

Culinary 461

Chapter 461: Making a Dish Only Available During New Year for the Trial Opening - Pressed Pig's Head!

At this point, the Pork Skin was ruddy and emitted a rich fragrance.

The meat was thoroughly cooked, trembling faintly like jelly when it was lifted out.

The freshly lifted pig's head was soft. Therefore, it was crucial to hurriedly remove the skull while it was hot. Otherwise, once it cooled, the pork would contract, making it very troublesome to remove the bones.

The deboned pork head meat looked even more tempting.

Beneath the ruddy Pork Skin lay white, rich fat. When placed on the cutting board, oil even began to seep from this fat.

For meat enthusiasts, this was simply irresistible.

And the ruddy pig snout, along with the pig ears that looked perfect for accompanying drinks, were even more tantalizing.

However, this delicacy had not yet reached its optimal state. It required further processing to bring its flavor and texture to their zenith, only then could it be considered the epitome of pressed pork head.

Once all the thoroughly cooked skull bones were removed, Lin Xu used a cleaver to cut the pork head meat into large chunks.

He fetched a deep tray, lined it with a white cloth roughly twice the tray's size, and evenly spread the Pork Skin on the cloth. He ensured there was extra cloth extending beyond all four sides, which would make it easier to fold over when pressing.

After laying down the Pork Skin, he divided the chopped pork head meat into two portions. One portion was spread into the tray, and the other was kept aside.

"It smells so good. The flavor must be even better once pressed,"

Xu Xinhua, who was helping on the side, sniffed, his expression full of admiration for Lin Xu's skills.

Few could master both pastry and savory cooking, let alone also excel at braised delicacies. Such a wide range of expertise was almost unbelievable.

No wonder the boss has achieved so much today; his skill level is indeed a significant cut above the average person.

Lin Xu used a spatula to flatten the meat in the tray. He then took four braised pig ears, used his cleaver to slice the thicker, meatier base of each ear, and arranged the ears evenly over the meat.

After laying them down, he poured the remaining pork head meat on top.

After flattening this layer, he folded the overhanging flaps of Pork Skin from the bottom layer upwards and over the meat. Then, he covered it all with another intact piece of Pork Skin, ensuring the pork head meat was completely encased.

After wrapping it, he folded the white cloth towards the center, completely enclosing the meat in the tray.

Next, he added another layer of white cloth on top. This was to prevent the meat from being squeezed out during the pressing process.

Once these steps were done, Lin Xu placed a previously prepared tray on top of the cloth-wrapped meat. On this tray, he set several stone slabs, aiming to compress the pork as tightly and solidly as possible.

When everything was set, Lin Xu and Xu Xinhua moved the tray into the dedicated refrigerator in the braised goods department.

This would speed up the cooling and solidification of the pork head.

「At six in the afternoon.」

Lin Xu and Xu Xinhua lifted the now thoroughly chilled tray from the refrigerator. They removed the stone slabs from its surface and lifted off the top pressing tray. They found that the pork head, wrapped in the white cloth, had completely hardened and taken shape.

Unfolding the white cloth, a solid block of pressed pork head, resembling firm tofu, appeared before everyone's eyes.

"Holy moly! This suddenly makes me feel like it's Chinese New Year!"

Wei Qian's family were butchers. Every Spring Festival, they would prepare several pressed pork heads to serve to relatives and gift to friends. Seeing Lin Xu's pressed pork head now, Wei Qian instantly felt the urge to set off firecrackers.

Chen Yan, who had spent the afternoon showing off her figure at the basketball court, remarked,

"Every Chinese New Year, UPs online all jump on the bandwagon, making pressed pork head. If I'd known, I would have filmed this earlier to wish our followers a Happy Chinese New Year ahead of time. We could see which UP could beat us with the earliest greetings!"

Lin Xu: "..."

Are even New Year's greetings this competitive nowadays?

Shen Guofu stood to the side, watching the enticing piece of meat, grinning with such delight that his mouth couldn't stay closed, unconsciously caressing the Liquor bottle in his hand.

TSK TSK, this is truly a top-tier dish to go with drinks!

With this dish available, forget about practicing aerial yoga! Even if my wife were to string me up from the rafters, I, Old Shen, am going to drink to my heart's content today!

He swallowed and brazenly said to Lin Xu,

"Let's get started, Lin Xu! Let Dad give it the final inspection!"

Chapter 462: This is simply a divine artifact for drinking! How to eat pig brain? Must steam it with eggs!

By now, no one cared whether Shen Guofu's words were problematic. All eyes were fixed on the huge chunk of meat—rosy in color with smoothly rounded edges. The only thought on everyone's mind was to taste it as soon as possible; nothing else mattered.

"Hurry up, hurry up! Playing badminton all afternoon left me so frustrated. I urgently need my brother-in-law's cooking to soothe my nerves."

As Lin Xu was preparing to cut with the chef's knife, Chen Yan couldn't help but mutter.

Shen Baobao asked from the side, "What happened? Ran into an amateur?"

"No, I met a handsome guy. We played several games together, and we really clicked. Afterward, he even took out his phone to add me on WeChat."

"Uh... isn't that a good thing?"

