

Culinary 401

Chapter 401: Mom, I'm Allergic to Silkworm Pupae and Got an Injection! What Kind of Injection? Tiramisu!

"Why aren't you eating, Yueyue? This is so delicious!"

Chen Yan couldn't stop eating; her satisfaction with this dish had even surpassed that of the spicy crawfish.

Dou Wenjing and Shu Yun, on the other hand, were quite reserved. They tried a bit before putting down their chopsticks. The boss is still busy in the kitchen; it wouldn't be right for us to just feast like this.

As for Zeng Xiaoqi... Today, I came specifically for the spicy crawfish. I'm not interested in any other dishes, no matter how good they are.

Shen Baobao took a photo of the stir-fried silkworm chrysalis and posted it under the Lin Ji's Food topic, chatting with netizens while saying, "When I was a kid, the chubby kid next door at my nanny's house scared me with silkworm chrysalis. Since then, I haven't been able to touch them. You guys eat; I'm waiting for the crawfish."

Not long after the photo of the stir-fried silkworm chrysalis was uploaded, Zhu Yong, who was discussing the new store layout with Wei Qian, received a WeChat message: "Weeping Willow, are the silkworm chrysalis tasty?"

The sender was Lu Lu, but they still liked to call each other by their internet names.

Zhu Yong tapped out a reply: "The boss is still busy; how could we dare to try them? Right now, only the boss's wife's cousin is eating... Why do you ask, Yuyu? Are you on a diet again tonight?"

"I was going to diet, but after seeing the photo the boss's wife posted, I couldn't help but order a bunch of takeout. Show me the crawfish your boss makes later, and if you dare to forget, I'll beat you to death!"

Seeing this message, Zhu Yong helplessly curled his lips. This Lin Daiyu is like a violent maniac, always threatening to beat me to death. No wonder there's such a thing as 'Uprooting Weeping Willow'! With her level of aggression, forget a weeping willow; even a spruce tree wouldn't stand a chance against her dismantling!

While they were chatting, Qin Wei, having finished prepping the silverfish, saw that the oysters were almost done steaming. He turned off the rice cooker and opened the lid. As he did, a rush of savory aroma mixed with a rich garlic scent wafted out from the kitchen. The steamed garlic oysters were ready.

Lin Xu said to Qin Wei, "Just bring them out to eat; the crawfish will be ready shortly."

After saying that, he lifted the lid of the pot and turned up the flame, allowing the sauce to reduce a bit—this made the crawfish more flavorful and even tastier.

As the oysters were served, the women began to gather around the coffee table and sit down. The men, out of habit, went to the kitchen to see if anything else needed to be brought out.

Soon, the spicy crawfish were ready. Lin Xu poured them into a tray and then started to stir-fry the whelks. This fresh delicacy was incredibly tasty; one gentle suck was all it took to draw out the delicious whelk meat.

"How much longer, boss? Why don't you go eat, and I'll watch the kitchen," Zhuang Yizhou said as he entered the kitchen, intending to take over the cooking.

Lin Xu smiled and said, "This will be ready in a few minutes after stewing with the spicy seasonings. It'll be perfect to serve alongside the garlic crawfish..."

Zhuang Yizhou saw cucumbers soaking in the sink. He took them out, gave them a smack, and cut them into chunks. After smashing a few garlic cloves, he easily made a dish of smashed cucumber.

Not long after, the garlic crawfish and whelks were both ready. Next, Lin Xu pan-fried the silverfish that Qin Wei had prepared, creating a dish of fragrant pan-fried silverfish. Having finished, he brought the dishes out and announced, "Let's eat!"

"Bring out the beer, fill everyone's glasses!"

The men all filled their glasses. Among the women, aside from Shen Baobao's older sister and Zeng Xiaoqi, the others also poured themselves a token glass.

Lin Xu raised his glass and said, "Lin Ji's Food will be opening soon. I hope everyone can unite as one. Under the leadership of Manager Dou and Store Manager Shu, let's achieve new glories!"

After toasting with everyone, he drained his glass in one go. Once the new store opened, Lin Xu would no longer be in charge of management; all store operations would be fully entrusted to professionals.

Everyone quickly raised their glasses, offered some polite words, and then tilted their heads back to finish their beer.

After the first round of drinks, everyone chatted while they ate.

Shu Yun put on disposable gloves and began peeling shrimp while saying, "The front desk manager's position is crucial. Even in a high-end place like Fishing Platform, I still encountered unreasonable people and was brought to tears several times. Do we have someone selected for that position here?"

Upon hearing this, Dou Wenjing, Shen Baobao, Wei Qian, and Shen Baobao's older sister all chuckled. Other positions at the newly opened Lin Ji's Food might have weaknesses, but the front desk manager was Song Tiantian. This formidable Nezha, who could knock out a grown man with three punches, was an expert at handling all sorts of unreasonable people. No matter how unreasonable someone was, when faced with her imposing presence, they would invariably become polite and gentle.

"Song Tiantian is actually that imposing?"

Shu Yun watched Lin Xu's videos every day and knew about the cashier at the front desk with a baby face and a sweet voice. She had initially thought Song Tiantian was just a delicate young girl. But hearing everyone's descriptions, she couldn't help but think of Lu Tixia from **Water Margin**. Could this Song Tiantian be Master Zhishen in disguise?

Dou Wenjing picked up a garlic crawfish, sucked on it first, praised Lin Xu's skill, and then said, "A few days ago, I arranged for Tiantian to intern at a restaurant owned by one of Manager Shen's friends. The main purpose was for her to get familiar with the job responsibilities and authority of a restaurant's front desk manager, as well as how to handle emergencies."

They had originally planned to send Song Tiantian to Fishing Platform. However, Fishing Platform wasn't very busy, and its clientele consisted of high-end individuals, so Tiantian wouldn't learn much there. It was better for her to go to a slightly more upscale restaurant where she could encounter people from all walks of life and gain broader experience.

While everyone was eating, Zhu Yong took out his phone, aimed it at the dishes on the table, snapped a photo, and sent it to Lu Lu.

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Soon, a reply came:

"That's too much! You even made two flavors of crawfish? How are they? Tell me the truth. If you dare lie just to flatter your boss, I'll beat you to death!"

Zhu Yong was left speechless.

It's really like tagging along with Sister Lu, getting beaten eight times a day.

He didn't reply immediately. Instead, he looked at the others enjoying the crawfish and asked, "I have a friend..."

Before he could finish, his sister-in-law, Chen Yan, cut him off, "There are no outsiders here. Just talk about you and Lin Daiyu. You've been flirting under the Lin Ji topic every day. Who here doesn't know about you two?"

Zhu Yong's old face flushed red. He hadn't expected his attempt to ask discreetly, using a "friend" as a cover, to be so ruthlessly exposed by Chen Yan.

He cleared his throat and asked, "Lin Daiyu is always threatening to beat me to death. If I reply too slowly, she says she'll beat me to death. If I disturb her at work, she also says she'll beat me to death... What do you all think? Should I confess my feelings or not?"

This question made everyone pause for a moment before a heated discussion erupted.

"She definitely likes you! Why else would she say things like that?"

"I think a girl would only speak so unreservedly in front of people she's close to."

"Master Zhu, summon the courage you showed when you were tackling those crawfish and just go for it! A true warrior isn't shy about launching an attack!"

"I have a feeling that if you confess, you'll definitely succeed."

"She might say she'll beat you to death, but who knows how much she actually cares about you in her heart."

"If I ever told a man I'd beat him to death, I'd definitely be head over heels in love."

"..."

Soon, his sister-in-law, Dou Wenjing, Shu Yun, Zeng Xiaoqi, and others began to voice their opinions. Wei Qian and Ji Minghui also nodded in agreement.

Even Qin Wei looked eager to chime in.

Zhuang Yizhou, while nibbling on a river snail, timidly added, "Is there a chance... this is just her catchphrase?"

As soon as he said it, Chen Yan retorted, "How could it be a catchphrase? Anyone can see you've probably never been in love... Hey, wait a minute, you have a partner, right?"

Chen Yan glanced around and realized that everyone passionately discussing the topic was single.

The only ones with partners, Zhuang Yizhou and the brother-in-law, were engrossed in eating and hadn't participated much in the discussion.

