

## Culinary 411

### Chapter 411: Grandma Likes Pickled Cucumbers? Wait, I'll Make It!

Lin Xu laughed and said, "The quickest would be two hours, but that's too short for a thorough pickling. Ideally, it should be refrigerated overnight... If it's the whole cucumber, then it needs over two weeks; otherwise, it won't be flavorful enough."

"Then make the quick version. How about we go to Grandma's for lunch tomorrow? We can bring it to her then."

"Sure, I'll follow your lead."

"Thank you, Xu darling, you are so good to me!"

Lin Xu couldn't help but smile wryly. Just by following your suggestion, I'm being good to you? Isn't that too easy to please?

He passed Dundun, who was in his arms, to Shen Baobao. "Pets aren't allowed inside the supermarket. You and Dundun wait at the entrance. I'll pick out some suitable cucumbers and also grab some snacks."

"Okay!"

Shen Baobao held Dundun in her arms, leaning against the glass door and letting the little guy watch the crowd outside.

Not long after, Lin Xu walked out of the supermarket carrying two big bags of cucumbers, along with packs of Soy Sauce and some snacks. After checking out, the couple, loaded with their bags and carrying Dundun, headed upstairs to their home.

As soon as they got home, Shen Jiayue couldn't wait to call Mrs. Shen. "Grandma, we made some Pickled Cucumbers. We'll bring them over tomorrow at noon. Let us know if there's anything else you'd like to eat; your grandson-in-law can cook anything."

Mrs. Shen laughed and said, "Just bring the Pickled Cucumbers. It's been so hot these days, and eating porridge without some pickles feels like something's missing and spoils my appetite."

"Then wait for us; we'll be there tomorrow by noon."

After hanging up the phone, the young lady boldly called her father, Shen Guofu. "Dad, Xu darling is making Pickled Cucumbers for Grandma, and I need to stay and help, so I won't be coming back tonight!"

Shen Guofu was speechless. Making Pickled Cucumbers is a good idea; the old lady really loves them. But what help could you possibly offer? You'd be more of a hindrance!

He didn't expose his daughter but just cautioned her, "Don't make too many for your grandma; eating too many pickles is not good for her health."

"Okay, okay."

「In the West Fourth Ring Villa」

Shen Guofu, who was drinking purple rice oatmeal porridge, hung up the phone. He then glanced at the seaweed salad on the table and suddenly slapped his forehead. "Why didn't I ask Xu to make more? Pickled Cucumbers aren't high in calories; I can eat them too."

While eating, Han Shuzhen was looking through her daughter's medical reports and said to Shen Guofu, "Call them back. I'll also tell her she must not eat silkworm pupae anymore, or any similar high-protein foods, to avoid allergic reactions."

「In the kitchen」

Lin Xu placed the cucumbers he bought into the sink and carefully washed them twice. These homegrown cucumbers were uneven in size and wrinkly, looking almost stunted. But it's these types of cucumbers that produce the best-tasting Pickled Cucumbers—crispy and fresh.

After washing, he put the cucumbers in a basin and picked out the straight ones. After chopping off the ends, he sliced them vertically with a kitchen knife, then halved them again, eventually cutting each cucumber into eight sticks, similar to how one would prepare Jade Soup.

Once all were cut, he placed the cucumber sticks in the same basin, sprinkled in half a packet of salt, stirred them up, and began to draw out the water from the cucumbers. When making Pickled Cucumbers, whether it's the quick-cut version or the whole-cucumber regular method, it's necessary to draw out the water from the cucumbers first so they can be thoroughly pickled and flavored.

While the cucumbers were releasing water, Lin Xu fetched a glass jar with a sealing lid, washed it clean, and dried it, preparing it to pickle the whole cucumbers in later. As for the quick version of cucumbers, soaking them directly in the basin would suffice.

After preparing the tools, he set a frying pan on the stove, poured in a little cooking oil, and fried the Sichuan peppercorns, Star Anise, and bay leaves until fragrant. He then poured in packs of Soy Sauce. Both methods required full submersion in Soy Sauce, so a large amount was needed—almost half a pot.

After pouring the Soy Sauce into the pan, Lin Xu added a large spoonful of White Sugar. White Sugar enhances the taste and neutralizes the saltiness of the Soy Sauce, making the Pickled Cucumbers lightly sweet and more appetizing. Finally, he added two large spoonfuls of aromatic vinegar. The vinegar enhanced the complex aroma of the sauce and also gave full flavor to the Pickled Cucumbers.

He brought the sauce in the pan to a boil over high heat, then simmered it for five minutes to dissolve the sugar and allow the vinegar's acidity to evaporate a bit before turning off the heat and setting it aside to cool. The sauce for the pickles needed to be completely cooled before use; otherwise, it would spoil them.

Next, he washed some peeled garlic, ginger, and small chili peppers. These ingredients also needed to be dried before use to prevent introducing moisture that could cause the Pickled Cucumbers to rot and go bad.

「After finishing these tasks」

Lin Xu washed his hands, and he and Shen Baobao snuggled on the couch, logged into their video account, and started watching an old movie called "The Mortician."

From the title, Shen Baobao thought it was a horror movie. She even prepared to jump into Lin Xu's arms screaming in fright. However, to her surprise, it turned out to be a very touching drama. The protagonist had stumbled into the funeral industry. He faced his wife's lack of understanding and disdain from his childhood friend, and he himself struggled immensely.

But as he gained understanding and insight into the mortician's role, he became resolute in his decision to remain one. He stopped struggling with his past and, having become accustomed to the inevitability of death, chose to reconcile with his former self. In the end, his wife returned to him, his previously disdainful childhood friend apologized, and the protagonist earned everyone's respect.

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Just as she was watching, Shen Baobao suddenly buried herself in Lin Xu's arms and started crying:

"BOO HOO HOO... Xubao, when you couldn't find a job back then, were you as helpless as the male protagonist? I regret so much not being there for you, I'm sorry..."

Lin Xu: ??????

I wasn't *that* helpless! Back then, I had already resigned myself to taking my diploma and going home to work on the scenic area if worse came to worst. Who knew a system would suddenly appear and disrupt all my plans.

He patted Shen Baobao on the back and said, "At that time, I was prepared. If I couldn't find a job by the time I got my diploma, I would just forcefully kiss you, then pack my bags and go home, putting a perfect end to my youth. But then... the plans fell through."

Shen Baobao immediately stopped crying. "Why would you want to kiss me?"

"I've secretly liked you for so long. Can't I even steal a kiss?"

"Definitely not! You'd have to kiss me at least ten times!"

Having said that, the girl pushed Lin Xu down onto the sofa and started kissing him. Dundun, who was originally lying on the sofa backrest watching the movie, suddenly jumped away disdainfully and dived into a nearby cardboard box.

Ugh... so gross! This kitty can't even bear to watch!

After the two on the sofa were tired of kissing, Lin Xu remembered the cucumbers still marinating in the kitchen.

He straightened his clothes and went to the kitchen. He found that a lot of water had been drawn out of the cucumbers, making the cucumber strips as pliable as noodles. Even the whole cucumbers had softened slightly by now.

But this state still wasn't enough.

Lin Xu first picked out the cucumber strips. He squeezed the water out and then rinsed them in clean water to wash away as much of the saltiness as possible, allowing the Soy Sauce flavor to penetrate better. After rinsing them several times, he squeezed the water out of the cucumber strips again and placed them in a prepared bowl.

