's birthday to add to the festivity.

Thinking this, he said to his uncle, "These can be minced and mixed into meat fillings, or made into a dessert. I'll handle it later; you don't need to worry about it, Uncle."

"Alright then, I'm heading out. The kitchen's really hot. Wenming didn't even think to install an air conditioner."

Shi Wenming: Go complain to your sister and brother-in-law; they're the bosses here.

「In the upstairs dining room.」

Shen Baobao handed a box to Grandma Lin, who was dressed in new clothes and holding Dundun. "Grandma, before coming over, my dad heard you were celebrating your birthday and asked me to bring you a gift. Please don't disdain it, okay?"

Grandma Lin was somewhat surprised. Having her granddaughter-in-law come to celebrate her birthday already made her very happy. She didn't expect that her in-laws had also prepared a gift. This was simply too delightful.

Eldest Aunt Lin Hongxin took it over with a smile and said, "Let me see what gift the in-laws have prepared... My dear niece-in-law, could this be... too valuable?"

She had originally thought it might be a bracelet or something similar, having heard that wealthy people would carve good wood directly into beads to give out to relatives and friends. But when she opened it, to her surprise, it was a Longevity Peach made of gold, and quite a large one at that.

Considering the current price of gold, this Longevity Peach must be worth a six-figure sum.

Grandma Lin found this Longevity Peach particularly to her liking. "This is so beautiful! Yueyue, say hello to your parents for me. We're all family now; there's no need to be so formal."

Shen Baobao nestled up to the old lady with a giggle. "It's because we are family that we have to give something even better! Grandma, I wish you fortune as vast as the East Sea and a lifespan longer than the southern mountains. We're still waiting for you to help us with the kids."

The old lady was even happier upon hearing this, even more so than when receiving the golden Longevity Peach. "Yes, yes, Grandma will definitely live a long and healthy life to help you and Lin Xu with the kids later on. But you'll need to have more, so your own grandma doesn't have to fight over them with me!"

The laughter and joy upstairs filled the relatives in the courtyard with envy. The wife that Little Xu found was really good at making the elderly happy; it would be wonderful if their own kids could find such a beautiful and sensible daughter-in-law.

「In the kitchen.」

After finishing all the preparations, Lin Xu said to his mother with a smile, "It's finally time to prepare that eel. Dundun got scared when I was butchering a rabbit yesterday, so I'll have to do it out of his sight today."

"No need to hide. As soon as the old lady arrived, she took him in her arms. They're probably upstairs now."

Chen Meijuan had just finished speaking when Shi Wenming, who had just finished cutting the meat, said, "I'll do it. Little Xu, you just wait."

His uncle-in-law, keen on butchering various creatures, went out with a kitchen knife. Before long, he returned to the kitchen with a cleanly butchered eel.

TSK TSK TSK... talk about efficiency.

Lin Xu put the eel into a basin, filled it with fresh water, and thoroughly washed the cavity. The water in the basin quickly turned bloody.

He changed the water again, took some salt, and meticulously scrubbed the eel, getting rid of a lot of mucus, until the eel's skin finally felt no longer slippery.

After changing the water once more, he took a handful of flour and scrubbed the surface of the eel again. He did his best to remove the blood and impurities from the eel's body, reducing any fishy smell.

Then he laid the eel on the chopping board and used his knife to score the backbone every three to four centimeters, but without completely severing it, as the belly flesh needed to stay attached. This way, when arranged on a plate, it would create the effect of a coiling dragon. Moreover, scoring it like this would prevent the eel from deforming due to nerve spasms during steaming.

He scored the spine from head to tail, then rinsed it again in fresh water. He thoroughly rinsed the blood from the backbone and flesh.

Finally, he rinsed it with cooking wine. Once cleaned, he placed it in a bowl, adding white pepper powder, minced garlic, ginger slices, scallion sections, and fermented black bean sauce. He made sure to coat the eel evenly, inside and out, before setting it aside to marinate.

After finishing this task, Lin Xu looked at the box of Horse Hoof his maternal uncle had sent and mumbled to himself, How was Horse Hoof Cake made again?

Chapter 377: A Dessert Perfect for Showing Off Skills - Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake! Excellent Level Stewed Dish Lottery!