As for her younger cousin, she was a classic case of being utterly devoted to her husband—best not to even bring her up.

Is it really only single people who enjoy meddling in others' relationship problems?

After glancing around, she stopped participating in the discussion and took a large gulp of her drink.

This bitter drink tastes like sorrow!

After finishing it, she took another sip. Why does it taste like alcohol?

Has Yuanqi Forest started making a beer-flavored drink?

She examined her cup and discovered that the Yuanqi Forest drink inside had, at some point, been replaced with beer, complete with a frothy head.

This...

How am I supposed to drive now? How can I take my cousin home?

Wait a minute. When I offered to drive Yueyue home earlier, I saw a murderous glint in that girl's eyes.

Could it be that this little rascal secretly poured it into my cup?

Seeing her drink the beer, Shen Baobao quickly feigned surprise and said, "Oh, Yan Bao, why did you drink my beer? How are you going to drive me home later?"

Chen Yan smirked.

Hmph, pretend! Keep pretending all you want!

She slung an arm around Shen Baobao's shoulder and whispered in her ear, "So, when you two went back this time... did you, you know... *do it*?"

Shen Baobao's expression turned a little unnatural. "What are you talking about with so many people around? Hurry up and eat your crawfish."

Chen Yan pressed on, "Want me to recommend some ultra-thin, effective... protective gear?"

This made Shen Baobao look at her in surprise. "Yan Bao, aren't you single? How do you know about these things?"

Chen Yan drained her cup, which now contained beer mixed with Yuanqi Forest, and said self-deprecatingly, "As a single woman, isn't it perfectly normal for my theoretical knowledge to be maxed out?"

"Then... what about practical experience?"

"Zero!"

"Ewww~~~~~ How tragic for a woman."

This remark instantly shattered Chen Yan's composure!

"You wretched Yueyue, I'm going to kill you!"

Shen Baobao laughed and dodged, retorting with the very logic Chen Yan had spouted moments before, "Didn't you just say that 'I'll beat you to death' is an expression of love?"

"It means love when I say it to others, but when I say it to you, I genuinely want to beat you to death!"

After the two 'sisters' bickered playfully for a while, they went back to eating crawfish.

Chen Yan had originally planned to drive and hadn't touched any alcohol. But now that she'd had some beer, her spirits lifted immediately. "Brother-in-law, where's that bottle of champagne I brought last time? Open it, open it! What's the fun in just drinking beer? Today is the first gathering of Lin Ji's core members; we absolutely must open a bottle of champagne to celebrate!"

Soon, the champagne was opened. Everyone poured themselves a glass, and even Zeng Xiaoqi accepted one.

She hadn't originally planned on drinking. However, after Shen Baobao mentioned that this bottle of champagne cost tens of thousands, she instantly felt it would be a huge waste not to have some.

But after taking a sip, she found...

It's not even as satisfying as a soft drink.

By 9 p.m., the crawfish on the table were nearly all gone, and most of the other dishes had been polished off as well.

Ji Minghui volunteered to cook some hand-pulled noodles for everyone. He served them with a ladleful of the remaining crawfish broth, and enjoying this delicious dish marked the perfect end to their feast.

Shen Baobao had drunk a large glass of beer.

While everyone was eating their noodles, the alcohol began to take effect. She picked up a silkworm pupa and muttered to herself, "Hmph, hmph. From this day forward, I'm no longer afraid of silkworm pupae!"

With that, she mustered her courage and popped the pupa into her mouth.

By now, the silkworm pupae had cooled and were no longer as crispy as when they had just come out of the pan.

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But the taste was still good.

She got hooked right away. "Wow, I didn't realize silkworm pupae were this delicious! I would have started eating them right from the start if I'd known."

And so, while everyone else was eating noodles, she polished off all the silkworm pupae on her plate. After finishing, she licked her fingers, still wanting more, and planned to ask Lin Xu to make some more when he had time.

Such delicious ingredients! One must have a big plate to satisfy the craving!

When everyone had almost finished eating, some were playing with Dundun, and others were helping to clean the utensils and kitchen.

The leftover crayfish weren't wasted either; Zeng Xiaoqi packed them all into a lunchbox.

Just then, while sitting on the sofa browsing likes from netizens, Shen Baobao suddenly muttered in surprise, "Why is my face itchy? Dundun, don't make trouble here. Watch out, or your stepmom will deal with you..."

She turned her face and realized that Dundun was several meters away, playing with Shu Yun on the cat tree with a bounce ball.

What's this?

She touched her face and found it covered in flat welts, like mosquito bites.

"Sister Yan, quick, look at my face! What's wrong with it?"

Chen Yan, who was eating her hand-pulled noodles, turned to look and immediately put down her bowl and chopsticks. "Could it be an allergic reaction to the silkworm pupae? Let's go, let's go! We'll go to the clinic at the community entrance and get an allergy shot. You were just saying you wanted a big plate of them. I think you better not touch those things anymore."

"Allergic? Will it leave a scar?"

"No, a shot will take care of it, and it won't even affect your bath tonight... Let's go, don't just stand there."

Chen Yan's father, Chen Yuejin, had a seafood allergy but couldn't resist eating it, so Chen Yan was extremely familiar with allergies and didn't make a big deal out of it.

When Lin Xu heard about Shen Baobao's allergy, he wiped his hands and came out of the kitchen. "Is it serious? Do we need to go to the hospital?"

"No need, no need, brother-in-law. You go on with your work. We'll just go down and get a shot."

Chen Yan fastened the buckle on her high-heeled sandals and then pulled Shen Baobao out the door.

Before long, the two of them returned.

As soon as they entered the house, Shen Baobao cuddled into Lin Xu's arms, feeling aggrieved. "Lin Xu, the shot was so painful!"

"Alright, alright. I just made some Jade Soup. Try some first."

Shen Baobao, whose allergic symptoms on her face were disappearing, perked up at once. "You didn't put any silkworm pupae in it, did you?"

Lin Xu smiled. "No, it's made with cucumber, but the taste is superb, and it even has slimming effects."

At the mention of "slimming," several of the ladies who had eaten until they were burping perked up immediately.

"Then I must try it later!"

"The boss can make slimming soup, too?"

"I was already full, but I still have to try the slimming soup."

"Brother-in-law, considering I took your wife to get an injection, drinking thirty bowls isn't too much, right?" Chen Yan teased.

"Boss Lin, don't forget to film this soup when we're recording the show later! Then I can sip slimming soup elegantly in the studio!" Zeng Xiaoqi added.

Before long, the Jade Soup was ready.

While ladling the soup into bowls, Lin Xu looked at Zhuang Yizhou and the others and asked, "Understood the trick? Practice it more later. I plan to make this soup a signature dish of Lin Ji."

"Sure thing, boss!"

"No problem, we'll practice more."

"This quick Chicken Soup base is quite practical. I think these are techniques everyone should master."

The group discussed animatedly.

When the vibrant green Jade Soup was served, the ladies outside instantly brightened.

It's green. This must definitely help slim me down, right?

Everyone tasted the soup and was immediately amazed by the dual freshness of the Chicken Soup and cucumber. Even Shen Baobao, who had just had an injection, was flabbergasted.

"Wow, this soup is too delicious, isn't it?"

"I declare, this is my destined soup from now on!"

"I never thought cucumber could be this delicious."

"I feel like using it on my face before was such a waste. This is the right way to use cucumber!"

"This soup is magical! The greasiness from eating crayfish just now has totally disappeared. What a refreshing feeling!"

Sipping the delicious soup, everyone chatted until almost ten o'clock before dispersing.

Since everyone had been drinking, for safety's sake, Chen Yan called her family's driver and summoned two vans to send everyone home. Her Porsche was also driven back by one of the drivers.

After seeing everyone off at the community entrance, Shen Baobao quietly opened the trunk of her BMW X1 and took out a suitcase.

Lin Xu: "..."

She came prepared!

He took the suitcase from Shen Baobao's hand and, while walking into the residential complex, asked, "About your allergy, shouldn't we ask Mom? She's a doctor, after all."

"It's already gone. If we tell her now, she'll definitely make me go home and then give me a bunch of pills."

Hearing this, Lin Xu said, "Maybe we should go to the hospital for a checkup tomorrow."

"Okay!"

Once back home, Lin Xu carefully examined Shen Baobao and confirmed that her allergy symptoms had completely disappeared. Only then did he feel relieved.

