

## Culinary 42

Chapter 42: Where are my chicken feet? Where did my big box of chicken feet go?

"Wow! I finally succeeded!"

In Wu Kexin's live stream room.

Under the watchful eyes of her online viewers, after several hours, numerous wasted ingredients, and several ruined outfits, she finally managed to make Tiger Skin Chicken Feet.

After they had soaked in the marinade for over half an hour.

Wearing loose loungewear and her hair in a casual bun, Wu Kexin fished the chicken feet out of the pot and neatly arranged them on a plate. After arranging them, she placed the plate on a rotating display stand and turned on the lights for her viewers to admire.

"Front row! Declaring my love for the best Xinxin!"

"Our Xinxin is so great! They look so tempting."

"Hey, person above, is Xinxin tempting or are the chicken feet tempting? You better tell me clearly!"

"Both are tempting! Both! Anyway, the boss lady is awesome!"

"Draw your swords, Mr. Lin... Whoops, off-topic, haha!"

"Front row, applying to be a taste tester!"

"Same here! Those people up there spamming about Mr. Lin, get out of this topic!"

"Exactly! Why bring up Mr. Lin? We only acknowledge the boss lady!"

"..."

The bullet comments were a chaotic stream.

Wu Kexin was already used to it all.

Once her viewers had finished admiring her creation.

She placed the plate in front of herself and first took a photo, ready to submit it as her "homework." Then, she lowered her head and sniffed.

"Hmm, the aroma is still very tempting, but it's not quite up to par with Mr. Lin's. I heard in the topic discussions that Mr. Lin always adds a large spoonful of lard and chicken fat to enhance the umami and fragrance. I didn't have those, so I couldn't add them."

She tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear, then picked up a chicken foot and put it in her mouth. She took a bite. Before the anticipated savory flavor could fill her mouth, Wu Kexin was hit by an intense saltiness.

"Whoa, so salty!"

After an afternoon of effort, she had managed to create the tiger-skin pattern perfectly. Even the braised chicken feet looked about eighty percent similar to those sold at Lin Ji. But unexpectedly, while Lin Ji's chicken feet were savory and delicious with just the right amount of salt, hers tasted... like ancient salted vegetables that had been pickling for half a year.

"Well, everyone, it's another disaster! Yay!"

Wu Kexin gave a helpless smile to the camera.

But the bullet comments instantly erupted.

"That's our Disaster Queen for you!"

"This is more like it! How could she succeed on the first try?"

"Xinxin's usual disaster."

"After the Three-Non-Stick, Pagoda Meat, Peeing Beef Balls, Crystal Skin Jelly, and Heartbreak Hot and Sour Noodles, another masterpiece of culinary disaster!"

"The Heartbreak Hot and Sour Noodles didn't count as a disaster; she just added too much chili and made herself cry."

"Anyway, our Xinxin is the cutest!"

Wu Kexin watched everyone's comments, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

It seemed that every time she challenged a difficult dish, she ended up with a disaster. For example, her Three-Non-Stick stuck to the bottom of the pan and wouldn't budge; the Pagoda Meat was too soft and wouldn't stand up; the Peeing Beef Balls didn't "pee"; and the Crystal Skin Jelly was a murky grey, with no lighting able to bring out a "crystal" effect.

"From now on, don't call me the Disaster Queen anymore! I plan to ask Mr. Lin for advice when I have time. I'll remake all these disastrous dishes and finally take off this 'Disaster Queen' hat!"

Wu Kexin went to the kitchen to get a bowl of rice she had made earlier. She picked up a chicken foot, added it to her rice, and continued chatting with everyone while eating.

Although the chicken feet were still very salty, they were somewhat edible with rice.

After all, it was the result of an afternoon's hard work.

She had to finish it, even if it brought tears to her eyes.

「Elsewhere.」

In the Hanhai International Villas, West Fourth Ring.

Shen Jiayue, dressed in a sports top and yoga pants, was in the basement gym doing burpees, one of the most calorie-intensive exercises.

She had already completed two sets.