Wahaha! Our single, marriageable, petite Yan Bao finally has a romantic encounter! This definitely calls for a couple of celebratory beers tonight... Wait a minute. Yan Bao said she was frustrated. If they added each other on WeChat, why would she be upset?

Chen Yan said resentfully, "I accepted on the spot, but as soon as we connected on WeChat, he sent a message asking which hair salon I got my hair done at. He said his girlfriend really likes my hair color and wants the exact same..."

Isn't that just pitiful?

Shen Jiayue quickly wrapped an arm around Chen Yan's shoulders. "There, there, don't be sad. With your beauty, Yan Bao, you're bound to meet your Mr. Right..."

Lin Xu had thought his sister-in-law had a perfect romantic encounter at the badminton court, but he never expected something like this.

He quickly started cutting the meat. His sister-in-law desperately needed a plate of pork head meat to soothe her wounded heart right now.

He made an incision about ten centimeters from the edge of the meat block and cut straight through, producing a strip of pork head meat about ten centimeters wide and nearly fifty centimeters long.

At the cut, the two layers of pork skin, top and bottom, made the meat look neat and clean.

In between were tempting pieces of meat, including both lean and fat, pressed tightly together, with a layer of white cartilage from the pig's ear in the middle, giving the pork even more defined layers.

Beautiful! everyone around silently exclaimed in admiration.

Even Chen Yan, still heartbroken, stared intently at the beautiful cross-section of the pressed pork head, momentarily forgetting to continue her tale of woe.

Shu Yun asked from the side, "Did you block that guy, Chen Yan?"

Chen Yan shook her head. "No, I referred him to the customer service girl from the salon where celebrities often get their hair done. I told him his girlfriend could chat with her."

What in the world? Is this repaying deceit with kindness, or does she find the guy so attractive that she's willing to compromise her principles?

Only Shen Baobao tentatively asked, "Is it that salon where a single hair appointment costs hundreds of thousands? Their customer service reps are really good at chatting, always going on about how women should treat themselves better, blah, blah, blah, just to lure them into spending money."

Tsk, tsk. If that guy's girlfriend gets talked into it by the customer service rep, the pressure will be all on him. He'll either have to shell out hundreds of thousands for his girlfriend's hairdo or face her questioning their relationship. Who knows, after a good sweet-talking by the rep, they might even break up!

After hearing the lady boss's explanation, Shu Yun and Song Tiantian felt a sense of vindication. Hmph! He could have just asked directly. But no, he had to try that pickup artist routine. Serves him right!

But, wait a minute... How does Chen Yan have the customer service rep's WeChat? And it seems the lady boss knows about it too. Could they have been sweet-talked as well?

Chen Yan flicked her stylish and fashionable hair, saying, "I had my hair done at that salon. It cost over three hundred thousand in total."

As Lin Xu was cutting the meat, he muttered to himself, "Over three hundred thousand? That could buy so many pig heads!"

His voice was a bit loud, and Chen Yan heard every word. The indignant woman immediately flared up, "Mutter that again, stinky brother-in-law, I dare you! Believe it or not, I'll kidnap your wife right now... Hmm, Yueyue has practiced Taekwondo, so it seems I can't kidnap her. Well then, believe it or not, I'll steal Dundun from you!"

On the service counter not too far away, Dundun, who had been sleeping on the roof of his little house, jolted awake.

Heavens! Is that silly aunt of mine really going to kidnap me, this cat?

He scampered into his little den and, not forgetting his predicament, even pushed his small blanket against the entrance, terrified that his harebrained aunt might actually come for him.

The interruption from Lin Xu lightened the mood considerably.

Chen Yan, phone in hand, was about to tell her parents she wouldn't be home for dinner when she noticed the guy from the badminton court liking her posts on Moments.

He was especially active on the posts featuring sports cars, not just liking them but also commenting.

Chen Yan scoffed, then promptly blocked and deleted him. She also cancelled her membership card for that badminton court through her phone.

"I'll stick to tennis from now on. The barrier to entry is higher, less chance of dealing with annoying situations like this."

By the time she put her phone away, Lin Xu had already sliced up a plate of pork head meat.

Sliced pork head meat looked even more appealing, the cut shimmering with a jelly-like sheen, a result of the collagen in the pork skin binding the pieces together.

Having finished cutting, Lin Xu handed the plate to Chen Yan. "You had a bad experience today, Sister Yan. You eat first."

"Hmph, at least you have a little conscience."

Chen Yan, holding the plate, turned to Shen Guofu and Han Shuzhen and asked, "Aunt, Uncle, should we eat down here or go upstairs?"

Shen Guofu, who had no patience left to go upstairs, pointed at a nearby dining table. "Let's just eat here. We had lunch on the second floor, so let's have dinner on the first floor. We should experience both."

Chapter 463: This is Simply a Divine Artifact for Drinking! How to Eat Pig Brain? Steamed Egg is a Must!

Where to eat isn't that important.

What matters is what you eat.

For instance, right now, with this plate of pig's head meat, even if you were to sit cross-legged on the ground at the entrance of an alley, you could still relish every bite.

After they took their seats, the waiter brought over a few more dishes. These had been prepared in advance, but everyone was focused on the pig's head meat, so they weren't served earlier.