While the girl was taking a shower, he approached Dundun, who was playing with a bouncy ball alone. He picked up the little guy and immediately chanted in his mind, Lottery draw!

Soon, the system's lottery wheel appeared in his mind.

"You have four chances to draw. Would you like to use the four-in-a-row option? Continuous draws are more likely to yield dishes that meet the host's needs."

Really?

Then let's go for the four-in-a-row.

After making his choice, the lottery wheel slowly stopped.

The system's notification quickly resonated in Lin Xu's mind: "Congratulations to the host for obtaining Perfect Level stir-fried dishes: Stir-Fried Chicken Giblets, Sautéed Lamb with Scallions; Perfect Level braised delicacies: Beef Steaks, Pressed Pig's Head."

Hey, not bad!

To think I got the somewhat rare Beef Steaks and the Pressed Pig's Head, which is usually only available during the New Year—good, good! Lin Ji is finally not just relying on Tiger Skin Chicken Feet to conquer the world anymore.

Once these two new dishes are introduced, they'll definitely spark a craze among the customers.

As for the Stir-Fried Chicken Giblets, it can serve as a signature rice-accompanying dish in the restaurant. With a Divine Artifact like this for pairing with rice, it's impossible to stop at less than three bowls.

And the Sautéed Lamb with Scallions can satisfy the demands of those connoisseurs in Beijing. Even the most fastidious eaters would have to praise such Perfect Level dishes.

After the lottery draw, Lin Xu rubbed Dundun's big head. "Thanks, son. Tomorrow I'll sneak some imported salmon from the kitchen for you."

The rules at Fishing Platform only prohibit chefs from eating imported ingredients; they don't say little cats can't eat them. So, feeding Dundun doesn't break any rules, right?

After Shen Baobao finished her shower and returned to her room, Lin Xu also took a shower and then went to his room to rest.

「The next morning.」

The young couple had breakfast and drove straight to the City People's Hospital where Han Shuzhen, Lin Xu's mother-in-law, worked.

They had intended to register for an appointment but found that Han Shuzhen's slots were already full. Shen Baobao then greeted the nurse at the door and walked into the consultation room.

Seeing her daughter and son-in-law come in, Han Shuzhen, dressed in a white lab coat, curiously asked, "What are you two here for? Is something the matter?"

Shen Baobao pouted. "Mom, I had an allergic reaction to silkworm pupae last night. I had to get an injection at the clinic near our community entrance to get better."

Upon hearing this, Han Shuzhen immediately asked, "What injection was it?"

"Tiramisu!"

As soon as she said this, the postgraduate students with Han Shuzhen couldn't help but laugh. Lin Xu, with his arm around the girl, wore a helpless expression.

Baobao, Tiramisu is a snack, not medicine.

With a helpless glance at her daughter, Han Shuzhen said, "You're still thinking about food, even now..."

She tapped on the table and said to the student responsible for recording medical cases, "Note it down, it was dexamethasone."

Lin Xu: "..."

Tiramisu and dexamethasone are worlds apart! Baobao, you even managed to mix those up? You truly are a foodie.

After speaking, Han Shuzhen muttered with some slight criticism, "Small clinics just love to use potent medications. A box of regular anti-allergy medication would have been enough. Why go for dexamethasone? ...Since you're here, I'll order an allergen screening. Then you'll know what you can and can't eat in the future."

"Oh..."

While writing the order, Director Han turned to Lin Xu and said, "The allergen screening might take a while. Why don't you two have lunch in our cafeteria?"

Lin Xu had no objections. "Sure, I'd like to try what Mom usually eats."

When eating came up, Shen Baobao curiously asked, "Is the food in the hospital cafeteria good?"

She gets all excited as soon as food is mentioned... Han Shuzhen thought, glaring at her daughter. "At least eating it won't require giving you a Tiramisu shot... Take the order form and go get the tests done. Come find me afterward."

Just as the two left the consultation room, Lin Xu received a call from Dou Wenjing. "Boss, I acquired a shell company a few days ago, and now the qualification for the lottery has come through. You can participate in the lottery on the official website at ten o'clock this morning."

Lin Xu: "..."

Ha!

Time for Dundun to show his power again!

Chapter 404: Bringing Family Along for a Free Meal! Chef Qiu, Shall I Tie Up Your Senior Brother for You?

"What's up? If there's something, you can go back first. I can manage on my own!"

Seeing Lin Xu answering Dou Wenjing's call, Shen Baobao thought there was an issue at the company.

"It's nothing. A few days ago, Sister Wenjing acquired a shell company with lottery eligibility. The lottery starts at ten this morning, so the company will be able to get cars soon."

Indeed, for a company of this size, not having even one company car was quite unbecoming; the general manager even had to use shared bikes for transportation.

Lin Xu quietly accompanied Shen Baobao for her allergy screening. By almost ten o'clock, all the examinations were done, and it was time to wait for the results.

The couple went to Han Shuzhen's clinic to say goodbye.

"Mom, the company has lottery eligibility now. I need to go back and try for it. We won't be having lunch here, so could you please collect Yueyue's results later?" Lin Xu said.

"Alright, then you go ahead. Yueyue, remember to go to work. Don't get too carried away playing," Han Shuzhen replied.

"Oh..." Shen Baobao responded.

After leaving the hospital, Lin Xu drove Shen Baobao to Fishing Platform. Pets weren't allowed in the hospital, and they couldn't bear to leave Dundun alone at home. So, before coming to the hospital, they had detoured to Fishing Platform to leave the little one at the reception of Building Number Two.

Now it was time for the lottery, so naturally, Dundun had to make an appearance to ensure nothing went amiss.

On the way, Shen Baobao asked curiously, "What car are we buying?"

Lin Xu was also unclear about this. He felt that at this stage, practicality should be the main consideration for the company's cars. However, Dou Wenjing had mentioned last night that buying a more expensive one could help with tax deductions. Besides, the company had ample cash on hand, so they might as well do it right in one go.

This time, there were two lottery chances. If both were successful, the company could get two cars.

After thinking for a bit, Lin Xu said, "Let's get Sister Wenjing a classy sedan, so she looks good when going out for business negotiations. I'll just get a simple SUV."

He had grown accustomed to SUVs, so switching to another type of vehicle would feel a bit awkward. Besides, the road conditions in his hometown were poor. An SUV with better clearance would be more convenient for trips back during holidays.

Arriving at Fishing Platform, Lin Xu parked the car in front of Building Number Two. He and Shen Baobao got out and saw Dundun playing with Gu Junli, who was wearing a light-colored cheongsam.

"Does this stinky cat think I'm ugly? Why does it get along so well with other girls but won't be affectionate with me?" Shen Baobao pouted.

Lin Xu remained silent. You always manhandle it so roughly; it would be strange if it wanted to play with you, he thought. Then, he took Shen Baobao's delicate hand and said, "You are so beautiful that Dundun simply feels inferior in comparison."

These words made Shen Baobao instantly overjoyed. "Really? Then I'll forgive it!"

Walking into Building Number Two, Dundun, who had been jumping around and playing with Gu Junli and a cat teaser, immediately leaped onto the reception desk. It plopped down on a little cushion and even wrapped an extra cushion around itself, striking a pose as if to say, "I'm sleeping. Dare to disturb me, and I'll bite you to death."

However, no sooner had it closed its eyes to feign sleep than Lin Xu scooped it up into his arms.

"What are you sleeping for in broad daylight? Keep playing! If you don't get some exercise, you'll turn into a furball."

Lin Xu hoisted Dundun onto his shoulder and strolled to the seafood section, intending to let the little guy randomly pick out some fish for lunch.

On the way to the seafood section, Lin Xu opened his phone, logged into the official lottery website with the company's account, and started the process. The results would only be displayed after an hour. He silently prayed Dundun would bring them luck. Then, he took the little one for a stroll around the seafood section and discovered it showed interest in the river groupers.

Then river groupers it would be for lunch!

But a single river grouper weighed several pounds, and Dundun's appetite was tiny. Slaughtering an entire one would be somewhat wasteful, especially since the staff cafeteria didn't serve such items.

How could they let Dundun taste the river grouper without wasting it?

Lin Xu pondered for a moment and then called Wei Qian for advice.