Lin Xu originally wanted to "test" Guo Xinghai again, but he felt it was inappropriate to constantly pick on one person. So, he took out his phone and searched for the recipe for Horse Hoof Cake.

The reward tasks were all quite simple anyway. As long as Shen Baobao was satisfied, he would pass.

After looking up a simple tutorial, he found that the recipe was really quite easy. It involved just pureeing fresh Horse Hooves into juice, filtering it, simmering it with sugar, and then pouring it into molds to chill.

The final product was like jelly, and adding some fresh diced Horse Hoof would make it even better.

If he wanted to show off his skills, he could divide the Horse Hoof Juice into two portions, add Coconut milk to one, and keep the other as is. He would then place the molds in a steamer, pour in one layer of the mixture and steam it for two to three minutes, then pour in the other mixture and steam for another two to three minutes. This way, what would come out of the steamer would be a layered Horse Hoof Cake, one layer clear and one layer white.

Although it didn't improve the taste much, its appearance would greatly improve.

After reading this, Lin Xu immediately took the box of Horse Hooves his eldest maternal uncle had brought over, ready to start.

If he made the Horse Hoof Cake now, it would probably chill in the refrigerator just in time for dessert after dinner.

However, today was his grandmother's seventieth birthday, and relatives from his hometown were all present.

If he was going to make it, he couldn't just simmer the mixture and pour it into molds to solidify. This method lacked challenge and could easily be mistaken by the relatives for Pork Skin jelly. If a relative unknowingly used it to accompany their drink, it would be quite embarrassing.

Lin Xu planned to use the layered steaming method to enhance the appearance of the Horse Hoof Cake and make a layered version.

In fact, Horse Hoof Flour is the most suitable for making Horse Hoof Cake. This flour is the white sediment obtained by mashing fresh Horse Hooves, filtering the liquid, allowing it to settle, and then drying the resulting paste. Using Horse Hoof Flour makes the cake more delicate and helps it solidify more thoroughly.

But since he only had fresh Horse Hooves now, he had to use them.

He peeled the Horse Hooves, chopped them into small pieces, and put them in the food processor. Since he needed a larger quantity of Horse Hoof Cake today, Lin Xu used half of the Horse Hooves right away. He knew that handling a larger quantity would make it easier to work without being overly cautious.

He added a bit of water to the food processor, then turned it on to blend the Horse Hooves into a paste. After blending one batch, he poured it into a bowl and continued blending the rest. After all the Horse Hooves were turned into a paste, he filtered it twice with cheesecloth to make the texture of the Horse Hoof Cake even finer. The filtered residue wasn't discarded. He put it back into the food processor, added more water, blended it several more times, and filtered it again to extract as much Horse Hoof Juice as possible from the pulp.

Once the Horse Hoof Juice was ready, it was time to cook it.

Lin Xu found a case of Coconut milk among the gifts brought by the relatives and took two bottles.

Just as he was about to start, he suddenly felt that the conventional method—layers of clear Horse Hoof Paste and white Coconut Milk Pudding—seemed a bit mundane and not dazzling enough. For such an important occasion, to dazzle the relatives and make his grandmother happy, he needed to get creative with the colors. He had to make it more beautiful. But how?

Upon seeing mangoes among the gifts, an idea struck him. Why not add some mango juice to make it bright yellow? But just yellow wouldn't suffice. He should add some cherry juice for a bright red. And if that worked, purple from purple sweet potato juice was also possible!

Following this train of thought, Lin Xu suddenly smacked his forehead. "Then why not just make a Seven-colored Horse Hoof Cake? It would look good and taste better."

Once he decided on the seven-colored version, he quickly assembled ingredients for seven different colors. Red would come from red cherries; orange from Carrot juice; yellow from mango juice; green simply from Matcha Powder; cyan from Cucumber Juice; as for blue, the blueberries his eldest paternal aunt had bought would be perfect; and purple would be left to Thanos... oh no, to purple sweet potato.

After arranging all the colored ingredients, Lin Xu considered that the seven colors wouldn't be clearly distinguished if placed directly side-by-side. So, he decided to use the white of the Coconut milk as a spacer. This way, the seven colors would be clearer, and the white Coconut Milk Pudding would make the Horse Hoof Cake look more upscale.