Then he added slices of ginger, garlic, and some chili peppers. He scooped in a few spoonfuls of the completely cooled Soy Sauce mixture, sealed everything with plastic wrap, and placed it in the refrigerator. This way, they could be eaten by tomorrow.

While Lin Xu was marinating the cucumbers, Shen Jiayue took a short video with her phone and posted it on her social media:

"Grandma said she wanted to eat Soy-pickled Cucumbers, so Xubao marinated some overnight. Tomorrow at noon, Xubao and I will take the Soy-pickled Cucumbers to Grandma together!"

Just after she posted it, Chen Yan commented, "What a coincidence! I just happen to be taking clothes to my maternal grandma tomorrow."

Shen Baobao mercilessly exposed Chen Yan's intentions: "If you want to freeload a meal, just say it directly, Yan Bao! Why beat around the bush?"

Chen Yan retorted, "Tomorrow I'll bring you silkworm pupae with cosmetic effects!"

"Then tomorrow I'll ask Grandma to find you a date. Anyway, the old neighbors in the South Third Ring alleys love to meddle in these things!"

Chen Yan: "!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

After the two 'sisters' engaged in some playful sparring, it ended with CEO Chen's compromise.

Nearby, Lin Xu was unaware that a comment war had just erupted. He was busy checking the whole cucumbers. Although somewhat softened, they hadn't pickled through yet. They needed more time to draw out all the moisture so the cucumbers would be less likely to spoil and would have a crispier texture.

While he was checking them, Shen Baobao murmured that she was hungry.

Lin Xu then made them two bowls of hot and sour sweet potato noodles using sweet potato noodles he had brought from his hometown, found a movie, and they began eating and watching.

At ten o'clock that night, he returned to the kitchen. The cucumbers had thoroughly softened from marinating by then. He rinsed them several times with clean water, squeezed out the excess water, and spread them on a bamboo tray, using a fan to dry their surfaces.

After these steps, he layered the cucumbers into a glass jar, adding slices of garlic, ginger, and chili peppers with each layer. Finally, he poured in the cooled Soy Sauce mixture, using a long chopstick to poke down to the bottom to ensure the sauce thoroughly penetrated everything.

「The next morning, just after ten o'clock.」

Lin Xu drove Dundun back to their home on Yingchun Street from Fishing Platform. He poured the marinated cucumber strips from the refrigerator into a small jar and also brought along the large jar filled with whole Pickled Cucumbers. After placing them in the trunk, he and Shen Baobao, who had rushed over from the audit office, set off for the South Third Ring.

「At that moment, outside the courtyard house on the South Third Ring, a Bentley slowly stopped at the gate.」

Shen Guofu, looking at Han Shuzhen in the passenger seat, asked, "Our daughter and son-in-law are bringing pickles to the old lady. Is it really appropriate for us to come over to freeload a meal?"

Han Shuzhen pointed to a white Porsche slowly entering the alley. "Yan Bao is here too. You tell me if it's appropriate?"

Soon, the Porsche stopped in front of the Bentley. Chen Yan alighted, making a show of carrying two newly bought outfits suitable for middle-aged and elderly people. "Uncle, Auntie, you're here too?"

Seeing Shen Guofu and his wife getting out of the car, Chen Yan quickly greeted them.

Shen Guofu replied with a smile, Lin Xu hasn't had a chance to visit your maternal grandmother since he returned from Yinzhou, so we all just happened to decide to come today.

Yes, can't say we're freeloading. That would be too detrimental to my, Old Shen's, image. Claiming we all discussed it as a family and decided to come together sounds a bit more official. Later, after the meal, I'll see if Little Xu is busy. If not, I'll invite O'Sullivan from South City for a couple of games at a nearby pool hall. Let the young Trump experience the cunning of an old hand!

Reaching the gate of the courtyard house, Chen Yan pushed it open and walked in with Shen Guofu and his wife. Soon after, Lin Xu, driving his G-Wagon, followed the GPS into the alley.

Seeing the Bentley and Porsche parked on the roadside, Shen Baobao couldn't help but pout. "They're definitely here to freeload. Xubao, do you have enough ingredients? Want me to run to the supermarket at the alley entrance and grab some more?"

"It's enough. I brought five pounds of beef brisket and several pounds of Fishing Platform's own especially ripe, sandy-fleshed tomatoes from their kitchen today."

When she heard beef brisket and tomatoes, Shen Baobao's eyes immediately lit up. "Xubao, are you going to make beef brisket stewed with tomatoes?"

"Yes, this isn't another one of your favorites, is it?"

"Hey! You stole my line!"

The young couple chatted and laughed as they got out of the car. Shen Baobao perched Dundun on her shoulder. Seeing Lin Xu struggling with jars and ingredients, she shouted towards the courtyard, "Listen up, all you freeloaders inside! Get out here and help carry things, or I'm ordering takeout for you all!"

In the courtyard, Shen Guofu, who was in the middle of telling his niece (Chen Yan) how he, Lin Xu, and Shen Baobao had discussed that morning what time to arrive, felt his old face flush. With a daughter like this, it was impossible to maintain any pretense. He sighed and stood up to go to the gate.

Just as he stepped out, he saw the bag of beef brisket in Lin Xu's hands, and the dejection on his face was instantly replaced by delight.

Yes! We're having meat!

Chapter 413: The incredibly satisfying Tomato Stew Beef Brisket! The whole family overate!

"Come on, Lin Xu, let me hold that for you."

Shen Guofu's mood immediately brightened.

Heaven pity him; he had been eating mostly vegetables recently, so seeing meat transformed gloomy Mr. Shen into happy Mr. Shen. Well, as long as there's meat, even if my daughter scams me every day, I'm more than willing!

Taking the beef brisket from his son-in-law, the hefty weight in his hands made his heart leap again.

People who haven't eaten meat for several days, when they occasionally get to eat a meal, their biggest worry is that there won't be enough. This piece of meat is decent! Judging from my past experience vending at Xizhimen, it's at least four or five pounds, enough to stuff myself at lunchtime.

Thinking this, Shen Guofu once again felt that coming over to freeload was a wise decision.

If I hadn't been shameless enough to come here, I wouldn't have gotten a taste of these four or five pounds of meat, would I?

"What kind of meat is this, Uncle?" Chen Yan, who had taken the small glass jar from Lin Xu's hands, looked at the tomatoes in the bag and then at the meat in her Uncle Shen Guofu's hands, asking curiously.

What meat? Does it matter, niece? As long as it's meat, it's better than vegetables!

Shen Guofu muttered to himself, glanced at the bag he was holding, and then said, "Beef brisket, the kind with both tendons and meat."

Beef brisket?

Chen Yan looked again at the tomatoes in Lin Xu's hands, her eyes lighting up with excitement. "Brother-in-law, are you making Tomato Stew Beef Brisket?"

"Yes, the beef brisket from Building Two looked good, so I cut a piece. Do you also like this dish, Sister Yan?"

"Love it, absolutely love it! I need to tell Grandma right away to steam more rice for lunch. I usually need at least two bowls of rice as a base when I eat this dish."

After speaking, she ran into the quadrangle with the glass jar containing cucumber slices, nearly tripping over her skirt in her haste.

After she went inside, Shen Guofu muttered under his breath, "Boasting about eating just two bowls of rice?"

Shen Baobao, carrying Dundun, walked beside Lin Xu and said somewhat sentimentally, "Xubao, this is where I grew up. It used to be a big messy courtyard. Later, when my dad made some money, he bought it and transformed it into a quadrangle."