"You can go to Building Number Fifteen or Eighteen," Wei Qian suggested. "Building Fifteen specializes in seafood, while Eighteen specializes in Sichuan cuisine. The staff cafeteria there serves river groupers. Bring Dundun over, and both you and the cat will have lunch. Isn't that great?"

Wei Qian had completely decided to take it easy now. He had arranged his leave for next year's Tomb Sweeping Festival today and planned to submit his resignation tomorrow. If he resigned, he wouldn't be able to stay in the Fishing Platform employee dormitory anymore. He needed to rent a place and move before Lin Ji opened for business to avoid any interruption to his new work.

Zhu Yong, Qin Wei, and Ji Minghui had the same idea. They all planned to submit their resignations tomorrow and look for an apartment with Wei Qian.

Going to Building Fifteen or Eighteen for a free meal? Lin Xu mused. This suggestion was actually good. Since Shen Baobao and Dundun were with him today, it was time to try the dishes from the other buildings.

As for which building to go to... Lin Xu thought for a moment and decided on Building Number Eighteen. Head Chef Dai had always been so considerate towards him; it was time to bring Dundun along and drum up some business for him.

Back at the reception, he looked at Shen Baobao and said, "Let's go have lunch at Building Number Eighteen. We can also get a slice of river grouper for Dundun to try."

"Building Number Eighteen? What's good to eat there?" Shen Baobao asked.

"They specialize in Sichuan cuisine there. Just say what you want to eat."

Hearing Sichuan cuisine mentioned, Shen Baobao immediately started to rattle off a list, "Boiled River Grouper, Kung Pao Chicken, Mapo Tofu, Shadow Beef, Spicy Fatty Intestines, Brown Sugar Sticky Rice Cake, Bobo Chicken, Mouthwatering Chicken, Fried Pork, Cold Eating Rabbit, Crispy Skin Duck... Ooh, there's too much I want to eat!"

Lin Xu was speechless. Baobao, we need to be mindful when we're getting a free meal. Don't order too much at once, or we won't be able to come back for more. We need to make this last, understand?

Chapter 405: Bringing the Family Along for a Free Meal! Chef Qiu, Shall I Help You Tie Up Your Senior Brother?

He went to the back kitchen and happened to run into Xie Baomin, who was wandering around with nothing to do.

"Senior Brother, I'm planning to take Yueyue and Dundun to Building 18 for lunch today to try Chef Dai's cooking."

"What a coincidence, I was just about to head to Building 18 myself. Old Dai said Mr. Huang sent him a small, farm-raised crocodile, and I was planning to go try some."

A small crocodile?

Lin Xu asked curiously, "Is he related to that Mr. Huang?"

He just got a bag of silkworm pupae yesterday afternoon, and today he gets a crocodile. Is Chef Dai really that close to Mr. Huang?

"Not relatives, they probably just hit it off. Come on, let's go! We'll go see what that little crocodile looks like. This kind of rare delicacy is seldom seen; the Fishing Platform itself might only encounter it a few times a year at most."

Crocodile meat isn't expensive. But the Fishing Platform isn't really a place for eating crocodile, so it's quite a rare sight.

Upon reaching the front desk, Lin Xu carried Dundun, and together with Shen Baobao, followed his Senior Brother out of Building 2, driving straight to Building 18 where Chef Dai was.

After driving through and taking in the scenery of the entire Fishing Platform, they successfully arrived at Building 18, located on the other side of the Fishing Platform's main gate.

Just as he turned the car into the driveway, Lin Xu saw Dai Jianli, dressed in his chef's uniform, wielding a shovel and chasing a small crocodile that was trying to hide in the bushes.

This... Are they not only serving it but also offering guests an immersive hunting experience?

Soon, another chef wielding a steel-pronged fork pinned down the small crocodile. Dai Jianli hurried over, deftly pulled a roll of electrical tape from his pocket, unwound it, and wrapped it several times around the crocodile's snout.

With its mouth sealed, the small crocodile instantly became docile.

"Old Dai, how did you let it get away?" Xie Baomin asked, getting out of the car and curiously examining the small crocodile on the ground.

After Shen Baobao got out of the car carrying Dundun, Lin Xu parked in a nearby spot and also walked over.

This was Dundun's first time seeing a crocodile. He seemed very interested and not at all frightened. He even jumped onto the crocodile and walked back and forth, completely at ease.

Dai Jianli told Xie Baomin, "I was just about to slaughter it when Old Huang called me. I got distracted for a moment, and this little thing escaped. Let's go, let's go! We need to bleed and skin it quickly, or we'll be late for lunch."

He and the other chef carried the small crocodile towards the kitchen.

Dundun, however, sat triumphantly on the crocodile, looking as proud as could be.

Upon reaching the restaurant in Building 18, Dai Jianli instructed the front desk manager, "My brother Lin has finally made it here for a visit! Bring out all those snacks for him to try. And hey, little kitty, if you don't get down now, you'll be braised along with the crocodile!"

Dundun leaped off the crocodile in a single bound and scurried into Lin Xu's arms, feigning a terrified expression.

Dai Jianli paused at this and exclaimed, "WOW! Can this little fellow understand human speech? Just you wait, little darling, I'll boil some crocodile meat for you to try in a bit."

After saying this, he and the other chef carried the crocodile towards the back kitchen. Xie Baomin followed them, discussing methods for cooking the crocodile meat with Dai Jianli as they walked.

Once they had left, Lin Xu placed Dundun on the front desk, gently stroked its head, and said, "He was just kidding with you. I'm here; no one will hurt you."

Dundun rubbed its head against Lin Xu's hand and then sprawled across the cashier's counter, assuming its lucky cat pose.

Lin Xu didn't disturb it further. He sat with Shen Baobao at a dining table not far from the front desk, quietly enjoying the snacks and hot tea brought by the front desk manager.

Not long after, customers began to enter, and the front desk manager warmly greeted them.

TSK TSK TSK. It just lay down and it's already working its magic. This little Dundun's ability is truly enviable.

Too bad this ability can't be made public, or groups of catnappers might line up all the way from Yingchun Street to the South Fourth Ring.

While he was musing over this, Lin Xu saw Qiu Zhenhua enter with a displeased expression.

Seeing the front desk manager, he asked coldly, "Is that dog Xie Baomin here?"

Before the front desk manager could reply, he spotted Lin Xu sitting nearby and strode over.

Lin Xu's mouth twitched. Shu Yun is submitting his resignation today. Chef Qiu isn't here to cause trouble, is he?

Just as he was about to mimic Dundun by pretending to sleep on the table, Qiu Zhenhua walked briskly over.

"Chef Lin, your Senior Brother really doesn't do things properly!"

My Senior Brother? Isn't he **our** Senior Brother? Could it be that Shu Yun hasn't revealed where he's going after resigning?

Lin Xu forced a laugh and said, "How has he offended you now, Chef Qiu? Next time I see Master, I'll be sure to report him to you properly!"

Qiu Zhenhua took a deep breath, a look of helplessness on his face, and said, "On the day of the competition, he suddenly wanted to switch people with me. He swore up and down that he wouldn't screw me over. But Shu Yun had only been at Building 6 for a week before handing in his resignation!"

That bastard definitely knew what was going on and deliberately had our Building 6's Gu Junli swapped out!"

Lin Xu picked up a clean cup, poured some tea, handed it to Qiu Zhenhua, and said, "Chef Qiu, calm down, calm down. My Senior Brother really is a bit... Well, you know him. He's always either scamming people or on his way to scam someone. You can't trust him even when he swears an oath."

Okay, while Chef Qiu still doesn't know that I'm the one who poached Shu Yun, I should first let him vent his anger on Senior Brother. That way, when he finds out where Shu Yun has gone later, he won't be so angry.

Qiu Zhenhua, still fuming, took the teacup, sipped the tea, and then continued,

Chapter 406: Bringing the Family Along for a Free Meal! Chef Qiu, Shall I Help You Tie Up Your Senior Brother?

"That damn guy treated me to tea yesterday and gave me two Big Red Tangerines that were supposedly fifteen years old. I took them to Building No. 10 to have Guo Weidong evaluate them, only to find out those Big Red Tangerines were swiped from him!"

Lin Xu was speechless.

There was such an incident? My senior brother didn't mention the Big Red Tangerines yesterday; otherwise, wouldn't I have helped my father-in-law get two as well?