But that wasn't enough to burn off all the calories from the food she had eaten today.

She needed to keep burning fat.

As she was exercising, her mom, Han Shuzhen, walked in.

"Yueyue, do you still have any of those face masks you gave me last time? I thought they were quite good and want to try them again."

Without stopping her movements, Shen Jiayue replied,

"They're in a drawer in my dressing room. There are two boxes left; you can take them both."

Han Shuzhen glanced at her daughter's movements and advised earnestly,

"Exercise in moderation; don't injure yourself."

After saying this, she went upstairs and into her daughter's room. Just as she was about to go to the dressing room to find the masks, she suddenly smelled a faint, elusive aroma wafting through the room.

This is...

Han Shuzhen focused, trying to identify it.

It smelled a bit like braised meat.

How many times have I told her that eating at night is bad for her health? Why is this child so disobedient?

As the chief physician of the gastroenterology department, Han Shuzhen felt a familiar frustration regarding her daughter's habit of hiding food—that frustrating sense of "no matter the doctor's advice, bad habits die hard."

She sniffed again. The aroma seemed to be coming from the nightstand. She gently pulled open the nightstand drawer. Inside, a brown paper takeout box sat quietly.

Did she bring takeout back from a restaurant?

Frowning, she opened the box.

Inside was a full box of glistening, oily chicken feet, their color a rich red.

Eating late at night is bad enough, but to eat something so greasy too? Doesn't she care about her health at all?

Once the lid was lifted, the aroma became many times more intense. So much so that even the frowning Director Han found herself gradually drawn in.

Is this from a new stewed goods shop? This aroma does smell rather...

She tried to place the scent carefully.

These weren't the chicken feet from any of those famous old Beijing establishments.

While the chicken feet from those places were also delicious, they couldn't compare to these in appearance or aroma. Besides, those old shops never trimmed the chicken toenails, which really ruined one's appetite.

Holding the box, Han Shuzhen couldn't help but swallow.

Such a fragrant aroma, and they look so appetizing. They must taste good, right? Otherwise, her daughter wouldn't have hidden them in the nightstand.

Tonight, the housekeeper had made purple rice and oatmeal porridge. While healthy, it was quite bland. So, when Han Shuzhen smelled this rich, savory aroma, she couldn't resist the urge to try a bite.

It's a whole box; Yueyue definitely can't finish it all. Besides, what's wrong with a mother trying a couple of bites of her daughter's food?

After making a host of excuses for herself,

Han Shuzhen carefully picked up a chicken foot.

Just as she was about to take a bite, a voice suddenly came from behind her,

"What are you doing?"

Han Shuzhen was so startled she jumped, nearly biting her tongue.

She turned to see it was her husband and breathed a sigh of relief.

"Yueyue gave me some face masks last time that were quite good. I was just going to get a few more."

The chubby Shen Guofu walked in.

Seeing the chicken foot in his wife's hand, he asked curiously,

"Is that a face mask?"

Han Shuzhen shot her husband a glare. "Have you ever seen a face mask that looks so much like a chicken foot? This is food Yueyue secretly hid. I was just about to taste it when you came in."

"Then I'll try one too."

The couple tacitly avoided the topic of unhealthy late-night eating.

Each picked up a chicken foot and started to munch.

"Wow, this chicken foot... it's actually so delicious! Where did she buy these? We should ask Yueyue to buy some more tomorrow."

"It really is good. Better than what we had at the Jinguo Hotel last time."

The couple murmured to each other as they ate.

After finishing one, Shen Guofu looked at the remaining chicken feet in the box and said, "There's a whole box here. If we eat a couple more, our daughter probably won't notice... right?"

"Well... alright. Just one more piece then!"

"..."

「An hour later.」

Shen Jiayue dragged her exhausted body back to her room.

Her workout complete. Now I can finally enjoy the chicken feet Xu Bao packed for me without any guilt!

She pulled open the nightstand drawer.

She found that the spot where the takeout box had been was now empty.

My chicken feet! Where are my chicken feet? Where did my huge box of chicken feet go?????