In Beijing, although a messy courtyard and a quadrangle may seem similar, they are actually two different types of courtyards. A messy courtyard is simple, a place where the lower social classes lived in the past. It would house more than a dozen families, who used dry toilets and had only one water tap per family; it was all chaotic and unordered. In contrast, a quadrangle is neatly organized. Everything from the front gate to the courtyard layout, and the function of each room, is very particular.

Walking in from the southeast corner through the double courtyard doors and passing through the entryway, Lin Xu reached a screen wall at the end, which featured a huge, inverted "fortune" character. This symbolized "fortune has arrived."

Turning left in front of the screen wall, a spacious courtyard came into his view. The courtyard was not large but was very tidy. The ground was paved with grey-green bricks, surrounded by a circle of blue brick houses. In the middle of the courtyard stood a tall Chinese parasol tree, blocking most of the fierce sunlight.

"This tree was planted by my grandmother when my mom was pregnant. She said it would bring a phoenix to the family, and that phoenix turned out to be me," Shen Baobao explained, a touch of excitement in her voice as she returned to her childhood home.

Finally, Xubao can see where I spent my childhood! If only Xubao had been here back then, we could have gone from being childhood sweethearts to a married couple.

In the courtyard, Han Shuzhen had just come out of the kitchen with a basket of washed fruit. Faintly, Chen Yan's voice could be heard from inside, telling Grandma Shen to add more rice: "That's not

enough! Just fill the rice cooker to its maximum capacity. Too little won't be enough. You know my uncle's appetite... even four bowls of rice might not be enough for him!"

TSK TSK TSK, did my sister-in-law skip breakfast?

Lin Xu greeted his mother-in-law and then carried the glass jar into the kitchen.

"Grandma, these are the pickled cucumbers I made for you. They'll be ready to eat in two weeks."

"Oh, wonderful, wonderful! My grandson-in-law is so thoughtful. Where's Dundun? I saw Spanish mackerel on sale at the supermarket this morning and bought a piece especially for Dundun. I was just about to steam it for it."

Chen Yan: "..."

I like Spanish mackerel too, especially in dumplings! I absolutely love them, but you've never bought Spanish mackerel for me, not once. BOO HOO HOO... Am I, an older single woman, no longer welcome at Grandma's?

After placing the jar in a corner of the kitchen, Lin Xu took the beef brisket his father-in-law handed him. He went to the sink, filled a basin with water, and placed the brisket in it to soak. "Grandma, you all go inside and cool off. Leave the kitchen to me. We'll keep it simple with just one main dish today."

Shen Guofu loved to hear that.

Simple is good. It's not like there are other options to choose from anyway.

Hearing there would only be one dish, Han Shuzhen, who was outside the kitchen, called out to Lin Xu, "Lin Xu, don't make it too greasy! Your dad's diet has just started showing results. Try to add some vegetables."

Shen Guofu quickly walked out of the kitchen, pulling Han Shuzhen toward the main house, which faced south. "There are vegetables, there are! That whole big bag of tomatoes, definitely enough vegetables... Let's go inside, quick! I'm about to die from this heat."

Exactly. I can't let my wife see that huge piece of beef brisket, or she'll definitely make our son-in-law save half of it.

Just as they were about to go inside, he called out to his daughter, who was carrying Dundun, "Baobao, come over quickly! Your mom has been missing Dundun so much she can barely eat."

To stop my wife from thinking about the meat in the kitchen, I have to distract her quickly. And the best way to do that is, naturally, little Dundun.

And just as he'd hoped, upon hearing Dundun had also come, Han Shuzhen instantly forgot about the meat in the kitchen. "Come here, my little darling! Let Grandma give you a hug."

Chapter 414: The incredibly satisfying Tomato Stew Beef Brisket! The whole family is stuffed!

In the kitchen, Grandma Shen opened the small jar that Chen Yan had brought over and picked up a cucumber strip with chopsticks to taste it. She immediately praised her son-in-law's culinary skills.

"This cucumber is really crunchy and delicious, and the soy sauce flavor is strong."

Upon hearing this, Chen Yan immediately leaned over and took a bite of the cucumber strip Grandma Shen was holding. CRUNCH, CRUNCH, she chewed as she spoke, "It is quite crunchy, but why is it so salty?"

Grandma Shen gently patted her granddaughter. "Silly girl, this is meant to be eaten with porridge. It has to be a bit salty, right? Besides, when you taste something like this, you're supposed to take a small nibble. Who bites off half of it in one go like you do?"

Chen Yan pouted, feeling slighted again!

But she had to admit, these cucumber strips were indeed tasty.

Lately, her brother-in-law had become obsessed with cucumbers. First, it was Jade Soup, and now these soy-pickled cucumbers. He'd taken a simple cucumber and worked wonders with it.

Unlike her, who, when she got her hands on a cucumber, either gnawed on it raw or used it for a facial.

She was no match for her brother-in-law at all!

To avoid being scorned by Grandma again, Chen Yan, CRUNCH, CRUNCH, munched on her cucumber and left the kitchen, planning to find a quiet corner in the living room to wait for dinner.

After she had left, Lin Xu put the tomatoes to soak, then took the rice Grandma Shen was about to wash and said, "Grandma, you rest. I can handle these chores."

"Okay, okay, then I'll just wait to eat... Turn up the air conditioning in the kitchen, don't let my grandson-in-law get too hot."

"Got it, Grandma."

After rinsing the rice twice, he set it to steam. Then, he lifted the beef brisket out of the water and began to cut it up.

Beef brisket is meat from the cow's belly. This cut has a lot of fascia and sinew, making it particularly suitable for stewing. He sliced the beef into long strips, then chopped them into chunks slightly larger than mahjong tiles. This made them easier to stew thoroughly and convenient to eat, one piece at a time.

Once the beef was cut, he brought a pot of water to a boil, added all the beef chunks, and then put in Scallion and Ginger to blanch them. Ideally, beef brisket should be soaked in cold water for several hours before cooking to draw out the blood, which makes the stew tastier. But since there wasn't enough time today, he opted for blanching instead.

Once the water boiled and he had skimmed off the scum, he rinsed the meat chunks and placed them in a pressure cooker. He then added several slices of ginger, a few sections of scallion, two pieces of Star Anise, several bay leaves, and a whole onion, sliced. The onion not only imparts a rich, savory aroma to the beef but also makes it more tender. Adding some onion when cooking beef can have surprisingly good results. Lastly, he added a washed green chili to the pot to enhance the beef's bright, fresh flavor.

With everything in, he added enough water to cover the beef, put the lid on the pot, and set it on the stove to stew.

Tomato Stew Beef Brisket is a very common home-style dish. The basic method is to stew beef brisket with tomatoes. However, restaurants often prepare the components separately to enhance the dish's appearance and texture. This was exactly what Lin Xu was doing now: first, he stewed the beef in a pressure cooker without any seasonings. Then, he would simmer it in a sauce made from stir-fried tomatoes until the beef was thoroughly tender. This method resulted in incredibly soft and tender beef, and the tomatoes retained their flavor instead of becoming bland from overcooking.

After the pressure cooker came up to pressure, Lin Xu didn't rush to deal with the tomatoes but instead strolled to the living room. The beef needed to be pressure-cooked for at least half an hour to become tender. He had to wait for this step to finish before stir-frying the tomatoes, because he needed to add some of the original beef cooking liquid to the pan.