He looked at Qiu Zhenhua and asked, "Where are those Big Red Tangerines now?"

"Guo Weidong insisted on taking them back from me," Qiu Zhenhua replied. "After much pleading, we finally split them, one each. Your senior brother still has one in the drawer upstairs. That guy is like a hamster, stashing stuff everywhere."

Chef Qiu, oh Chef Qiu, you're just too honest, Lin Xu thought. How could you let Mr. Guo take one away? Does it mean it belongs to Building No. 10 just because Guo Weidong says he got it from there? Everything should be based on evidence. Besides, even if he wanted it, he should show some sincerity, like trading ten or eight small green tangerines for it. Otherwise, aren't you just a delivery boy taking goods right to his doorstep?

Seeing Qiu Zhenhua's face becoming gloomier, Lin Xu pointed towards the kitchen and said, "My senior brother is in the back kitchen watching Chef Dai slaughter baby crocodiles. Since you're here, you might as well try some crocodile meat later. My senior brother said the Fishing Platform rarely sees this kind of thing."

Qiu Zhenhua shook his head helplessly. "I have to give him a piece of my mind before I go back. There's an impromptu banquet at Building No. 6 tonight, and they specifically requested the Braised Eel from Ma'an Bridge I make, so I need to go back early and prepare."

Braised Eel from Ma'an Bridge? Lin Xu pondered. Isn't that the most classic and famous way to prepare eel? Last time I was cooking dragon eel back home, I was thinking that I should learn eel preparation techniques from Chef Qiu, and now I've stumbled upon the opportunity.

Lin Xu said, "Chef Qiu, why don't you give my senior brother a good beating? I'll help you tie him up."

Qiu Zhenhua was momentarily stunned. Do these two junior and senior brothers also have some grudge between them?

"Old Dai is always like your senior brother's fanboy, getting into fights here with Old Xie," Qiu Zhenhua continued. "Those two damn guys definitely won't let it go. I'll just give him a telling-off later."

Is a telling-off really enough to vent his anger? Lin Xu wondered.

Lin Xu said, "How about this, Chef Qiu? I'll go help in the kitchen at Building No. 6 this afternoon. There's not much happening at Building No. 2 anyway. Consider it an apology on behalf of my senior brother. What do you say?"

Since you're not willing to hit him, then apologizing in his place is the next best thing, right? Lin Xu thought. Regardless, I'm determined to learn how to make that Braised Eel from Ma'an Bridge.

When Qiu Zhenhua heard about the offer of free labor, his expression eased considerably. "If everyone were like you, your senior brother wouldn't be treated like a street rat that everybody detests... Chef Lin, are you really willing to come and help me out?"

"It's what I should do," Lin Xu replied. "Besides, Lin Ji is opening soon, so I also want to learn some advanced kitchen management experience from Building No. 6."

These words made Qiu Zhenhua overjoyed. He decided he couldn't be bothered to go in and find Xie Baomin for a scolding anymore, especially since this was Old Dai's territory. That damn guy was always stirring up trouble like a shit-stirring stick; it was better to keep one's distance.

He and Lin Xu agreed on a time for him to help in the afternoon, and then Qiu Zhenhua left.

Hmm, with an expert coming to help in Building No. 6's kitchen this afternoon, I'd better make sure everyone is in high spirits, Qiu Zhenhua thought. We can't let Building No. 6 lose face.

Not long after Qiu Zhenhua left, Xie Baomin came over with a plate of freshly fried crocodile meat. "Junior Brother, come and taste this with your sister-in-law! Fresh out of the pan, Fried Crispy Crocodile Meat made from the meat near the crocodile's spine—it's super tender and has a great texture. Dipped in salt and pepper, it's truly exceptional."

After saying that, he hurried back to the kitchen, completely unaware that Qiu Zhenhua had just been there looking to settle a score.

Shen Baobao picked up a piece of crocodile meat, dipped it in salt and pepper, and tasted it. Her eyes lit up instantly. "Wow, is this crocodile meat? The texture is so tender!"

Upon hearing this, Lin Xu also picked up a piece and tasted it.

Perhaps it was because the crocodile was young; the meat was very tender, and eating it even felt slightly like eating bullfrog, he thought.

The meat was coated with a layer of crispy batter, making it crispy on the outside and tender on the inside. Dipped in salt and pepper, it became even more delicious.

Fresh ingredients always taste best, Lin Xu mused. It's just a pity that I don't know how to cook crocodile. Otherwise, I'd buy one and host an All Crocodile Banquet at my father-in-law's villa. That would surely amaze everyone!

As he was thinking about this, Lin Xu heard a system prompt in his mind: "The host is keen on researching crocodile recipes and has triggered the side quest [All Crocodile Banquet]: Please use the resources at your disposal to make the first episode of the culinary program the ratings champion of Yanjing TV Station. Upon completion, you will be awarded the Excellent Level Cooking Technique—All Crocodile Banquet."

Holy cow! Lin Xu exclaimed internally. This really is a task where the effort and reward are directly proportional.

Lin Xu certainly wanted the All Crocodile Banquet technique. After all, with that technique in hand, he could wow anyone, no matter where he was. But to make the first episode the ratings champion, even if just within the TV station, wouldn't be easy. After all, such programs usually rely on word-of-mouth to gain traction and make a comeback later. Becoming the ratings champion right out of the gate is somewhat challenging. However, the benefits were also clear. Aside from the All Crocodile Banquet Cooking Technique reward, it would also greatly enhance and promote Lin Ji's Food.

Yes, I need to communicate well with Zeng Xiaoqi about the first episode and also use my connections to give the program an early boost, Lin Xu decided.

Before long, dishes like Braised Alligator Leg, char-grilled crocodile tail, boiled crocodile meat, steamed Crocodile Belly, sautéed sliced crocodile stomach, and dry-pot crocodile skin were served one by one.

Shen Baobao relished the food, her mouth glistening with oil, as she kept exclaiming in wonder at how delicious the crocodile meat was.

But Lin Xu had already lost his appetite. All he could think about was how to make his program the ratings champion.

After the meal, Dundun got to taste the delicious crocodile meat as wished.

Of course, Dundun didn't eat for free. During the little one's time there, Building No. 18 welcomed seven or eight more tables of guests. This forced the already busy Dai Jianli to pass the task of cooking crocodile to Xie Baomin, while he went to greet the customers.

After dinner, Xie Baomin wanted to stay and drink, but Lin Xu drove back to Yingchun Street. Once Shen Baobao drove off to work in the X1, he took Dundun back to the Fishing Platform.

At two in the afternoon, after resting for a bit in the tearoom, Lin Xu strolled towards Building No. 2.

He was ready to learn the classic eel dish from Qiu Zhenhua—Braised Eel from Ma'an Bridge!

Chapter 407: The Ultimate Eel Dish - Braised Saddle Bridge!

"Boss, the lottery results are out. Both our company's entries won."

On his way to Building No. 6, Lin Xu received a call from Dou Wenjing. Her voice was tinged with excitement; she had originally held little hope, even thinking that acquiring the shell company was simply throwing money away. But unexpectedly, they had actually won. And not just one, but both lottery opportunities were successful—it was nothing short of a miracle. After her initial excitement subsided, Dou Wenjing asked, "Boss, what kind of car are we planning to get for the company?"

This question genuinely stumped Lin Xu. Thinking of the white X1 driven by his Shen Baobao, he said, "I'll go for a black BMW X5, high-spec. The other spot is yours, Wenjing. What kind of car do you want?"

Dou Wenjing didn't stand on ceremony and replied immediately, "A BMW 5 series will do for me. It's convenient and looks respectable."

"Alright, then one X5 and one BMW 5 series it is," Lin Xu agreed. "Plus the van Master rented for me to buy groceries, that should be enough for everyday use."

"Okay, I'll get right on it."

After hanging up, Building No. 6 was already in sight. Lin Xu was quite fond of this place, with its beautiful environment and abundant talent. However, starting next week, he'd be busy with Lin Ji's opening, so he would have fewer opportunities to come here.

Upon arriving at Building No. 6, he was about to enter the restaurant when Shu Yun suddenly came out to meet him. "Boss? What brings you here?"