Shen Guofu picked up a slice of the pig's head meat with his chopsticks and put it into his mouth. Chewing gently, a satisfied and blissful expression immediately appeared on his face.

Delicious! Absolutely tasty!

The moment the pig's head meat entered his mouth, he could taste the rich flavor of the marinade infused into the meat. When he chewed, the first thing he noticed was the bouncy and chewy Pork Skin.

The Pork Skin was salty and fragrant, carrying the aroma of the marinade. The meat inside had also become dense and compact due to being pressed, making it chewy while still retaining the distinctive flavor of pig's head meat. Even better was the crunchy pig's ear in the middle, which added an extra bit of fun to chewing the pig's head meat.

A single slice of pig's head meat allowed one to experience the chewiness of the Pork Skin, the crunchiness of the ear, the aroma of the lean meat, and the richness of the fat—a variety of textures intertwined. It just wouldn't be right without a drink.

After swallowing a mouthful of meat, Shen Guofu couldn't wait to open the bottle cap and poured himself a glass of Liquor.

He lifted his glass and took a small sip.

Phew... truly satisfying!

"I never thought pressed pig's head meat could be this delicious," he said. "The texture is so much firmer, and it tastes amazing."

Han Shuzhen didn't use to like pig's head meat, always finding it too greasy. But today, after tasting one slice, she couldn't stop.

Shen Guofu, eager to drink more, held the Liquor bottle towards Han Shuzhen and asked, "Dear, would you like some? This pig's head meat really needs to be paired with Liquor; the more you chew, the more fragrant it gets."

"Really? Then pour me a small cup."

Upon hearing this, Shen Guofu quickly picked up an empty cup nearby and poured her a cup of Liquor.

Haha! Once she has a drink, tonight's aerial yoga won't happen. Old Shen is indeed a clever BOY! Son-in-law, you should take notes. This is all experience accumulated from daily life!

Han Shuzhen, who had a higher tolerance for alcohol than Shen Guofu, took a sip of the Liquor, then picked up another slice of pig's head meat to taste. It was indeed quite good; no wonder those who drank couldn't do without pig's head meat.

While drinking and eating, she didn't forget about the evening's fitness routine. "Since we've had some Liquor, let's skip the aerial yoga. You can just run five kilometers on the treadmill instead. Sweat it out, and you'll sleep even better."

Shen Guofu was speechless. Son-in-law, you'd better not learn from me. Your father-in-law is a cautionary tale...

After Lin Xu finished slicing the pig's head meat, he quickly mixed a dipping sauce using fragrant vinegar, Garlic Paste, and Sesame Oil.

It wasn't until he placed the sauce on the dining table that he realized his in-laws were drinking Liquor. They weren't driving today; had even his mother-in-law decided to let loose?

After the dipping sauce was set on the table, everyone picked up a piece of meat and dipped it.

Hmm, this sauce was well-made; the sour fragrance of the vinegar and the flavor of the Garlic Paste significantly neutralized the greasiness of the pig's head meat, making it much more refreshing to eat. The key was that the sauce enhanced the meat's flavor, making it utterly irresistible.

Chen Yan couldn't stop praising as she ate, "Brother-in-law, your cooking skills are truly unmatched! You've managed to elevate simple pig's head meat to such a high level."

Lin Xu smiled and said, "This is nothing special yet. Wait until I make the Crystal Pork Hock tomorrow. That's going to be truly high-end."

Crystal Pork Hock is a summer cold dish. It's not only refreshingly cold and delicious but also beautiful to look at. The white hock meat is enveloped in a crystal-clear, jelly-like aspic. Just looking at it is a delight, let alone eating it.

Hearing "Crystal Pork Hock?", Shen Guofu, who was drinking, and the group of socialites (including Chen Yan) nearby, all unconsciously turned to look at Lin Xu. "When will you make it tomorrow?" one of them asked.

"I'll start in the morning, and it will be ready by noon."

The Crystal Pork Hock needs to be blanched then boiled. After that, it has to be sliced and steamed together with Pork Skin. Once steamed, it goes into the fridge to cool down. It's not difficult, but it is time-consuming, so preparations must start early in the morning.

Upon hearing it would be ready by noon, Shen Baobao breathed a sigh of relief. Starting tomorrow at noon, she would be driving over to the shop to help deliver lunch for the audit firm, so it would be perfect timing to taste the Crystal Pork Hock.

Awesome! Since Xu said it looked good, it must be stunning!

Nearby, Chen Yan, still eating meat, was secretly rejoicing. It's a good thing she moved the company close to Yingchun Street. Tomorrow at noon, she could just stroll over with a parasol and enjoy a meal at the shop. No need to worry about her cousin 'food-poisoning' her with tempting posts anymore, and maybe she could even return the favor in the future!

While the family was enjoying their meal, Lin Xu saw Xu Xinhua walking past with a bowl, heading upstairs. He asked curiously, "What's in there?"

"It's the pig's brain we scooped out when pressing the pig's head this afternoon. I was planning to go upstairs and ask them what would be good to make with it."

No sooner had he finished speaking than Shen Guofu chimed in, "Steam it with Egg! Make Steamed Egg with Brain. It's fresh and tender."