Next, he placed a small saucepan, used for desserts, on the stove. He poured a large bowl of the filtered Horse Hoof Juice into it, added a handful of Crystal Sugar, and began to simmer it on low heat.

This step normally involved the Cantonese dessert staple Crystal Sugar. But Crystal Sugar would impart a yellowish hue. To ensure the resulting Coconut Milk Pudding had a more beautiful color, Lin Xu decided to use Crystal Sugar instead.

As it simmered, the distinctive fresh aroma of Horse Hooves wafted from the pot, and the liquid started to thicken slightly. This was due to the starches in the Horse Hooves taking effect.

After simmering for a while longer, when the liquid in the pot turned into a slightly viscous, clear fluid, Lin Xu opened two cartons of Coconut milk and poured them in. The clear liquid in the pot immediately turned milky.

After simmering for a bit longer, once he was sure the Horse Hoof Paste and Coconut milk had thoroughly combined, Lin Xu turned off the heat and poured out the milky-white mixture from the pot.

This mixture is referred to as the "cooked paste" in Horse Hoof Cake preparation. It is contrasted with "raw paste," which is uncooked Horse Hoof Juice. When making Horse Hoof Cake, the cooked paste provides structure, while the raw paste enhances the refreshing taste of the Horse Hooves. Mixing both pastes makes for a tastier Horse Hoof Cake.

After pouring out all the cooked paste, Lin Xu added a scoop of raw paste to it and quickly stirred everything together evenly with a spoon.

Chapter 378: The Dessert Suitable for Showing Off Skills - Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake! Excellent Level Stew Dish Lottery!

To make layered Horse Hoof Cake, one shouldn't pour too much raw batter, as it would affect the cake's solidification. Lin Xu then coordinated with the freshly squeezed colorful fruit juices and other ingredients, stirring them until evenly mixed, and began to cook the Seven-colored Liquid.

After everything was prepared, he placed a steamer on the stove. He then fetched several molds suitable for steaming desserts, washed them, wiped them dry, and greased them to facilitate demolding. Once all preparations were complete, he began the steaming process.

Once the water in the steamer boiled, he first poured a layer of white Coconut Milk Pudding into the bottom of the molds and placed them in the steamer for two to three minutes. When he took them out, the Coconut Milk Pudding had solidified. Lin Xu then scooped in a spoonful of Horse Hoof Paste made from purple sweet potato juice and placed it back in the steamer. Next, he steamed another layer of Coconut Milk Pudding. Once that was done, it was time for the blue Horse Hoof Paste made from blueberries.

Following this pattern, layer by layer, the liquids were poured into the molds until all the prepared paste was used up.

"Son, why are you making all these colorful liquids? Are you planning to surprise your grandmother?" Chen Meijuan was full of curiosity, feeling that her son was up to something mysterious.

"Uncle just brought a box of Horse Hoof. I thought I'd make some Horse Hoof Cake for everyone to try. But an ordinary Horse Hoof Cake wouldn't showcase your son's skills, so I made Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake instead."

Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake? Chen Meijuan looked at the seven different colored liquids in the bowls and couldn't help but praise, "To think that such a Horse Hoof Cake could be made! My son is truly impressive."

"It's because Mom has excellent genes," Lin Xu flattered her, then removed the molds from the steamer and placed them in the freezer to accelerate cooling. At this point, the Horse Hoof Cake was still sticky, soft, and not yet edible. Only after its temperature dropped would it solidify and set, its texture becoming bouncy and firm like jelly.

It was already past eleven in the morning. All the relatives had arrived. After greeting them, Lin Xu began to cook.

He layered the marinated fish head with sautéed red millet chili paste and green Chaotian chili paste. Then, he took out the marinated eel, placed its head in the center, and coiled its body on the plate, creating the standard coiled dragon design. Next, he steamed the eel and fish head together in the steam cabinet. Then he got busy preparing the other dishes.

Soon, dish after dish was brought upstairs.

"Grandma, this dish is called White Jade Lotus Root Strips. It's a designated dish served to foreign guests at the Fishing Platform. The last time I participated in an internal competition at the Fishing Platform, I won the championship with this very dish," Lin Xu explained.