In the living room, Dundun was lying calmly in Grandma Shen's arms like a well-behaved baby. Shen Baobao, in her self-styled role as Dundun's teasing 'stepmother', hovered nearby, itching to tease Dundun. But every time she reached out, either Grandma Shen would stop her, or her own mother would slap her hand away.

When Lin Xu entered, Shen Baobao immediately went over to him. "Come on, come on, let me show you my room over here."

Lin Xu picked up a mango from the table and started peeling it as Shen Baobao pulled him out of the living room and towards a room on the west side.

Chen Yan, left alone in a corner, saw that she was the only young person remaining. She was about to follow when she suddenly remembered the several times she had inadvertently walked in on those two playfully nipping at each other like seals. The thought immediately made her dismiss the idea of joining them.

Forget it. Instead of being subjected to their PDA, I might as well stay here and hold court.

"These are Water Margin cards I collected as a kid; I always wanted to complete the set... This is a 'Lao Fu Zi' comic I bought with five yuan I stole from Grandma. Dad beat me hard for it. After he was done, he cried even more heartbrokenly than I did, kept saying how useless he felt..."

「In the room next door.」

The scene their 'sister-in-law' (Chen Yan) had imagined—the two of them playfully nipping at each other like seals—did not materialize.

Shen Baobao sat on the floor, opening a Huanghuali wood box, taking out items one by one to share with Lin Xu.

Lin Xu sat beside her, listening attentively, having even forgotten to eat the mango in his hand.

This box held Shen Baobao's entire childhood.

No wonder she cherished it like a priceless treasure.

"When I was little, I wanted a cloth doll, but my mom's salary was too low to buy one, so she sewed one herself. But it was so ugly, she only let me play with it at home and never let me take it outside."

Lin Xu, holding the awkwardly cute cloth doll, said, "From a post-modern art perspective, this little elephant is quite creative."

Shen Baobao opened her mouth. "But... this is supposed to be a kitten!"

Lin Xu was speechless.

I take back what I just said.

After they had looked through all the collectibles, the beef stewing on the stove was almost ready. The two of them put the collectibles back into the box, locked it again, and left the room.

「Back in the kitchen.」

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Lin Xu grabbed a pot, boiled half a pot of water on another stove, then lifted the soaking tomatoes out. He made a crosscut on the top of each tomato and blanched them in the boiling water to easily peel off their skins.

This way, they wouldn't have to deal with the tomato skins.

After peeling all the skins, he placed the tomatoes on the chopping board, finely diced them with a knife, and transferred them into a bowl.

Then, he took the pressure cooker off the stove and began to release the pressure.

While the pressure cooker was releasing steam, he set up a wok and started to stir-fry the tomatoes.

He poured oil into the wok, heated it, then added minced garlic and stir-fried until fragrant. Next, he added the diced tomatoes, sautéing them on high heat.

While stir-frying, he added three teaspoons of salt and six teaspoons of sugar to the wok.

Tomato Stew Beef Brisket should be sour, sweet, and savory, with a predominant sweet and sour taste, so it requires a good amount of sugar.

The quality of the tomatoes used today was quite good. If the tomatoes were of average quality, he would need to add a large spoonful of tomato paste while stir-frying; otherwise, their acidity wouldn't be sufficient, and the brisket would lack a certain something.

After adding the seasonings, he stirred with a spoon to mix them evenly.

By this time, the pressure cooker had almost finished releasing steam. Upon opening the lid, a rich aroma wafted out.

The beef in the pot was thoroughly braised and trembling, looking tantalizing enough to make one's mouth water.

Shen Guofu rushed from the next room to the kitchen doorway. "Is it ready, Lin Xu? Do you need my help serving the dish?"

Lin Xu said with a smile, "Not yet, Dad. Please wait a bit longer; I'll call you when it's ready."

Shen Guofu came into the kitchen. "Then can I have a taste now?"

"Not yet. I haven't added any seasonings to the beef, so it won't taste right."

Upon hearing this, his father-in-law left, feeling a bit disgruntled. It smelled so delicious; who would have thought it wasn't ready yet?

Lin Xu stirred the contents of the pressure cooker a few times with a spoon. The green chili he had added had completely disintegrated; only its faint, fresh aroma lingered in the broth.

He ladled two scoops of the beef broth from the pressure cooker into the wok with the tomatoes. Using the beef broth to stew the tomatoes would perfectly meld the umami of the broth and tomatoes, creating an appetizing savory flavor.

When adding the broth, he used a slotted spoon to strain it, preventing ingredients like Scallion and Ginger, onions, and Star Anise from being scooped into the wok and affecting the final presentation.

After simmering for about five or six minutes, the tomatoes in the wok had cooked down to a pulp. Lin Xu then used a slotted spoon to transfer the beef brisket from the pressure cooker into the tomato sauce.

He continued to braise it, allowing the sweet and sour flavor of the tomato sauce to fully penetrate the beef.

The beef bubbled in the ruddy tomato sauce. Lin Xu used his phone to shoot a several-second video of the pot and posted it under the Lin Ji's Food topic.

"How many more bowls of rice could this dish make you eat?"

No sooner had he posted it than his online friends started replying like crazy.

I, the Slimmest 300 Pounds in the Family: Ahhh, my favorite Tomato Stew Beef Brisket!

Liang Mountain's Thirst: I almost jumped off the tower crane to snatch that pot.

Spring Breeze Cannot Blow You: Boss Lin, is it really appropriate to post this kind of video during mealtime?

Lin Daiyu Uprooting Willows: Keep posting such tempting stuff, and I'll beat up your staff!

The Blind Taxi Driver: As someone advanced in years, I just can't stand to see such tempting food. I only want to know if Lin Ji will have this dish after opening.

Great Mahayana Stage cultivator: Fellow Daoist Lin, I've failed my ascension and need a portion of Tomato Stew Beef Brisket to heal my inner injuries. How many high-grade spirit stones does it cost?

Invisible Chicken Wings: I bet it tastes awful. If you don't believe me, let me have a taste!

...

Fifteen minutes later, the tomato sauce in the wok had thickened considerably. Lin Xu then carefully poured the contents—meat, sauce, and all—into a prepared serving basin.

A whole basin of beef brisket, emanating a rich, tangy aroma, looked incredibly tantalizing.

After garnishing the center with a pinch of fresh cilantro, he carried the basin of meat into the living room.

As soon as he entered, Shen Guofu impatiently greeted him, "Oh, that aroma! It's so tantalizing."

Chen Yan helped bring the rice cooker over, Han Shuzhen brought the bowls and chopsticks, Grandma Shen picked at some pickled cucumber strips, and Shen Baobao... was sneaking a bite.

"Wow, this beef is so delicious!"

The beef was incredibly tender yet retained a pleasant chewiness. It had a sweet and savory flavor with a hint of salt, and as one chewed, a subtle oniony note and a delicate, fresh zest emerged.

After eating, Shen Baobao just wanted to quickly shovel down a couple of mouthfuls of rice.

This combination of sweet, sour, and savory flavors practically begged for a few mouthfuls of perfectly steamed rice—soft, yet with distinct grains—to accompany it.

"How's the flavor, sweetheart?"

"It's absolutely fantastic! Don't just stand there, Dad, hurry up and scoop some rice. This gravy is too perfect to pair with rice."

Shen Guofu was speechless. For the sake of the meat, I won't argue with you.

After hastily serving everyone rice, he sat down at the dining table.

He picked up a piece of meat, glistening with the rich, red sauce, and took a bite. Mmm, that tangy, appetizing tomato flavor was truly irresistible.