"Steamed Egg with Brain?" Shen Baobao immediately said, "That sounds so delicious! Xu, I want to eat it. Can you make it for me?"

President Chen also looked over with an expectant expression. Clearly, she also wanted to boost her brainpower... ahem, she also wanted to taste it.

Her mother-in-law, Han Shuzhen, added, "Eating brain is good. It's nourishing, calming, and brain-strengthening." Although she didn't say more, her face was filled with anticipation.

Seeing that his family was quite eager, Lin Xu stood up and said, "Zhuang Yizhou seems quite good at steamed and stewed dishes. I'll go ask him to teach me how to steam this kind of ingredient."

He took the bowl containing the pig's brain and strode upstairs.

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Xu Xinhua watched Lin Xu's retreating figure with admiration. He's already so skilled, yet he remains so humble. The boss's magnanimity is truly worth learning from, he murmured to himself.

Upstairs, the back kitchen staff were having lunch.

Lin Xu approached Zhuang Yizhou and asked, "Master Zhuang, how should one make Steamed Egg with Brain so it's delicious?"

Hearing this, Zhuang Yizhou immediately put down his chopsticks. "The method is quite simple," he said. "I could just do it for you."

Lin Xu waved his hand. "No need, no need. Just tell me the techniques; I want to practice. I don't get to work with this ingredient often, so I'm not very good at it."

The two men went over to the stove.

Zhuang Yizhou fetched a basin of water and explained, "Soak the pig brain in water and gently peel off the thin membrane on its surface. Be careful when you peel it; don't break the brain."

Pig brain is more delicate than tofu and is covered with an extremely thin membrane. This membrane needs to be carefully peeled off before cooking. That way, the brain remains exceptionally tender no matter how it's prepared. However, one must be cautious during peeling, as the unprotected brain can easily be punctured.

These two pig brains had already been soaking in water for a few hours, which loosened the membranes and made them relatively easier to peel.

Once peeled, Zhuang Yizhou, who had already prepared some scallion and ginger water using cooled boiled water, took over. He carefully lifted the brains out with his hands, placing them in a clean basin. After draining them slightly, he poured the scallion and ginger water over them, then added cooking wine and Light Soy Sauce, sprinkled some pepper, and began the marination.

"When making steamed egg dishes—whether it's minced meat steamed egg, Steamed Egg with Brain, or abalone steamed egg—you should always marinate the main ingredients for a while," Zhuang Yizhou instructed. "This helps eliminate any strong, undesirable taste, allowing the steamed flavors to come out much better."

Lin Xu took this to heart. Brains weren't always available, but minced meat was plentiful. He decided he would practice this in private. Then, when his family craved it, he could make it for them as a little surprise.

While the brains were marinating, Zhuang Yizhou beat ten eggs.

"Generally, four to five eggs are just right for steamed egg dishes. Too many can make the egg flavor overpowering, overwhelming the natural flavor of the main ingredients, while too few wouldn't be enough. For two servings of Steamed Egg with Brain, ten eggs is the perfect amount."

To make the texture even smoother, Zhuang Yizhou added a little water to the eggs as he beat them, along with a pinch of salt.

After the eggs were thoroughly beaten, the brains had been marinating for about ten minutes.

Zhuang Yizhou carefully lifted the brains out, drained off the marinade, and placed them into the prepared steaming cups. He poured half of the beaten egg mixture into each steaming cup, letting the brains soak in it for a bit. This allowed the brains to absorb more of the egg flavor.

Then, he placed the two steaming cups into a preheated steamer that was already producing steam.

After nine minutes of steaming, Zhuang Yizhou opened the steamer, and a rich, savory aroma immediately wafted out.

Smelling this aroma, Lin Xu instinctively swallowed. No wonder everyone loves steamed egg dishes so much, he thought. The smell alone is incredibly enticing.

Zhuang Yizhou put on gloves and carefully lifted the steaming cups from the steamer. By now, the egg mixture had completely set and looked very delicate.

He drizzled seafood sauce into each cup, followed by a little peanut oil, and then sprinkled some chopped scallion on top.

He then returned the steaming cups to the steamer.

"After adding the seafood sauce, steam for another two minutes," Zhuang Yizhou explained. "This fully brings out the flavors of the seafood sauce, peanut oil, and scallions, making it even more delicious."

"Why add peanut oil?" Lin Xu asked.

"To make the texture smoother," Zhuang Yizhou replied. "You can also add some lard for a richer flavor. If that's too much trouble, you could just spoon in some of the seasoned soy sauce used for steamed pork ribs. That way, you even save the step of adding extra soy sauce."

So that's the way to do it... Lin Xu thought, planning to practice diligently when he had time. He also wanted to explore more possibilities for this dish. For instance, if he added a bit of lard to the egg mixture while beating it, wouldn't the texture and flavor improve? However, lard had to be used judiciously. Too much would make the dish rich but also greasy, completely overshadowing the tender, smooth, and delicious essence of steamed eggs.

Two minutes later.

Zhuang Yizhou reopened the steamer.

This time, the aroma was even more complex. In addition to the original savory scent of the steamed eggs, there were now faint notes of fermented black beans, scallion, and hints of seafood and peanut oil.