"Oh my, then I simply must try it!" exclaimed Old Lady Lin, who was wearing a birthday hat. In the dining room on the second floor, Old Lady Lin happily tried the White Jade Lotus Root Strips and couldn't help but give a thumbs-up, "Delicious! It's so crisp and crunchy, and the flavor is wonderful. Everyone, try it quickly! My eldest grandson's skills are truly excellent."

Hearing Old Lady Lin's praise, everyone eagerly picked up their chopsticks to taste. They were instantly captivated by the crisp texture of the lotus root strips.

"Our Little Xu is indeed incredible!"

"I didn't even realize this was made from lotus root."

"Such impressive skills! Truly worthy of a Central Finance graduate—his cooking is top-notch!"

"We're planning to have our Little Xun apply to Central Finance too. Then he can go and be Little Xu's head chef!"

"Our Shaokang will apply too."

"And Moli too! Female chefs are becoming quite sought after these days..."

Shen Baobao listened to the relatives' discussions, unsure whether to laugh or cry. His alma mater's reputation was certainly taking an... interesting turn!

Soon after, the Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips were served.

"Grandma, this is Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips, made from shredded radish. Chairman Liu, who visited last time, mentioned that this is a lost dish recorded in ancient texts, and I managed to recreate it," Lin Xu explained.

Old Lady Lin was even more delighted to hear this and immediately took a bite. The soft, tender, and slightly chewy texture, paired with the faint garlic aroma, delighted her immensely, "Delicious, truly delicious! I never imagined that at my old age, I'd get to eat such wonderful food. It's all thanks to my eldest grandson!"

The relatives tasted it and were equally astounded. In terms of preparation, this dish wasn't much different from the steamed radish strips they made at home. However, the texture and flavor were worlds apart. It left them marveling, even wondering if the common radishes found everywhere in the countryside could truly be made this delicious.

Then, dishes like Sweet and Sour Pork Loin, Oil Braised Large Shrimp, and Crystal Sugar Pork Knuckle were served one after another. Each dish drew gasps of amazement from the relatives.

By the time Lin Xu brought in the White Robed Shrimp, specially prepared for Old Lady Lin, everyone was almost experiencing sensory overload. Their thoughts had shifted from 'Is this dish good?' to 'Just how incredibly good can this dish possibly be?'

"Grandma, when I was little, I often heard you talk about this dish, White Robed Shrimp. This time in Beijing, I made a special effort to learn how to make it. Please try it and see if it's exactly like the taste you remember," Lin Xu offered.

Old Lady Lin said with a beaming smile, "There's no need to taste it to know it must be delicious when made by my eldest grandson."

She took a bite. It was crisp and refreshing, savory yet not heavy. The freshness, saltiness, and aroma were all perfectly balanced.

Shen Baobao was quite surprised. She had no idea when her Xu Bao had managed to learn this dish.

"I learned it from Huo Yifan during the competition," Lin Xu explained to Shen Baobao, then returned to the kitchen and brought out the Qingshui Furong.

After serving the soup, he looked at Shen Jiayue, who was eagerly waiting beside Old Lady Lin. Then, he said to Shen Baobao, "Baobao, go ahead and snap your fingers."

Chapter 379: The Dessert Suitable for Showing Off Skills - Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake! Excellent Level Stew Dish Lottery!

"Okay!"

How could I, Shen Jiayue, miss out on a chance to show off?

She walked over, mimed a gesture for effect, and then snapped her fingers; the flower buds in the clear soup immediately blossomed at the sound.

These relatives had watched the video online more than once. But their faces were still filled with shock when they saw it in person.

Old Mrs. Lin couldn't focus on eating. She patted the reserved seat next to her and said, "My dear grandson must be exhausted. Come and sit down to eat. Don't bother with the remaining dishes; we can't finish them anyway."

Lin Xu said, "There are only two dishes left. I'll bring them out, and then we can start eating."

He returned to the kitchen.

He took out a large fish head and eel from the steamer cabinet.

After the fish head was drizzled with hot lard, Uncle Shi Wenming carried it upstairs.

As for the remaining eel dish, it required a bit more work.

Lin Xu used chopsticks to pick out the Scallion and Ginger, then poured out the steamed juice. This juice was too fishy and not suitable for eating.