After taking a bite, he quickly followed it with two mouthfuls of rice. The feeling of satisfaction from chewing them together with the meat almost made Old Shen shout out in bliss.

It had been days! Finally, he was experiencing that satisfying feeling of meat combined with carbs once again. Delicious!

"Wow, brother-in-law, your cooking skills are incredible! This is the best beef brisket I've ever eaten!"

"Indeed, it's tasty. Even an old lady like me can chew it."

"Xu's cooking is beyond reproach, but... is it just meat? What about the vegetables?"

When Shen Guofu heard his wife mention vegetables again, he said while eating, "The vegetables have cooked down into the sauce, haven't they? We can have some soup after this; isn't that vegetarian enough?"

Han Shuzhen was taken aback. You really would say anything to eat meat! Are vegetables that have melted into the meat broth still considered vegetables?

"You'll have to do an extra set of exercises with me tonight then!"

"Okay, wife! As long as you let me eat my fill, forget one set, two sets are no problem at all!"

Shen Guofu devoured several pieces of the tender stewed beef brisket. Then, with a sense of curiosity, he tried a piece of the pickled cucumber his son-in-law had made. The crispiness of the cucumber immediately captivated him.

"Delicious, delicious! This is really good. It has a rich, savory flavor, yet it's not too salty, and there's even a hint of sweetness in the aftertaste. I have to take some with me when I leave; this goes even better with rice than seaweed strips."

When Shen Baobao heard this, she also picked up a piece to try. "It's true! This cucumber is so crunchy and delicious."

Taking a bite of cucumber and then a bite of beef brisket—the sensation was just perfect!

As they were enjoying their meal, Han Shuzhen said with some concern, "I'm worried I'll gain back the two pounds I just lost by eating this."

Director Han had recently become addicted to losing weight, and now, suddenly faced with such delicious beef brisket, she felt conflicted.

She wanted to indulge with her husband, yet worried that her previous efforts would be in vain.

Ah, what a dilemma!

"Auntie, don't worry about that," Chen Yan chimed in. "After we've eaten and drunk to our heart's content, we can ask my brother-in-law to make a pot of slimming soup. One bowl each, and we'll definitely slim down."

"Slimming soup?"

Han Shuzhen immediately became interested. "Xu, you know how to make that too? How about you make some for Mom to try later?"

Lin Xu paused. Even though Jade Soup has plenty of cucumbers, its slimming effect is weak. After all, it's a broth stewed from a chicken carcass and thickened with cornstarch, so it isn't low in calories.

But seeing his mother-in-law so interested, he nodded and said, "I'll make some after we finish eating, so Dad, Mom, and Grandma can all try this Jade Soup."

Once Director Han heard there really was such a slimming soup, she relaxed. "Old Shen, give me that fatty piece; this kind of meat is tastier when it's a bit fatty... And get me another bowl of rice later. It seems my bowl wasn't quite full; it's gone after just a few bites..."

"Alright, alright, I'll get you more."

"Dad, I want another bowl too, a big one!"

"Of course, my girl."

"Uncle, me too..."

Shen Guofu: "..."

How did I, the illustrious Prince of Gourmet Food, turn into the Prince of Rice Serving in the blink of an eye? Can't they serve themselves? From now on, if anyone asks me to serve them rice, I'll get upset with them!

As he was grumbling to himself, Grandma Shen handed her bowl over. "Guofu, more rice."

"Right away!"

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"Ugh, I'm so stuffed!"

In the dining room of the main hall, everyone slumped in their chairs, gazing longingly at the leftover Tomato Stew Beef Brisket on the table, even though their stomachs were already beyond full.

Who would have thought that this dish could be so delicious?

Moreover, the sweet and sour Tomato Beef Brisket paired with the flavorful cucumber strips unexpectedly produced an appetizing effect that cut through any greasiness.

With one bite leading to another, everyone ate until their bellies were round.

Now, a quarter of the dish still remained in the serving bowl.

Shen Guofu actually wanted to eat a bit more. After all, he hadn't eaten meat for several days and was craving it badly. But the rice in the pot had been completely finished. If he wanted to eat more now, he'd either have to go to the street corner to buy a couple of Sesame Pancakes or ask his son-in-law to cook some noodles.

"Stop eating, Guofu, or you'll upset your stomach," Han Shuzhen said. She was full and was now waiting for her son-in-law to make his delicious and nutritious slimming soup. She hadn't expected slimming soup at last night's crayfish feast. Luckily, Chen Yan had mentioned it; otherwise, she would have missed this tasty dish. She initially wanted to complain that her daughter hadn't said anything, but then she remembered: her son-in-law had just gone to the kitchen to make the soup, and her daughter had immediately followed him. They were inseparable all day, practically glued at the hip.

"Those two are really like conjoined twins," Han Shuzhen muttered.

Hearing his wife's grumbling, Shen Guofu chuckled. "Weren't we the same when we first started dating? During the time I had a stall near Xizhimen, you'd sneak out of Medical College every day to keep me company. You even traded the meal tickets your father gave you for roasted sweet potatoes to feed me..."

Recalling that poor yet sweet past brought an involuntary smile of happiness to Han Shuzhen's face. "Remember how cold it was that winter? Every time I went to Xizhimen, I had to warm my hands in your armpits for ages before I could feel them again."

"Psh, you just coveted my good looks and wanted to hug me a bit longer," Shen Guofu teased.

Han Shuzhen rolled her eyes at her husband. She then turned to Old Mrs. Shen and said, "Mom, didn't you say Guofu wasn't making any money from his stall at Xizhimen? Actually, he did. But one time, just before closing, he met a swindler. The man had a bead and claimed it was worn by Cixi. Guofu believed him and spent all the few hundred yuan he had on it..."

Old Mrs. Shen laughed. "Guofu even lied to me, saying his goods were stolen... At the time, I wondered why anyone would bother robbing him when he was just selling gloves and socks. So, there was more to the story, eh?"

Nearby, Chen Yan looked at her uncle incredulously.

No way! My uncle has always been my role model for his hard work, and he got swindled?

And by such a flimsy trick...

In Beijing's antique circles, if something is said to be related to Cixi, you just turn and walk away – it's guaranteed to be fake. That's practically common knowledge in the field.

I can't believe Uncle actually fell for it.

Curious, she asked, "Uncle, didn't you know that antiques from street stalls are almost always fake?"

Shen Guofu smiled. "I knew. But whether it's real or fake isn't important. What's important is that your aunt liked it, so I bought it."

As he spoke, Han Shuzhen raised her wrist, showing off a white bead hanging on her bracelet. Clearly, this was the bead he had bought all those years ago.

Chen Yan: !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

I was so focused on stopping my cousin and her husband from their public displays of affection, I never expected my own aunt and uncle to pick it up!

Alert! Alert! This PDA thing is contagious! It's spreading from person to person!

All single people, take evasive maneuvers!

AAAH!! And I just kept naively asking questions, practically handing them a ladder to show off!

I'm so indignant I could cry! You're all grown-ups, can't you give us youngsters a break?!

While she was mumbling to herself, Lin Xu came in carrying a large bowl of soup, while Shen Baobao was already sipping from a small bowl.

"Wow, this is so savory and delicious! Grandma, Mom, you should both try it quickly!" Shen Baobao exclaimed.

Having said that, the girl put down her soup bowl, quickly edited a video on her phone of the Jade Soup being made, and posted it to the Lin Ji's Food topic as well.