Lin Xu covered the steaming cups, placed them on a tray, and carried them downstairs.

At that moment, Shen Guofu was still drinking, while Han Shuzhen, Shen Baobao, and Chen Yan were eating the stir-fry hand-pulled noodles delivered by the server.

"Wow, the Steamed Egg with Brain is here!" Shen Baobao exclaimed as she saw Lin Xu coming downstairs. She immediately put down her chopsticks and picked up a spoon. "Yan Bao, you can finally nourish your brain!"

Chen Yan glanced at her cousin Shen Baobao's well-developed Xiongxiong and said sarcastically, "I think *you're* the one who needs to nourish your brain, and a lot of it at that."

Hmph, that shameless Yueyue, all chest and no brains! And she has the nerve to talk about me? Chen Yan fumed internally.

After Lin Xu brought over the Steamed Egg with Brain, he placed it on the table and casually lifted the lid of one steaming cup, saying, "This smells so fresh. Mom, you try it."

Shen Baobao scooped up a piece and, without a word, offered it to Han Shuzhen. Her mother was so touched she almost didn't recognize her own daughter.

When Han Shuzhen tasted it, the soft, smooth egg and the tender brain created a delightful contrast, complemented by the savory depth of the soy sauce and the aroma of scallions.

Delicious! This pig brain was truly tasty.

However, compared to the flavor of the Steamed Egg with Brain, Han Shuzhen was more satisfied with her daughter's attitude.

She's really grown up!

Just as Han Shuzhen was about to praise her, Shen Baobao skipped back to her own seat with her serving of Steamed Egg with Brain. "Mom, since you've already had a taste, the rest is all mine!"

Han Shuzhen was speechless. The biggest regret of my life, she thought, is not having a second child. If she only had a younger sibling, this brat wouldn't have been spoiled like this.

Lin Xu smiled and brought the other portion over to his mother-in-law, Han Shuzhen. "Mom, please have this. Let Yueyue and Sister Yan share that one. Dad and I won't have any; we find the pork head meat tastier, anyway."

What a good son-in-law! Han Shuzhen thought. This morning, I bought him clothes worth tens of thousands of yuan while we were shopping, and I thought that was plenty at the time. Looking back, it seems I bought too little! For such a filial son-in-law, I should have just bought out all the clothes in the mall for him!

As Han Shuzhen contentedly ate her Steamed Egg with Brain, Lin Xu leaned over and whispered to Shen Guofu, "Dad, after I make the Crystal Pork Hock tomorrow, I'll arrange for a courier to deliver some to you so you can try it."

Hearing this, Shen Guofu's face immediately lit up with a delighted surprise.

My son-in-law is simply too wonderful! he thought. Just for this, I'll have to buy him a top-spec Range Rover or a Bentley Bentayga at the end of the year. A BMW X5 is just a grocery-getter; it doesn't match my son-in-law's outstanding aura at all!

The mere thought of enjoying Crystal Pork Hock in his office tomorrow at noon made Shen Guofu's heart flutter with anticipation.

Should I pair it with that aged Wuliangye from the cabinet, or should I simply open a bottle of Moutai? Such a difficult decision!

Chapter 465: Refined Method for Pork Hock—Crystal Pork Hock! Trial Open for business, and it's booming!

6 a.m.

Lin Xu opened his eyes from his slumber to find Shen Baobao clinging to him like an octopus. He carefully removed the girl's arm wrapped around him and moved the smooth, pale long leg draped over his waist, finally feeling a bit more relieved.

No wonder I felt like there was a ghost pressing on me in my sleep...

To prevent Shen Baobao from catching a cold from the air conditioning, Lin Xu meticulously covered her perfect body with a blanket, then stole a kiss and got out of bed.

Today was the trial opening day; he couldn't sleep in. He needed to go check on the restaurant. After all, it was the first day of business, and many problems would likely surface. They needed to be resolved as thoroughly as possible to prevent them from becoming hidden dangers after the official opening.

Leaving the bedroom, Lin Xu first scooped the cat litter, then washed his face and brushed his teeth, changed into the new clothes his mother-in-law had bought him, locked the door, and carried Dundun to the restaurant.

Hmm, I'll let Shen Baobao sleep a bit longer. I'll come back and wake her for breakfast at seven o'clock.

Arriving at the restaurant, Chezi, who was responsible for procurement, and the early-shift chefs had already arrived.

After they greeted each other, Lin Xu asked, "What's for breakfast this morning?"

The head chef on duty responded, "Pumpkin millet porridge, Scallion Oil pancakes, savory meat buns, and our homemade sweet and sour radish cubes and cold Pork Skin salad. Does the boss need a special dish?"

Making a "special dish" meant preparing something separately. Everyone knew that the boss's wife was now living with the boss, so they were subtly asking Lin Xu if he wanted something different made for her.

Lin Xu said, "No need for a special dish. We'll eat whatever you guys are making... Oh, right, steam a chicken leg after removing its skin. Dundun hasn't had breakfast yet."

Today was again time for the little one to work its magic. So, he had to ensure the little darling had a good meal, lest their restaurant's God of Wealth Divine Artifact be slighted.