Next, he drizzled a bit of Steamed Fish Sauce over it and added finely shredded scallion, ginger, and red pepper strips. He heated some lard and poured it over the dish to sizzle. With that, this eel version of 'Coiling Dragon Eel in Soy Sauce' was ready.

When he brought it to the table, the relatives were full of praise:

"I didn't know you could prepare eel like this; I'll have to try it myself."

"You'll have to share the recipe, Lin Xu. Otherwise, our eel will definitely turn out fishy."

"Exactly, exactly. Teach us later, Lin Xu!"

"Wenming, you should learn it. Once you master it, we can put it on the restaurant's menu, and it'll be a great way to make money."

"I'll learn, definitely! Lately, I've basically become Lin Xu's apprentice. I follow him and learn every dish he makes. Once I've learned it, we can sell it in the restaurant."

"..."

Lin Xu sat beside Old Mrs. Lin and put a piece of eel into his mouth.

Mmm, the fish skin is smooth, the eel flesh delicious, with a subtle soy sauce flavor. Moreover, since the spine has been cut, it's very easy to eat. Just a gentle pull and the meat comes right off. This dish is good. If I get a chance to level it up, it can be a new addition to the restaurant's menu. However, this is ultimately an eel dish. I'll have to find a way to go to the Fishing Platform's Building 6 and learn more eel recipes from Chef Qiu. I've heard that Jiangsu cuisine chefs can make one hundred and eight different dishes with eel. That's truly enviable. And Guo Xinghai is always studying Cantonese cuisine. Apparently, an Excellent Level Cantonese chef can make one hundred and eight unique dishes from chicken. In comparison, my own school is quite straightforward. We only manage to offend one hundred and eight different peers...

When they had almost finished eating, Lin Xu went to the kitchen to cook a small bowl of hand-pulled noodles for his grandmother. For a birthday celebration, noodles were a must.

After Old Mrs. Lin ate them happily, his eldest uncle Lin Hongjun and his father Lin Hongqi brought in a large, three-tiered cake.

It was time for cake. This was the kids' favorite part.

Meanwhile, the adults continued to drink and chat, occasionally complimenting Lin Xu's cooking skills.

"My dear grandson, I'm full. Your cooking is really good. I've lived for seventy years, and this is the happiest birthday I've ever had. It's all thanks to my dear grandson's hard work."

"This is what I should do. Wait a moment, Grandma. There are still some snacks. I'll bring them over for you."

There's more?

A flicker of concern passed through Old Mrs. Lin's eyes. That boy has been busy in the kitchen all morning. Just how much food did he prepare? If I'd known, I wouldn't have let him go to so much trouble. Steaming some buns and stewing a big pot of vegetables would have been fine. Back then, it was because of a meal like this that those two boys from the Chen Family agreed to let Meijuan marry in.

He went to the kitchen and brought out a mold from the fridge.

Its temperature had dropped completely. It even felt cool to the touch, perfect for an after-meal dessert.

He opened the lid and inverted the mold onto the cutting board. Gently tapping it twice, he then slowly lifted the mold away.

A whole Horse Hoof Cake, like a frozen rainbow, appeared before his eyes.

Holy cow! This is so beautiful! I knew it would be pretty, but I didn't expect it to be this stunning.

The seven colors were even, all the same thickness. Each color was separated by white, making it look both neat and high-class.

With a gentle pat, it wobbled. It's like a big blob of jelly sitting here.

After marveling at it, Lin Xu took a kitchen knife and evenly cut the large Horse Hoof Cake into more presentable and visually striking diamond shapes.

Once cut, he arranged them on a plate. Then, he carried it upstairs to the dining room.

As he entered, everyone—whether it was the children fighting over cake or the adults drinking and chatting—unconsciously looked towards the door. More precisely, they were looking at the plate in Lin Xu's hands.

The evenly cut, diamond-shaped pieces displayed seven vibrant colors, each layer separated by a milky white. The presentation was simply stunning.

After setting it down on the table, Lin Xu smiled and said, "Grandma, this is the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake I made for you. Please try it."

Although she knew her dear grandson would surprise her again, Old Mrs. Lin was still captivated by the beautiful Horse Hoof Cake.

Beautiful! Simply too beautiful!