Lin Xu replied, "I've come to give Chef Qiu a hand... Didn't you submit your resignation? Why haven't you left yet?"

"There's a banquet tonight at Building No. 6, so I have to stay for my last shift," Shu Yun explained. "Tomorrow, I won't be coming to work. Chef Qiu has already signed my resignation letter."

The next day, Shu Yun and Dou Wenjing were to begin recruiting staff for the new eatery. Cashiers, waiters, food runners, cleaning staff, dishwashers, kitchen assistants, and other positions all needed to be filled. Besides the two of them, Che Zai, who was always proficient with recruitment, would also come to the company to help out.

After exchanging greetings with Shu Yun, Lin Xu walked inside. Upon reaching the kitchen, just as he was about to ask where Qiu Zhenhua was, he ran into Ji Minghui, who was getting ready to roll out dough for the Crab Soup Dumplings.

Ji Minghui was startled. "Boss—" he began, but Lin Xu cut him off.

"Master Ji, what a coincidence running into you here."

Here in my old lair at Building No. 6, I've not only lured away the best front manager from Fishing Platform, but I've also nabbed a dough-rolling master, Lin Xu mused. If Qiu Zhenhua knew, he would definitely get beaten up by this group of chefs in the kitchen, who are more proficient with rolling pins than with knives.

Better to let them beat up Senior Brother instead.

After all, Senior Brother is a habitual offender, and beating him up would be more satisfying.

"Where is Chef Qiu?" Lin Xu asked.

"He's in the filling room, inspecting the fillings for the dumplings," Ji Minghui replied.

Lin Xu and Ji Minghui had a brief, surreptitious chat, like undercover agents making contact, then hastily parted ways, Lin Xu acting as if he didn't know the man well.

Following the steps they had discussed the previous night, Ji Minghui would submit his resignation the next day. Once approved, he would start preparing for Lin Ji's Food's pastry department, where he would be responsible for all the hand-rolled noodles and snacks.

Lin Xu went to the filling room, where Qiu Zhenhua was explaining the essentials of preparing fillings to the kitchen assistants.

"Chef Qiu, I'm here to report in!" Lin Xu announced.

Qiu Zhenhua had originally thought Lin Xu was just saying he would come, but he had actually shown up. Qiu Zhenhua chuckled and said to the masters in the filling room, "Weren't you just arguing with me that culinary specialists can't handle pastry work? Master Lin here is skilled in both culinary dishes and pastry. Even I find the Crab Soup Dumplings he makes delicious."

The masters greeted Lin Xu with smiles, a far cry from the hostile stares they had given him last time. The scene was much more harmonious.

It seems Senior Brother really isn't popular here, Lin Xu thought.

Lin Xu greeted everyone in turn. After Qiu Zhenhua finished his explanation, they went together toward the cooking area.

Tonight's banquet at Building No. 6 was hosted by the Overseas Chinese Bureau to welcome a group of repatriated overseas Chinese. Many of these guests were from Jiangsu and Zhejiang and hadn't tasted their home region's flavors for decades. So tonight, the leaders had personally requested Chef Qiu to make Braised Mian'anqiao Bridge eel to comfort the homesickness of these overseas compatriots.

"Jiangsu cuisine is all about eating in season," Qiu Zhenhua remarked to Lin Xu. "And it's the perfect season for eel now, so making Braised Mian'anqiao Bridge is very apt."

Although Lin Xu had volunteered to help, Qiu Zhenhua had no intention of letting him do the work of a mere kitchen assistant. The two of them reviewed the evening's menu and, after some discussion, decided to add two dishes that Lin Xu was particularly good at: White Jade Lotus Root Strips and Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips.

Lately, Qiu Zhenhua felt the kitchen atmosphere was becoming increasingly restless, and no one was settling down to practice the basics. Therefore, he wanted Lin Xu to prepare two dishes that showcased exceptional knife skills, hoping to enlighten them. He wanted them to understand that even though Jiangsu cuisine chefs are known for their knife skills, it doesn't mean they are superior. The path of cooking is endless; one cannot afford to become complacent with a little success.

The eel for that evening had already been prepared. They were all quite large and very lively, wriggling and entangling with each other in the tank like a mass of snakes. Anyone with a phobia of such sights would surely be startled if they suddenly saw this.

"The banquet is tonight, so let's start with some other dishes first, and then we'll work on the Braised Mian'anqiao Bridge later," Qiu Zhenhua said.

"Yes, Chef Qiu!" Lin Xu agreed.

Jiangsu cuisine features many river delicacies and emphasizes seasonal foods.

Here, Lin Xu saw some large Taihu Lake green shrimp; perhaps they would later be made into White Robed Shrimp or Longjing Shrimp.

Seeing the freshly picked lotus, he wondered if they might later be deep-fried in warm oil to make lotus cake.

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Additionally, there were some young, slender eels, some freshly picked lotus pods, as well as fresh Gu fish, fragrant dried tofu, Lactone Tofu, and other ingredients.

"Is this Gu fish for Squirrel Guaiyu?"

"Yes, Squirrel Guaiyu. Since the guests want to taste the local cuisine, Squirrel Guaiyu is a must-have."

Soon, the kitchen helpers began to cut the ingredients according to the requirements of the evening's menu.

The fragrant dried tofu was sliced into fine strips, blanched in chicken broth, and then arranged on a plate to become a classic dish in Suzhou cuisine—Boiled Dried Tofu Strips.

As for the Lactone Tofu, it was obviously intended for Wensi Tofu.

「At three o'clock.」

A kitchen helper took a cleaver and began to slaughter the eels. First, he chopped off an eel's head, then threw it into a dry sink. The eel's body twisted violently, red blood flowing from the severed neck.

"Eels are an ingredient that must not be eaten if already dead; they can't even be left overnight. They must be killed right before cooking," Qiu Zhenhua explained, already completely accustomed to such scenes. While speaking, he picked up an eel, used a sharp small knife to slit open its belly, and cleaned out its innards.

He then handed the eel to the assistant beside him.

The assistant, holding the still-writhing eel, chopped off its latter half, leaving only the plumper, more uniform middle section.

The fame of Braised Saddle Bridge lay not only in its complicated preparation but also significantly in its choice of ingredients. This dish used only the uniformly thick middle section of the eel. The head and tail were discarded, meaning about one-third or even more of each eel was thrown away.

Of course, in modern society, which values conservation, these parts would definitely not be discarded anymore. The discarded eel tails could be used for eel shreds or even deboned for stir-fried eel slices; they had many uses.

After all the eels were cleaned, Qiu Zhenhua brought the portions intended for Braised Saddle Bridge to the chopping board and began to cut the eel segments.

Seeing Lin Xu looked very interested, he said while working, "The eel segments for Braised Saddle Bridge shouldn't be too short. If they are, you won't get the saddle effect, nor will they have a bridge shape after frying. They must be longer than six centimeters."

With that said, he placed an eel segment on the chopping board. With two swift cuts, the trimmed eel became three segments, each six to seven centimeters long.

After all of them were cut, he picked up a segment, placed it on the chopping board with its back facing up, and evenly made two scores along the eel's spine.

Lin Xu initially thought these two scores divided the eel segment into three equal parts. However, on closer inspection, he realized that the meat at both ends was left slightly longer, while the middle section was about half a centimeter shorter.

What is this?

Just as he was about to ask, Qiu Zhenhua turned his head and asked with a smile, "Did you notice too? Longer at the ends, shorter in the middle? This is done so that after frying, the ends will curl more easily, creating a more distinct Saddle Bridge shape."

Tsk, tsk, there's truly knowledge in every detail. I originally thought Braised Saddle Bridge was just a symbolic name. I never expected the dish actually had to achieve a saddle shape to be considered authentic.

Once all the eels were cut, Qiu Zhenhua said, "Eels shouldn't be washed excessively. That's why they weren't rinsed during the initial killing and cutting. They should only be thoroughly cleaned after all the cuts are made. Otherwise, during frying, blood will congeal on the eel's surface, giving it a strong fishy smell and affecting the texture."

While speaking, he grabbed a handful of salt and sprinkled it into the basin containing the eel segments.

Then, a startling scene unfolded.

The eel segments, already cut and scored, began to writhe violently again, startling the unprepared Lin Xu.

Damn! Dude, its head and tail are gone, and it's scored all over. How is it still not dead? Does it think it can still be saved?