Netizens were currently discussing how to make Tomato Stew Beef Brisket. This dish is widely popular, and its taste varies from place to place. For example, in the Sichuan and Chongqing regions, they add dried chili to create a sour and spicy flavor, while in the Northwest Region, they prefer to add some vinegar to intensify the sourness. As for the staple food served with it, there are rice, rice noodles, noodles, and even pancakes and steamed buns. Different tastes and different staple foods result in huge variations in cooking methods.

While everyone was discussing which region's method was the most authentic, Shen Baobao's video appeared in the topic list.

"Boss Lin's latest creation: 'Jade Soup'! Anyone looking to lose weight should give it a try! It's incredibly delicious, low in calories, and perfect for those aiming to slim down."

As soon as the post appeared, those discussing Tomato Stew Beef Brisket immediately flooded in, eager to comment on this soup.

"Seriously? After eating Tomato Stew Beef Brisket, there's still soup to drink?"

"You two, have some mercy! First food, now drinks; if you've got the guts, sell it in your shop!"

"Lin Ji should open its doors soon! That way, when you drop these temptations, there's a place for us to satisfy our cravings."

"How much Tomato Beef Brisket is left? Can you give me some of the sauce? I want to take it home to eat with rice."

"Boss Lin, remember to post tutorials, for both Tomato Stew Beef Brisket and Jade Soup!"

"Yes, post tutorials! It'll be much easier for us to learn that way."

"..."

At the dining table, Lin Xu spooned the soup into five small bowls. He then served them one by one to Old Mrs. Shen, his father-in-law, and his mother-in-law. As for Chen Yan's bowl, she took it as soon as it was filled and moved aside, sipping it slowly.

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Yes, President Chen's emotional wounds were now being entirely mended by gourmet food.

"This soup is really nice."

"Lin Xu, is it too much trouble? Why don't you stay over tonight? You can teach Auntie Liu how to make it, then we can have it anytime."

"Right, teach her so we can drink it whenever we want."

Listening to his father-in-law and mother-in-law's request, Lin Xu nodded and said, "Okay then, I'll teach Auntie Liu tonight."

Shen Baobao perked up at this. Aha! Staying on Yingchun Street for a couple of days before going back home—this is pure bliss!

After everyone had finished a bowl of soup, Shen Guofu looked at the leftover tomato beef brisket on the table and asked, "Mom, are you going to eat this tonight?"

Old Madam Shen, still thinking about the pickled cucumbers Lin Xu had made, shook her head. "No, I'll just make some millet porridge tonight. I ate too much at lunch and feel a bit overfull."

Since the old lady didn't want the leftovers, Shen Guofu didn't hesitate. Picking up the serving dish from the table, he said, "Then I'll just take this all with me."

Han Shuzhen asked, "How are you planning to eat it when you get it home? More rice?"

She felt a bit stuffed and wanted something lighter for the evening.

How to eat it? As long as there's meat, any way is fine.

But on such matters, it was better to hear an expert's opinion. Shen Guofu looked at his son-in-law and asked, "Lin Xu, what's the best way to eat the leftovers?"

That was quite simple. Lin Xu said, "Cook some noodles tonight and have tomato beef brisket noodles. There's still plenty of the original beef broth in the pressure cooker, which would be perfect for a noodle soup."

Tomato beef brisket noodles?

Shen Guofu, Han Shuzhen, and Chen Yan—who felt like gagging from all the public displays of affection—all pricked up their ears.

Eating noodles after having rice... That sounds quite exciting!

Shen Guofu waved his hand magnanimously. "Then dinner is in your hands, Lin Xu! If there's not enough beef brisket..."

He was about to say he'd have Auntie Liu buy some more, but seeing his wife's disapproving glance, he quickly changed his tune. "Then just add more vegetables. We had too much meat at lunch, so we should eat lighter tonight."

After saying that, he gave his son-in-law a meaningful look.

Lin Xu understood immediately. That was his cue to add more meat.

He agreed, "Got it, Dad. Leave dinner to me."

He found a container for the leftover dish, then filtered the beef broth from the pressure cooker in the kitchen and poured it into another, packing both into sealed containers.

After tidying up the kitchen, Lin Xu was about to take Dundun and Shen Baobao to the villa to play when he received a call from Zeng Xiaoqi. "Boss Lin, can you come to the travel channel? The kitchen is all set up. I'd like you to see if anything needs adjusting..."

Her voice was somewhat hoarse. Clearly, the herbal tea she'd been drinking for her throat had offered some relief, but her voice hadn't fully recovered.

The kitchen's ready? I need to check it out. Otherwise, any inconvenience during filming would greatly affect how the dishes turn out.

Just then, Shen Guofu and Han Shuzhen were preparing to leave, and Chen Yan also planned to return to her company in Wangjing to work.

Lin Xu said, "I need to go to the TV station, and it's not convenient to bring Dundun. Who wants to play with him this afternoon?"

"Ooh, play with Dundun?" Chen Yan and Shen Baobao eagerly raised their hands. "Me!"

"Brother-in-law, let me! Dundun and I are really close," Chen Yan added.

However, Dundun didn't even glance at the two of them.

Forget the Yueyue Demon King; this kitty wants to live a couple more years. As for Auntie Chen Yan... she seems a bit dim-witted. Better to keep my distance, lest her foolishness rubs off on me.

Old Madam Shen had already made plans to play mahjong with several elderly friends from the alley. Taking Dundun wasn't out of the question, but she worried he might be uncomfortable or mistreated at someone else's home.

And as for Director Han, pets weren't allowed in the hospital.

Just when everyone was wondering what to do, Dundun proactively leaped into Shen Guofu's arms.

Relatively speaking, Grandpa Shen is the safest bet.

Old Shen was overjoyed. "See? It's my good looks! Dundun chose me right away."

He hoisted Dundun onto his shoulder and immediately called his secretary, Xiao Zou. "Hurry to the pet supply store and buy a complete set of cat supplies: a litter box, cat litter, cat toys, a scratching post, cat bowls—get everything. I'm taking my grandcat Dundun to the office this afternoon."

Xiao Zou reminded him, "Director Shen, this afternoon, the head of Huasheng Group is flying in from Shanghai on a chartered plane to discuss our collaboration. Is it really appropriate to have a pet in the office at such a time...?"

Shen Guofu replied, "If they want to collaborate, they will. If not, it's no big deal. At most, we'll earn ten million less, which won't significantly impact the company. Now, hurry up and buy those cat supplies; I'm about to head out."

No business deal was as important as his little grandcat, Dundun. He had to make sure this little guy was comfortable in the office.

When Lin Xu heard his father-in-law had business that afternoon, he was about to suggest Dundun go with him instead, but then he remembered the little cat supposedly had a money-bringing aura.

With Dundun's lucky charm, he might just help Dad Shen clinch this deal!

So, he didn't say anything more, just ruffled Dundun's big, round head. "Be good in Grandpa's office, okay? Don't run around too much."

Shen Guofu laughed heartily. "Running around is fine! My office is huge, plenty of space for this little guy to have fun."

Carrying Dundun, he and Han Shuzhen got into the car. He would drop his wife off at work first, then take Dundun to his office.

Lin Xu, meanwhile, asked Chen Yan to drive the packed beef broth and leftovers to the villa on West Fourth Ring to prevent them from spoiling in the car.

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Moreover, Shen Baobao hadn't driven this time, so Lin Xu also had his sister-in-law, Chen Yan, give her a ride. After all, the business at the TV station was important and couldn't be delayed.