"Alright, boss. I'll get started on that right away."

Lin Xu checked the upstairs preparations. He took out the two boxes of chilled pork fore hocks and one box of Pork Skin that Chezi had brought in, then cooked them in batches in a pot for several minutes.

After boiling, he laid the pork hocks and Pork Skin on the workbench and began using a blowtorch to scorch the skin. This step was the same as for Crystal Sugar Pork Hock: first, use hot water to shrink the pork skin and make the bristles protrude, then use a blowtorch to scorch the skin. Using the blowtorch's high-temperature flame, he burned away the sweat glands, pores, hair follicles, and the like from the surface of the Pork Skin.

Making Crystal Pork Hock required impeccably clean ingredients, so this step had to be thorough. The more thoroughly the pork hock skin was scorched, the cleaner it would become after washing, and the better the dish would look.

While he was scorching the skin, Chezi, who had finished signing off on the deliveries, came over. "Let me do it, boss. I'm good at this kind of work."

Lin Xu said with a smile, "I can handle this. Just boil some hot water so I can soak these hocks and Pork Skin. Soaking them for a while before washing makes them cleaner."

"Okay, boss."

Chezi started boiling water on a nearby stove. He didn't remain idle while the water boiled. He ran to the vegetable washing area and soaked the tomatoes, eggplants, and small leafy greens needed for the sauce. This would make them easier to clean later.

By the time he returned to the main stove, Lin Xu had already finished scorching all the pork hocks and Pork Skin.

"Chezi, how many pig heads did we get in today?"

"Eight."

"After breakfast, remember to send four to Master Xu downstairs. Have him clean them and soak them. Once I'm finished here, I'll go braise them. We'll continue to press pig heads today."

When they were preparing them yesterday, Lin Xu had worried that eight pig heads would be too many and they wouldn't sell out. But after tasting the final product, he felt he had prepared too few. With its enticing flavor and outstanding presentation, customers would surely snap them up immediately. And although two pig heads seemed like a lot of meat, it would shrink considerably after being pressed firm, yielding only a few plates.

So today, he decided to press four more pig heads to see how they sold. If that still wasn't enough, they would continue to increase the quantity.

Once the water was hot, he soaked the charred black hocks in it. He didn't rush to wash them, instead letting the hot water soak them thoroughly. This would ensure the hocks came out cleaner.

"The place where I used to work also made Crystal Pork Hock," Chezi remarked, "but we never processed it like this. We always soaked them in formalin and bleaching powder, then added gelatin when cooking."

Chezi, though new to the industry, had witnessed many "secrets" of the kitchen from his time as a helper. Of course, the other chefs also knew about these things, but being old hands at the game, they usually didn't mention these "unspoken rules" of the industry. Only a hot-blooded youth like Chezi, who had just turned eighteen, would pay attention to such matters.

Lin Xu said with a smile, "By using those methods to deceive customers, they ultimately only deceive themselves."

If they had treated customers sincerely, perhaps their restaurant wouldn't be on the verge of closing. Now, it's said they even have trouble paying salaries. As soon as word got out that Lin Ji was hiring, even chefs in the middle of cooking rushed over for interviews. In order to stay, some even sought favors through Chezi and Xu Xinhua, making Chezi, young as he was, realize that "the ways of the world aren't about brawls and bloodshed, but about human connections and intricacies."

About ten minutes later, Lin Xu took the Pork Skin soaking in hot water and began scrubbing it with a new brush, trying his best to wash off all the black, torched spots. This was to avoid affecting the final quality of the dish.

After washing the Pork Skin, he took out the thoroughly soaked hocks, scrubbed them clean with a steel wool scrubber, and rinsed them twice with clean water as well.

Once everything was done, he started to prepare the hocks for cooking. For Crystal Pork Hock, the meat couldn't be cooked until it was too tender, or it would lose its satisfying chewiness. To prevent uneven cooking, which could compromise the texture, the hocks needed to be cut open and deboned before cooking.

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This allows the meat to mature quickly, and the bones, placed at the bottom of the pot, make the cooked meat more fragrant.

Seeing Lin Xu pick up the kitchen knife, Che Zai also brought over his own and joined him.

"Boss, do I need to trim the bones out?"

"Yes, trim them out. Later, we'll use them to line the bottom of the pot. That way, the meat will be even more fragrant when cooked."

Watching Che Zai's somewhat clumsy bone-trimming technique, Lin Xu advised, "Start cutting at the thinnest part of the hock. Push the knife blade against the bone and make a cut, then follow along the bone to slice through the tendons. Like that, you'll have the bone trimmed out."

This scene filled the faces of the other early-shift kitchen helpers with envy. He's truly worthy of being Lin Ji's number one employee! The boss is personally teaching him bone trimming. Assuming this guy doesn't jump ship, becoming the head chef is virtually a done deal. Sigh! So envious.

After trimming the bones from all the hocks, he placed them in the stockpot with the Pork Skin. Then, he added half a pot of fresh water and some Cooking Wine and began to blanch them.

This step is indispensable for making Crystal Pork Hock.

Only by boiling out all the blood can the hock achieve a clean color and a refreshing, firm texture.