"Haha, you're definitely different from Old Xie. The first time he saw me prepare this dish, he wasn't startled at all. Instead, he startled me..."

Lin Xu wiped the sweat from his forehead with a tissue and asked curiously, "How did my senior apprentice-brother startle you?"

"When the eels were moving, he actually leaned over the basin, observing them intently for a long time. He found two segments that weren't writhing and repeatedly cursed them for being lazy."

Lin Xu was speechless. You should have sent him directly to a psychiatric hospital back then. That way, he would have been able to con you far fewer times.

After adding the salt, Qiu Zhenhua poured in a large spoonful of Cooking Wine and began to scrub the eel segments vigorously. This method maximized the removal of the eel's surface slime and blood, making the eel meat fresh and not fishy, which greatly improved the texture.

"You have to scrub them for a good while when washing," Qiu Zhenhua explained. "Otherwise, the slime won't come off. When frying, a white, sticky film will form on the eel's surface, ruining its appearance."

Lin Xu nodded, making a mental note of it.

After several minutes of scrubbing, Qiu Zhenhua rinsed the eel segments in clean water twice, thoroughly washing off the blood and surface slime.

By now, the eel segments felt smooth to the touch, no longer slimy at all.

With these preparations complete, they heated oil in a wok, preparing to deep-fry the eel segments. The purpose of deep-frying was to remove the eel's fishiness. High-temperature oil is much more effective at this than blanching. Moreover, deep-frying also helps the eel segments hold their shape, achieving the Saddle Bridge effect.

"The oil for frying eels must be very hot. Bring it to about an eight-tenths level of heat. This way, the fried eels will look good and retain their moisture."

To maintain a high oil temperature, Qiu Zhenhua selected a large iron wok and poured in a generous half-wok of oil. The more oil used, the better the deep-frying effect, as the oil temperature wouldn't drop as drastically when the ingredients were added.

Chapter 409: The Ultimate Way to Cook Eel - Braised Saddle Bridge!

After adding oil, he turned the burner to its highest heat setting.

Finally, when the oil temperature reached about eighty percent hot, Qiu Zhenhua poured the eel segments into a large colander, gave it a couple of shakes to remove excess water, and then carefully scattered them into the oil pan.

The reason for scattering them in rather than dumping them all at once was to prevent the eel segments from sticking together during frying.

The hot oil in the wok boiled vigorously.

Lin Xu took a slight step back, afraid the hot oil might splash onto his face.

When the frying was nearly complete, Qiu Zhenhua used the colander to separate any eel segments that had stuck together, flash-fried them again, and then removed them to drain off the excess oil.

At this point, all the eel segments resembled saddles, curving inwards from the scored cuts, creating a bridge-like shape.

"Cleaned eel fries to a golden yellow," Qiu Zhenhua explained. "If it's not cleaned properly, it will turn black because fish darkens when heated."

Lin Xu nodded, making another mental note.

Once the deep-frying step was complete, it was time for braising.

Qiu Zhenhua brought over the ingredients and seasonings for braising: Pork Belly, Scallion and Ginger, Star Anise, Cinnamon, White Pepper Powder, Braised Soy Sauce, Original Soy Sauce, Zhenjiang Vinegar, table salt, Crystal Sugar... and finally, a bowl of peeled garlic.

The garlic was also special; they were all small, round, plump single-clove garlic, resembling little lanterns.

"This dish uses a significant amount of garlic, so prepare plenty. Using single-clove garlic makes for a more beautiful presentation. However, it's better to use smaller ones; oversized cloves can visually dominate the dish."

Lin Xu, looking at the Pork Belly which was also cut to the same thickness as the eel, asked curiously, "Master Qiu, does this dish also use Pork Belly?"

"Yes," Qiu Zhenhua replied. "Strictly speaking, the dish 'Braised Saddleback' should be called 'Braised Pork Belly with Saddleback Eel.' We use Braised Pork Belly to cook these eel segments. That's the authentic way to make Braised Saddleback."

Qiu Zhenhua appreciated Lin Xu's eagerness to learn, unlike Old Xie and Old Dai, who would pester him endlessly if they didn't get a clear explanation.

He elaborated, "Eel is rich in umami but lacks aroma. Therefore, we use the fragrance of Pork Belly to elevate the eel's umami. This isn't just for eel; it's good practice to add some Pork Belly or lard when cooking any seafood to enhance both its umami and aroma."

Once everything was ready, they began cooking.

Qiu Zhenhua poured a large ladleful of vegetable oil into the wok, heated it, then added a full bowl of garlic and began to fry it.

This dish is infused with the flavor of garlic, so the garlic had to be fried first to develop a more intense aroma.

Once the garlic was thoroughly fried, he scooped out about half to be used for plating later.

The garlic remaining in the wok would dissolve into the broth during the simmering process.

After removing the garlic, Qiu Zhenhua added the sliced Pork Belly to the wok, along with the Scallion and Ginger, and began to stir-fry.

When Pork Belly is an ingredient, no matter the dish, its fat should be rendered out first. This makes the dish more fragrant and gives it a richer, more unctuous mouthfeel.

While stir-frying, Qiu Zhenhua added a handful of Crystal Sugar.

This way, as the pork fried, the Crystal Sugar would gradually melt and caramelize, giving the finished dish a more beautiful color.

After frying for a while, the rendered fat in the wok gradually increased, while the surface of the Pork Belly developed a light golden-brown, caramelized crust. At this point, he added the Star Anise and Cinnamon.

He stir-fried them briefly before deglazing with a splash of Zhenjiang Vinegar.

The vinegar helps to tenderize the Pork Belly and adds another layer of complexity to the aroma.

After adding the vinegar, he spread the Pork Belly evenly across the bottom of the wok. Then, he layered the fried eel segments on top. This prevents the eel from sticking to the wok, and the fragrance of the Pork Belly could better infuse the eel.

Next, he added the Original Soy Sauce and Braised Soy Sauce, followed by some Cooking Wine, two small spoonfuls of table salt, and white sugar equivalent to three times the amount of salt.

The two types of Soy Sauce serve different purposes: one enhances the savory, fermented soy flavor, and the other deepens the color.

The sugar is used to bring out the dish's umami.

In the cuisine of the Jiangsu and Zhejiang regions, sugar is commonly used to enhance umami. This is especially true in the Su Xichang area, where sugar and Soy Sauce are the primary seasonings in the kitchen.

With sugar and Soy Sauce, housewives there can create delicious meals even without salt.

After adding the seasonings, he poured in enough fresh water to cover the eel segments and sprinkled some White Pepper Powder over them. He brought the liquid to a rolling boil over high heat, then reduced the heat to low for a gentle simmer.

"Eel is inseparable from White Pepper Powder," Qiu Zhenhua stated. "If you want this dish to be delicious, you need to add White Pepper Powder three times. Master Lin, if you're interested, you should pay attention to this."

Lin Xu listened with some surprise. They actually add it three times? Back home, they don't even use that much White Pepper Powder in Spicy Soup! Won't the eel end up tasting like Spicy Soup?

After simmering on low heat for about half an hour, Qiu Zhenhua turned off the burner.

Lin Xu, who had just finished shredding radish, asked curiously, "Is it ready, Head Chef Qiu?"

"How could it be that quick?" Qiu Zhenhua explained. "This dish needs to be so tender it achieves bone removal, so tender that the meat just slides into your mouth with a gentle suck. But if you keep simmering it, the eel will lose its visual appeal. So, after simmering for half an hour, we transfer it to bowls and steam it for another hour and a half. This allows the eel to become even more flavorful."

He retrieved two fairly shallow, large bowls, their curves perfectly matching the arc of the 'saddleback' eel segments.

He carefully arranged the already cooked eel segments in the bowls.

Once arranged, he placed the Pork Belly on top of the eel and then ladled the braising liquid from the wok into the bowls until they were full.

Then he brought over the reserved fried garlic and added some of the braising liquid to it as well.

He then placed both bowls—one large, one small—into the steam cabinet to begin steaming.

"Steaming the fried garlic in the original broth not only makes for an attractive presentation but also renders it fragrant and tender-soft, absolutely delicious," he noted.

Once the steaming started, Lin Xu resumed his task of preparing the shredded radish.