Once everything was arranged, Lin Xu said goodbye to his grandmother, drove out of the alley, and followed the GPS to Yanjing City TV Station.

Soon, Shen Baobao also got into Chen Yan's Porsche.

According to their plan, the two of them were supposed to go back to work separately.

But plans often go awry. Just after getting into the car, Shen Baobao suggested, "Yan Bao, do you want to go for a swim at my place?"

That single sentence piqued Chen Yan's interest in losing weight and shedding some fat. After eating so much rice for lunch, it was the perfect time to swim a few laps and aid digestion.

She thought for a moment and said, "Then you're not allowed to deliberately show off your figure in front of me."

"No showing off, no showing off. There's no sense of achievement in it anyway."

Chen Yan was speechless. If only I were driving 007's car, then I could eject this show-off from the passenger seat and let them fly a kite! So what if your breasts are big? So what if your legs are long? I'm older; am I bragging about it?

「Two in the afternoon.」

When a white G63 slowly pulled into the courtyard of Yanjing TV Station, Zeng Xiaoqi hurried over to greet him. She was wearing a white floral sundress, a sun hat, and transparent high-heeled sandals. Anyone who didn't know better might think she was on vacation at the beach.

"You're dressed quite casually."

Lin Xu rolled down the window and greeted the beautiful Zeng Xiaoqi, then parked in an empty parking spot.

"When I'm not on camera, I just wear whatever is comfortable," Zeng Xiaoqi explained as she led Lin Xu to the prepared filming set. "Our travel channel has always been pretty laid-back, and no one at the station really cares."

It was a small news recording studio that had been converted. The space was cramped but fully equipped. Tripods were placed in various positions—overhead, to the sides, front, front-side, rear-side—all likely designated camera spots. Besides the tripods, there were also several sets of fill lights.

"This program is aimed at ordinary families, so we're using a home-style stove rather than the professional ones you use in restaurants. Will you have any problem operating it?"

"No problem."

Lin Xu also checked the range hood; it was a silent model, so the noise level was quite low. The height of the stove, the sink, and other features were all quite good. The production team had clearly put a lot of thought into it.

"It's all great; nothing needs to be changed. I can start cooking anytime."

This statement made Zeng Xiaoqi sigh in relief. "I oversaw the entire renovation process here and even consulted several chefs, just to make sure the stove setup would meet your requirements."

Lin Xu said, "This is much better than I imagined. When can we start recording the show?"

"Tomorrow or the day after would be fine. However, there's a small issue right now: we haven't finalized the show's name. We've tentatively chosen several, but none seem quite suitable. Plus, the station hopes to have a prominent figure do the calligraphy for the title, which is proving difficult for Director Zhen."

Lin Xu thought for a moment. "What names are you considering?"

"We have 'Everyday Home-cooked Dishes,' 'Daily Food,' 'Food 365,' 'Xiaoqi Learns to Cook,' 'The Taste of the World,' 'Food Heaven'..." Zeng Xiaoqi listed a whole series of them.

Lin Xu felt any of them would work. For a cooking show like this, as long as it highlighted the food, it would be fine. As for getting a prominent figure to do the calligraphy for the title... That was actually quite important. The mission required the first episode to achieve the highest viewership ratings across the entire station upon airing. To reach that level, the show needed to generate buzz even before its premiere. There were only a few people with that kind of renown.

Lin Xu thought for a moment and said, "I can ask Mr. Geng Lishan to do the calligraphy, but we can't take advantage of a calligrapher's work for free."

Zeng Xiaoqi said with a troubled expression, "The problem is, the production team has no money right now. If we had money, none of this would be an issue. But since we're broke, we can only offer station resources in exchange..."

"What kind of resources?"

"The naming rights for the cooking show for one month. That's equivalent to over one hundred thousand in cash."

Lin Xu was largely clueless about these matters. Comparatively, his sister-in-law, Chen Yan, knew a bit more. He said, "Let Director Chen discuss this with Director Zhen. If they reach an agreement, I'll help you get a piece of calligraphy. If not, then let's just pretend this conversation never happened."

Zeng Xiaoqi nodded. It seemed that was the only way.

After discussing these points, she looked at Lin Xu and asked, "The Tomato Stew Beef Brisket you made today looked delicious. Can you make that dish when we record the show in the next few days?"

She had seen Lin Xu's post earlier today and instantly started craving it. That rich, red sauce and those tender, trembling chunks of beef looked incredibly appetizing. If he could make it during the recording, and they steamed some rice to go with it, wouldn't that be another wonderfully satisfying meal?

Lin Xu smiled and shook his head. "That kind of stew isn't suitable for the first episode. It's relatively easy to make, and many people already prepare it at home. It wouldn't truly showcase a chef's skills and might even stir up arguments about the cooking method."

"What about Jade Soup then? It's both flavorful and good for weight loss."

"Soups and consommés can be done later; they aren't quite right for the first episode. For the premiere, we need something famous, a dish that people don't typically eat every day."

Hearing this, Zeng Xiaoqi immediately perked up. "Such as?"

"Oil Braise Large Shrimp!"

Oil braise... The moment Zeng Xiaoqi recalled the Oil Braise Large Shrimp she had eaten at the scenic area, she subconsciously swallowed. That dish was well-known, required skill, and, most importantly, was delicious. It was indeed perfect for the first episode.

Having decided on Oil Braise Large Shrimp, Zeng Xiaoqi curiously asked, "When do we start recording? I need to get the shrimp ready."

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Lin Xu smiled and said, "Let's make it the day after tomorrow. But don't bother with the shrimp; the ones you can get outside aren't that great. I'll get some from Fishing Platform. When the time comes, don't forget to thank the Fishing Platform State Guesthouse for their strong support."

"Alright, alright. Thank you, Mr. Lin."

"You're being too polite, Sister Xiaoqi. I'm also doing this for business."

Once the details were settled, Lin Xu bid farewell to Zeng Xiaoqi.

He drove toward the West Fourth Ring Villa. He needed to give Chen Yan a heads-up and ask his sister-in-law to try to secure more benefits.

「Elsewhere.」

In the Foton Building, where Shen Guofu was based, a travel-weary group arrived on the 30th floor, the headquarters of Shen Group. Leading them was an impeccably dressed woman in her forties who exuded the powerful aura of a successful career woman.

"Welcome to our company for this inspection, Director Yan!"

Shen Guofu, now changed into a formal suit, greeted this business partner with a smile.

Her company was a key upstream enterprise for Shen Group and had been their collaborator for the past two years. The purpose of this inspection was to deepen the cooperation between the two companies, allowing them to jointly capture more market share and aim for greater profits.

Yan Lin said solemnly, "Director Shen, I've toured your company and found the employees to be lax; several were even playing games. This disappoints me greatly."

Upon hearing this, the expressions of everyone from Shen Group froze. Clearly, the head of Huasheng Group was not impressed with them.

Shen Guofu replied, "My management style is such that as long as employees complete their assigned work within the designated time, the company allows for a degree of freedom. Employees are not robots, and they haven't signed servitude contracts."

After this neither-too-harsh-nor-too-soft retort, Old Shen smiled and gestured towards his office. "Director Yan, you've traveled a long way to be here. We've prepared tea in my office. I hope we can share some and catch up."

Yan Lin glanced at Shen Guofu, then said, "Let's skip the tea. I need to rush back to Shanghai..."