As the temperature in the pot rose, scum started to float to the surface.

Lin Xu stood before the stove, spoon in hand, patiently skimming the scum. He waited until the water boiled vigorously and the amount of scum decreased.

After ten minutes, he removed the thoroughly blanched Pork Skin and washed it.

The hocks needed to boil a bit longer and were only removed from the pot once fully blanched.

Once the Pork Skin was cleaned, he scraped its inner side with a knife, removing as much residual fat as possible. This was crucial, as too much fat could affect the dish's appearance or, worse, prevent the broth from setting—an embarrassing outcome.

After all the Pork Skins were cleaned, he sliced them into fine shreds.

After slicing, he set them aside for later use.

By this time, the hocks in the pot were almost cooked through. He poked them with chopsticks, and when no blood seeped out, he used a strainer to scoop out the hocks and other meat.

He then brought the broth back to a boil and blanched the julienned Pork Skin a second time.

This made the Pork Skin even cleaner, enhancing the visual appeal of the Crystal Pork Hock.

After the second blanching, he scooped out the Pork Skin, rinsed it again, and set it aside.

Next, Lin Xu washed the bones and hocks again with warm water.

The rinsed hocks, both skin and meat, had whitened considerably.

The lean meat, which was originally red, even turned a light pink color.

This was a sign that the blood impurities had been boiled out.

He emptied and cleaned the stockpot, then arranged the cleaned bones at the bottom before placing the hocks back in, one by one.

He added enough fresh water to cover the hocks and lit the fire to cook them again.

Soon, the water in the stockpot was boiling.

Lin Xu carefully skimmed the scum again. Then, he added a small bowl of prepared Scallion segments, a small bowl of ginger slices, a handful of Sichuan peppercorns, and half a ladle of salt to the pot.

All the seasonings for cooking the hocks were now in.

"Aren't you adding other spices like star anise, Boss?"

"No. This dish relies on the natural fragrance of the meat. Too many spices would overpower its flavor."

When making Crystal Pork Hock, one must avoid any seasonings or spices that could impart color, as they would significantly mar the dish's appearance.

With these tasks completed, breakfast was ready in the restaurant.

Lin Xu carried a plate of chicken legs, prepared by the shift chef and now cooled, downstairs. Dundun, asleep in his little house, caught the scent of meat and shot out like a wild boar charging down a mountain.

"MEOW—"

"You're hungry, aren't you? Come and eat."

Dundun padded over to the service counter. He politely rubbed his head against Lin Xu's arm before lowering it to eat, a picture of good manners.

While Dundun was eating, Lin Xu returned to the residential complex behind the restaurant, went upstairs, and unlocked his apartment door with a key.

In the bedroom, his little lazybones seemed to be sound asleep.

He walked over and affectionately patted the fair shoulder peeking out from under the blanket, "Baobao, time for breakfast. Don't you have to go to work soon?"

Shen Jiayue rolled over, sleepily wrapping her arms around Lin Xu's neck, "Mmm... This Baobao has been sealed by the bed. I need a kiss to break the spell!"

Lin Xu kissed her forehead and cheeks, then asked with a smile, "Is that enough?"

"Not enough, not nearly enough! I need tens of thousands more."

Lin Xu: "..."

Are you Sun Wukong?

He gave the pouting Baobao's pert bottom a playful slap, "Quick, get up! The hocks are still cooking on the stove. If we don't head back, they'll be overcooked."

At the mention of food, Shen Baobao immediately sat up in bed, "Xu Baobao, could you get me a set of clean underwear from the wardrobe, and a Pikachu T-shirt and jeans... What's for breakfast? I'm so hungry."

"Millet pumpkin porridge, Scallion Oil pancakes, soy-braised meat buns, plus sweet and sour diced radishes and cold-tossed Pork Skin."

"Wow, that sounds delicious..."

She got up, freshened up in the bathroom, then slipped on a pair of kitty-themed toe socks and white sneakers. The young couple then headed out.

Back at the restaurant, they ate breakfast together. By now, the hocks on the stove were fully cooked.

Lin Xu turned off the heat, removed the hocks from the pot, and, while they were still piping hot, began to carve them.

The perfectly cooked hocks were a clean white and exuded a rich, meaty aroma. As he carved, Shen Baobao even sneaked a piece to taste.

"This meat is so springy, and the fragrance is so pronounced! It's a bit like the dipped lamb you make."

Hocks should cook for half an hour; they shouldn't be overcooked. In terms of cooking method, it's quite similar to the dipped lamb, which is eaten as soon as it's cooked through. Indeed, at this moment, the hock could also be eaten with a dipping sauce.

Chapter 467: The Upscale Way to Make a Pork Hock - Crystal Pork Hock! Trial Opening, Business Booming!

However, to make the Crystal Pork Hock, one crucial step was still missing—steaming.

Anyone knowledgeable about cuisine knows that Crystal Pork Hock uses aspic to give the hock an additional shiny luster, thus earning its crystalline name.

But this crystal-clear quality isn't achieved by mere chance.

It requires intense steaming to render the collagen from the pork skin into a transparent broth, which creates the crystal-like effect upon solidifying.

If boiled, the broth would become murky, diminishing the crystal-like effect.