"No wonder my dear grandson was hired as a culinary consultant for the Fishing Platform. I can hardly bear to eat it."

Picking up a trembling piece of the Water Chestnut Cake, Old Mrs. Lin admired it as if it were a fine piece of porcelain in a museum. Only when the relatives urged her did she gently bite into it.

"Mmm, delicious! It seems like each layer has a different flavor. It's so delicious!"

Hearing the old lady's praise, the others also gathered around. Each took a piece, but before tasting, they held up their phones to snap pictures. After the photo session, they finally began to slowly savor it. All the while, they praised Lin Xu's culinary skills.

Seeing that the relatives had started eating, Lin Xu handed a piece to Shen Baobao, who was still taking pictures. "Remember I promised to make you Horse Hoof Cake on the day of the Fishing Platform competition? Today, I finally kept my promise... Go on, try it. See if you like the taste."

I love it! I love it so much!

With so many people around, Shen Baobao was too shy to throw herself into Lin Xu's arms. But her heart was already pounding with excitement, longing for nightfall when she could hug her Xu Treasure tightly and kiss him fiercely. Phew... Calm down.

Shen Baobao took a deep breath, pushing aside the whirlwind of thoughts in her mind. Only then did she take the Horse Hoof Cake he handed her and try a bite.

Her eyes immediately widened. "Grandma's right! Each layer has a different flavor. It's so delicious!"

The moment she finished speaking, a notification from the system rang in Lin Xu's mind:

"Host has boldly practiced and completed the reward task [Horse Hoof Cake], earning one Excellent Level stew dish lottery draw."

"Due to the Host's creativity in making the exceptionally beautiful Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake, the Excellent Level stew dish lottery draw reward has been upgraded to a Superior lottery draw reward. Congratulations to the Host!"

What? There are perks like this?

Lin Xu was overjoyed. He'd never imagined a reward task could be upgraded. It seems I'll have to go all out for tasks like this in the future!

He looked around and saw everyone praising the Water Chestnut Cake's appearance and taste, except for Dundun, who was listlessly lying by his cat bowl, waiting for meat.

Oh dear, my son is starving.

He quickly placed a piece of eel into Dundun's cat bowl. The little guy sniffed it and then nuzzled Lin Xu with his big head before lowering it to eat seriously.

Lin Xu crouched beside him. Once Dundun had eaten most of it, he added some lamb to the bowl.

Dundun began to eat heartily again. While eating, he even hummed contentedly. Clearly, he was enjoying today's meat very much.

When the little fellow had eaten his fill, Lin Xu picked him up. After playing with him for a while, he muttered in his mind:

Draw!

The lottery wheel materialized in his mind. The draw began.

Before long, the system's voice announced in his mind:

"Congratulations to the Host for acquiring the Superior Level stew dish: Tomato Stew Beef Brisket!"

Chapter 380: The Attraction of Beauty and Skin Care! Feel like eating crispy intestines? Try Stir-fried Pork Intestines!

Whoa!

He'd actually drawn the Tomato Stew Beef Brisket, a truly amazing dish to go with rice! Wasn't that an incredible surprise?

Lin Xu had figured that drawing Pork Ribs or some other meat dish would be impressive enough, but his son had really outdone himself this time.

It seemed that from now on, he'd need to feed this little guy well before the draw to get even more impressive dishes.

While he held Dundun for the draw, Shen Baobao posted about Lin Ji's Food's newest creation under its topic:

"Lalalala, Boss Lin's latest creation—the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake, also known as the Rainbow Horse Hoof Cake, tastes fresh and each layer has a different flavor. I've already tasted it for you; no need to thank me!"

No sooner had she posted this than her silly online friends gathered around.

Don't Argue; Arguing Means You're Fat: I had my paintbrush and paints ready, and you're telling me it's a Water Chestnut Cake?

Haiyan, You Really Should Eat Less: AAAHHH, I can't resist colorful cakes! You're so naughty, boss lady!

Riding a Cat onto the Battlefield: Super love these cute snacks; I really want to taste them!

High-Quality Human Garbage: I counted; there are fifteen layers. Guess whether I can eat a whole piece in one bite?

High Prices Paid for Second-Hand Aircraft Carriers: I thought Boss Lin had gone back home for a vacation, but it turns out he secretly leveled up!