She was in the middle of speaking when, suddenly, a cat's meow echoed from a nearby office:

"MEOW—"

Yan Lin's expression changed. "You have a cat, Director Shen?"

Without waiting for Shen Guofu's reply, she headed towards the office.

After pushing open the office door, a plump little cat appeared before Yan Lin, wagging its tail.

She bent down, and the chubby little fellow immediately began rubbing its head against her trouser leg. Its adorable, clumsy charm was enough to melt anyone's heart.

"Oh, what an adorable little thing... Director Shen, may I hold him? Just for a little while..."

Yan Lin had completely lost her earlier assertive demeanor; her voice was now filled with tenderness. Clearly, she too was a devoted cat enthusiast.

Shen Guofu hadn't anticipated that bringing Dundun to the office would result in such a fortunate turn of events.

He smiled and said, "Of course, you can hold him. His name is Dundun. He's my grand-kitty, you could say, and the apple of our whole family's eye."

"Dundun? What an adorable name!"

Yan Lin scooped the little furball up from the floor. Dundun cooperatively rolled over in her arms and even gently kneaded her arm a few times with his soft paw pads.

"Oh, this little one is even giving me a massage! Thank you, sweetie. Did you know I just got off a plane?"

At this moment, everyone from Shen Group looked at Shen Guofu with admiration.

No wonder Director Shen insisted on keeping a cat in the office today, going against everyone's advice. It turned out to be a calculated move!

Shen Guofu himself hadn't expected things to unfold this way.

He stepped into the office and personally poured a cup of tea, handing it to Yan Lin. "Director Yan, you must be weary from your journey. Please rest here for a while. Let my Dundun help you relax."

"Oh, very well, thank you, Director Shen... In that case, let's rest for fifteen minutes. After that, we can discuss the next stage of our collaboration. Is that acceptable, Director Shen?"

"Excellent!"

Chapter 420: The Summer Heat Relieving Divine Artifact—Watermelon Curd! So Simple Even Shen Baobao Can Learn It!

On the way to the West Fourth Ring Villa, Lin Xu took a detour to Welcoming Spring Street.

He went home to grab a couple of changes of clothes. He was definitely going to have a pool match with his father-in-law tonight, and not having a set of comfortable sports clothes would be a disadvantage.

He also tried to bring some pajamas and the like.

After all, it isn't my own home, and being too casual ultimately wouldn't be appropriate.

Besides clothes, he also took a few of Dundun's favorite little toys that he liked to cuddle with at night.

For example, a golden carp stuffed with silk cotton, a little mouse that would turn around when it hit a wall, and a tiny pillow the size of a palm—these were all Dundun's favorites.

At night, this little guy often slept with the tiny pillow, leaning against the little chubby carp while hugging the little mouse.

Sometimes, Shen Baobao would tease him by sneaking away the little mouse, and Dundun would whine dissatisfiedly, so cute that you couldn't help but want to kiss him on the forehead.

With clothes and Dundun's toys in hand, Lin Xu thought for a moment and also brought along the action camera he used for shooting videos.

It's time to update my videos. If I have time, I'll shoot a cooking method for a dish. If not, I'll update with a Dundun montage to satisfy his fans. Hmm, I'm a food and cute pet blogger. While focusing on food, I can't forget those fans who love Dundun. As a blogger, I have to be fair to all sides; it's not just an excuse to be lazy and not update my food videos!

When he got downstairs, he drove out of the neighborhood. Just as he was about to turn onto the North Fourth Ring, he saw Shu Yun and Dou Wenjing standing at the door, quietly discussing something.

Motivated by a desire to check on his employees, he parked his car on the side of the road and walked over.

"What are you two up to, Wenjing?"

"We were discussing when you'd treat us to crawfish again."

Lin Xu: ?????

Crawfish can be eaten at any time, right? However, if I plan to eat it soon, I can't notify Zeng Xiaoqi. The career prospects of this leading lady of the travel channel can't be ruined by me.

"The recruitment ended, and it was very smooth," Dou Wenjing said.

"The people who live near where Che Zai and his group stay are all from the catering industry. As soon as they heard we were hiring, they came over this morning, even skipping their shifts. This made it very easy for the company to find the staff we needed."

That simple? No wonder the two beauties are already thinking about crawfish. They're clearly looking for some recognition. I hadn't expected that when I worried about the staff not working hard and thus offered high salaries, it would trigger such a chain reaction. Of course, Che Zai and his group probably didn't skimp on showing off in their dormitory area. That's why there was such an overwhelming response.

Lin Xu said, "We can eat crawfish tomorrow or the day after. Today isn't good; I need to cook for my father-in-law later."

Dou Wenjing smiled and flipped her hair. "Just kidding with you. If we eat crawfish every day, we'd get fat and then how could we get married?"

She paused, then her smile faded, and she said seriously to Lin Xu, "We're planning to gather the staff and conduct some internal training to give everyone a stronger sense of belonging to Lin Ji. Also, Song Tiantian and her friends should be coming back soon. After a month of training, they'll definitely be capable of being supervisors."

Lin Xu wasn't knowledgeable about these matters. "You two can decide on that. If you need me to show up, just let me know in advance. Oh, by the way, Yanjing TV Station's travel channel might start advertising for us soon. When that happens, Wenjing, don't forget to buy some small gifts for Xiaoqi and her colleagues to maintain good relations."

"Sure, boss, I'll remember that."

After saying goodbye to the two women, Lin Xu drove onto the North Fourth Ring and then headed to the West Fourth Ring.

When he arrived outside the villa, he used his fingerprint to open the garage's rolling door and drove the car in.

He wasn't going back tonight, so it was safer to park the car in the garage.

Carrying the clothes and toys to the living room, he happened to run into Aunt Liu.

"Aunt Liu, where's Yueyue?"

"She's swimming in the pool at the back with Miss Chen. Do you need me to call them?"

Both of them? So my elder sister-in-law didn't leave after dropping people off? It seems like it's time to recommend her the book "How the Light Bulb Was Made." I was thinking of enjoying a swim with Shen Baobao while the elders weren't around, but since my elder sister-in-law is here, I'll forget it.

Lin Xu took the clothes and Dundun's toys upstairs.

He then went down to the basement and placed the pool balls on the table. While the Yanjing Ding Junhui isn't around, I should practice a few rounds to get a feel for the game. I can't let down my reputation as the Finance University Trump.

While he was practicing enthusiastically, the system's notification suddenly sounded in his mind:

"Host's beloved pet helped Shen Guofu sign a hundred-million-yuan order, completing the Hidden Task 'Divine Artifact in Action,' and obtaining a Superior grade summer dessert—Watermelon Curd. Congratulations to the host."

Haha! Dundun has contributed again! But wait... a hundred-million-yuan order? Is this little guy's ability really this godlike? It seems I've been underutilizing him by just having him bring luck in the restaurant. If he were in one of those companies with trillion-yuan valuations... Ahem, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Pushing those thoughts aside, Lin Xu decided to make a trip to the kitchen later to see what seafood was in the fridge.

My son made a great contribution; he deserves a special treat tonight.

He was about to continue playing with the cue stick when he suddenly remembered the Superior grade Watermelon Curd he had just received.

Considering it's the end of the scorching summer and the autumn tiger is still raging, it's the perfect time for a refreshing dessert like this. Plus, I haven't updated my video today. I'll shoot an episode about Watermelon Curd! Yes, a dessert like this will pique the fans' curiosity, and it's simple to make. An excellent choice for an easy video.