Over an hour later, the guests upstairs had already taken their seats in the large private dining room and the first courses were being served. Qiu Zhenhua opened the steam cabinet and, using heat-resistant gloves, removed the steamed eel and garlic.

The entire kitchen was instantly filled with a rich, savory aroma.

"Can we serve it now?" Lin Xu asked.

"Not yet," Qiu Zhenhua replied. "We still need to decant the liquid and thicken it into a sauce. And don't forget, we still have to add White Pepper Powder two more times."

If Qiu Zhenhua hadn't reminded him, Lin Xu would have completely forgotten about the White Pepper Powder.

Qiu Zhenhua carefully decanted the liquid from the bowls.

He then took a large serving platter, placed it over one of the steaming bowls, and swiftly inverted them, neatly transferring the contents onto the platter.

After removing the bowl, Lin Xu saw the eel segments arranged beautifully on the platter, each piece perfectly aligned, looking incredibly appetizing.

After arranging the steamed garlic evenly around the eel, Qiu Zhenhua began to prepare the sauce.

He poured the decanted braising liquid back into the wok, added two more spoonfuls of sugar, and sprinkled in some more White Pepper Powder. He stirred rapidly with a ladle, dissolving the sugar and allowing excess moisture to evaporate quickly.

Once the liquid in the wok came to a boil and the sugar had completely dissolved, he stirred in a spoonful of cornstarch slurry.

When the sauce thickened and became glossy, he removed the wok from the heat and evenly drizzled the sauce over the eel segments.

The thickened sauce made the eel's color even more vibrant and its aroma even more intense.

Just then, Qiu Zhenhua picked up the small shaker of White Pepper Powder and evenly sprinkled yet another layer over the dish. Lin Xu watched in astonishment. Isn't that going to be a mouthful of pepper?

Despite his surprise, he immediately thought, Use Cooking Learning Card!

Hmm, although Noodles With Black Bean Sauce is tempting, when faced with Braised Saddleback, even the best Noodles With Black Bean Sauce has to take a backseat. After all, this dish is the pinnacle of eel cuisine.

Soon, the System's notification sounded in his mind:

"Learning target: Qiu Zhenhua. Current Skill: Braised Saddleback. Do you wish to learn?"

Is that even a question?

Lin Xu immediately affirmed in his mind, Learn!

"Congratulations, Host, for acquiring the Perfect Level dish—Braised Saddleback!"

Chapter 410: Grandma Likes Pickled Cucumbers? Wait, I'll Make It!

Phew... all comfortable now.

This Perfect Level Cooking Technique card had finally fulfilled its mission.

Now, the only item left in his hand was a Cuisine Upgrade Card, which Lin Xu had been pondering for a long time.

Because the Sauce Explosion Technique, Steamed Rice Flour Technique, Sugar and Vinegar Technique, and Dry-frying Technique in his possession were all at the Superior Level; upgrading any to the Perfect Level would make it a signature dish in the store.

But he couldn't decide which one to upgrade.

"Master Lin, this Braised Saddle Bridge Eel is done. What do you think?"

Qiu Zhenhua garnished the plate with some coriander leaves, then had someone take it away to be served.

You're not even letting me have a taste, how am I supposed to have an opinion... Lin Xu grumbled inwardly, then said, "They say Su cuisine emphasizes knife skills and heat control, and now I've seen it firsthand. The level of complexity in this dish has completely changed my perception of eel."

Who could imagine that from preparation to serving, it would undergo such a series of processes, including dispatching, cutting, cleaning, deep-frying, braising, steaming, and saucing?

With such a complex method, never mind freshwater delicacies like eel; even a randomly picked leaf processed this way would taste good.

Especially since pork belly accompanied it throughout the entire cooking process.

A dish made like this could hardly taste bad.

Qiu Zhenhua said, "Braised Saddle Bridge Eel evolved from Braised Pork Belly. After more than a hundred years of development, it has become what it is today. No matter how it evolved, the core has always been to braise eel segments with pork belly, achieving a sweet, salty, savory, and fragrant flavor that left a delightful aftertaste."

Sweet, salty, savory, and fragrant? Sweetness comes first? Considering this is Su cuisine, it makes sense for the sweetness to lead. But if Lin Ji were to add it to the menu, the flavor profile would have to be changed to salty-sweet, savory, and fragrant. After all, Northerners didn't share the Su Xichang Region's extreme fondness for sugar.

Not long after, Shu Yun, who was in charge of the small banquet hall upstairs, came over and said, "The guests can't stop praising the Braised Saddle Bridge Eel, saying it's the same old taste from decades ago. They're all complimenting Chef Qiu's skills."

Qiu Zhenhua smiled humbly. "It's a pity my uncle returned to his hometown recently; otherwise, if he had made it, the taste would likely be even better."

After saying that, he asked again, "What other dishes did the guests like?"

"The White Jade Lotus Root Strips and Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips; they said it changed their perception of lotus root and white radish."

As expected...

Once these two dishes appeared, they immediately overshadowed the Su cuisine renowned for its knife skills. It had to be said, the culinary talent of Xie Baomin and his fellow chef was truly formidable. Especially Lin Xu; at such a young age, he had already mastered so many techniques. He was truly someone blessed by the heavens.

After finishing up there, Lin Xu had dinner with everyone.

The dinner there was quite sumptuous. The previously severed eel tails were deboned, sliced horizontally into pieces, and stir-fried with lard. The flavor was savory and fragrant, while the texture was crisp yet springy, leaving a deep impression on Lin Xu.

Too bad his Cooking Learning Card was used up. Otherwise, he definitely would have learned a couple more dishes, to master as many representative eel recipes as possible.

After dinner, he bid farewell to Qiu Zhenhua and strolled to Building No.2.

After saying hello to Gu Junli at the front desk, he took Dundun, who had napped for half the afternoon, and left work.

The little fellow had eaten crocodile meat today and wasn't very hungry yet, so Lin Xu hadn't prepared dinner for it at Fishing Platform. He planned to steam some pork loin at home.

Dundun hadn't had pork for several days; I need to vary its diet. It can't be allowed to become a picky eater.

When he reached the entrance of their residential complex, Lin Xu saw Shen Baobao, who had already finished work, holding a takeout container of Shengjian Buns and eating.

"WHOA, the Shengjian Bun place is incredibly popular! I had to wait in line for ages to get these."

The girl affectionately picked up a Shengjian Bun with a bamboo skewer and offered it to him. Lin Xu quickly opened his mouth to catch it, and his mouth was immediately scalded. Mhm, fresh from the pan, and full of hot soup—that's why the temperature was extremely high.

Lin Xu carefully ate it, then asked, "Are you staying here tonight or going home?"

"Wherever you go, I'll go. Anyway, I want to be with you."

Then let's not go to the villa. That way, my father-in-law won't see me and crave meat again, which would ruin the fat-loss plan my mother-in-law set for him.

After eating another Shengjian Bun, the two of them, holding Dundun, prepared to go to Uncle Yu's supermarket to buy some snacks and other things before heading upstairs to find an old movie to watch.

Just as they walked into the supermarket, Uncle Yu greeted them with a smile, saying, "Xiao Xu, a truckload of farm-grown cucumbers arrived this evening—the last batch of the year. Do you want some to try?"

Don't underestimate farm-grown cucumbers because of their small size; their cucumber flavor is intense. Whether served as a cold salad or shredded with noodles, they are delicious.

Lin Xu didn't particularly need any. Just as he was about to refuse, Shen Baobao, beside him, said, "Farm-grown? My grandma usually has the company driver go to a farm in the suburbs that grows vegetables to buy cucumbers for making pickled cucumbers. However, her waist and legs haven't been feeling well this year, so she hasn't made any yet."

Pickled cucumbers? Lin Xu suddenly remembered that during the competition at Fishing Platform last time, the second-round reward was an Excellent Level pickled cucumber recipe. Since Grandma's waist and legs aren't feeling well, I'll make them then. It's such a coincidence to come across these good cucumbers; it would be a real pity not to pickle some.

Thinking this, he said to Shen Baobao, "Then let's buy some later and make a batch. It's a good chance for your grandma to taste my handiwork."

"You know how to make pickled cucumbers too, Xu Bao? That's wonderful! I'll tell Grandma right away, so she can look forward to tasting your cooking... How long do the pickled cucumbers take to be ready?"