Sworn Enemy of Gambling and Drugs: When will you release a tutorial? The presentation just melted this old man's girlish heart!

...

Feeling happy, Shen Baobao liked everyone's comments.

Then she picked up a piece of the colorful Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake and put it into her mouth. It was chewy, and as she chewed, she could distinctly feel the texture of each distinct layer and their different tastes.

It was so delicious!

Last time, she'd thought the Horse Hoof Cakes from Building One were good.

But compared to what her Xu Bao made, they were nowhere close.

Yep, Xu Bao's skills were the best, no objections accepted!

After finishing the piece of Water Chestnut Cake, she quickly moved to Chen Meijuan's side.

"Mom, did you get the video of me snapping my fingers just now?"

"Got it, got it. I'm sending it to you right now... I just realized my daughter-in-law has a talent for performing magic! That snap was so cool."

"Hehe, it's all thanks to Mom's good upbringing."

The mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, just like a mother and daughter, huddled together, transferring videos between their phones.

After the transfer, Shen Baobao edited the video a bit and posted it on her social media feed:

"WAHAHA, I also learned the magic to make flowers blossom with a snap of my fingers! Transfer 1,000 yuan and I'll teach you!"

However, the people in her social circle knew each other too well.

No one was fooled.

Only Shen Guofu showed some interest in the other dishes on the table.

Last night, Old Shen had been up half the night dancing to the 'Compendium of Materia Medica' workout routine, and now his arms and legs ached. Seeing his daughter's post, he immediately commented below it,

"Sweetie, if you have any conscience, tell me the names of the dishes on the table so I can drool over them in my mind first."

Shen Jiayue didn't reply to her dad. Instead, she posted pictures of the lunch dishes one by one in the Shen Family's 'Our Loving Family' chat group.

When Shen Guofu saw Lin Xu's Double Pepper Fish Head and Fermented Black Bean Eel, he couldn't help but swallow hard.

"@Little Xu: After you come back, make me the fish head and eel. I haven't tried those yet; I'm quite curious about the taste."

Curious indeed. What would they taste like?

Shen Jiayue posted a smug emoji.

"Dad, want me to describe the taste and flavor of these two dishes?"

Shen Guofu hurriedly declined.

"No need, I prefer to taste them on my own."

Seeing her dad wasn't giving her a chance to tempt him, Shen Baobao didn't insist. Instead, she posted a photo of the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake and tagged her mom:

"TA-DA! Today's new Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake! Each color has a different taste. Director Han, would you like to try?"

Han Shuzhen had just finished her noon clinic.

She was on her way to the cafeteria for lunch.

Seeing her daughter's photo posted in the group, her interest was immediately piqued.

"It looks delicious. After you guys come back, ask Little Xu to make some. I'm planning to organize an afternoon tea and let everyone try it."

Last time, the Black Sugar Shaqima left a deep impression on everyone.

This time, the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake would likely garner everyone's praise again.

Yes, last time they didn't know Little Xu's identity. But now that they were engaged, it was time to introduce this handsome son-in-law to everyone.

Her daughter couldn't be relied upon for such things anymore. From now on, it might be best to consider her son-in-law as the public face of the Shen Family.

Seeing her mom so interested, Shen Baobao sighed softly to herself.

Before their relationship was public, based on the appearance of the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake alone, she could easily get 1,000 or 2,000 yuan from her parents for it, sometimes even more.

Now that they were engaged and Xu Bao was family, money couldn't be mentioned anymore.

SIGH... It felt like a loss of a hundred million!

The birthday feast concluded, leaving both Grandma Lin and the relatives exceptionally satisfied. After seeing off the guests, her mother, Chen Meijuan, said,

"Your maternal grandma's birthday is at the end of the year. It's also her grand seventieth. Son, remember to make time to come then; she's always thinking of you."

"Yes, yes. No matter how busy I am, I'll be there."

For a family to be united, everyone must be treated fairly.

This fairness wasn't just about treating the children of each family equally, but the elders as well.

After Uncle Lin Hongjun drove Grandma Lin home, Lin Xu and Shi Wenming cleaned up the kitchen. Then, they went with Shen Baobao and his mother, who was cradling Dundun, to pick wild fruits.