Lin Xu sliced the hock into wider strips, then cut them into large chunks. After cutting them all, he fetched the previously prepared pork skin and readied it for steaming in bowls.

Using bowls for steaming is a unique feature of the Crystal Pork Hock.

The advantage of this method is to prevent the broth from becoming murky due to excess meat. The less meat, the lower the chance of the broth turning cloudy, and the more pronounced the crystal effect.

Additionally, this method also makes it convenient for sale.

One bowl per serving ensures a consistent amount of meat, avoiding disparities in the ratio of meat to jelly during plating that could lead to customer complaints.

A pinch of pork skin jelly was placed at the bottom of the bowl, followed by a handful of the chopped hock, and finally, a layer of shredded pork skin on top.

When adding these, it was important to watch the quantity. The meat in the bowl had to be lower than the rim to prevent the pork skin from spilling over the edge, which would mar the final presentation.

Once the hock and pork skin were arranged in the bowls, Lin Xu added a few slices of Scallion and Ginger on top—just enough to counteract any gaminess.

Everything was now ready.

Lin Xu set up his wok, preparing to make some Sichuan peppercorn water.

This water was the key to the "crystal" in the Crystal Pork Hock.

Half a pot of water was added to the wok, along with some salt and Sichuan peppercorns. It was simmered for a while to dissolve the salt and infuse the water with the flavor of the peppercorns.

The Sichuan peppercorns were then scooped out.

After turning off the heat, he poured the prepared Sichuan peppercorn water into each bowl until it was nine-tenths full.

Once all the bowls were filled, he placed them on the racks in the steaming room to begin the steaming process.

"It looks so easy. Why don't you teach me to make it someday?"

Shen Baobao grabbed a scallion oil pancake and nibbled on it while watching the entire process.

Lin Xu wanted to refuse without even thinking. You just managed to make fruit yogurt, and now you're already eager for an Over-level Challenge?

However, he pondered that although the Crystal Pork Hock recipe was complex, making Crystal Skin Jelly was an option. With simplified steps and fewer ingredients, it could achieve an effect as stunning as the Crystal Pork Hock.

Thinking this, he said, "Later, I'll guide you in making Crystal Skin Jelly. The result is no less impressive than Crystal Pork Hock, and you can show it off to your relatives next time everyone dines together."

Shen Baobao immediately perked up at the idea, "Great, great! I'll make sure my aunt and uncle try plenty of it."

Lin Xu: "..."

You sure have a deep bond with your sister-in-law!

The hocks in the steaming room needed at least an hour of steaming. Shen Baobao couldn't wait that long and drove off to work in her little X1.

Meanwhile, Lin Xu went down to the braised foods department. He started preparing pressed pig's head and also fine-tuned several braising liquids to ensure the quality of the dishes wouldn't decline.

「One hour later.」

The steaming room door opened.

The unique fragrance of pork instantly filled the air.

He slowly pulled the steaming rack laden with bowls from the steaming room. The Scallion and Ginger in the bowls had changed color and softened. The broth, however, remained clear, now infused with a much richer aroma than when it was first poured.

He fished out the Scallion and Ginger and skimmed off any scum. Then, he carefully pushed the rack directly into the cold storage room to cool.

He had to push it as slowly as possible to prevent the broth in the bowls from sloshing and turning murky, which would mar its appearance once cooled.

After moving the rack to the cold storage room, Lin Xu started preparing the hand-rolled noodles.

Mixing the Dough, kneading it, preparing the toppings...

This was Lin Ji's bread and butter, so it had to be treated with the utmost care. As long as Ji Minghui hadn't mastered the Perfect Level Technique for hand-rolled noodles, Lin Xu couldn't relax.

While he was busy, a new post appeared under the Lin Ji's Food topic:

"Heard the store is having its soft opening today. Has anyone here confirmed this? Is it really true?"

Before long, responses from netizens flooded in:

"For real? Are you sure?"

"You could ask the High Priest. She can stroll over from school in a few minutes."

"The High Priest is one of Boss Lin's own; she might not tell the truth."

"Right! What if today's soft opening is only for a select few? We'd never know."

"Whatever, I'm going to check it out. I'll just say I'm meeting a client."

"Damn, great minds think alike! I just told my department manager I was off to see a client. He even reminded me to get a taxi receipt. Makes me feel so guilty."

"Don't feel that way! Who knows, you might actually sign a deal at Lin Ji."

"Just left the office. My client's in Sanlitun, but I hopped on the subway heading to Yingchun Street without a second thought."

"See you at Lin Ji, bro!"

"Yeah, see you there!"

"..."

「At half-past ten in the morning.」

Lin Xu entered the cold storage room. The hock in the bowls had completely solidified, each one gleaming as if made of glass.

The Crystal Pork Hock is a success!

Now to see how well it would sell.

He took out two bowls and inverted them onto a cutting board. A trembling, semi-circular meat jelly slid out.

When he sliced one through the middle, the cut surface was translucent, like a work of art.

After slicing, he arranged the hock on a plate.

The white meat of the hock, the white Pork Skin, and the perfectly transparent aspic—these three elements combined to transform a typically greasy ingredient into what looked like a refined culinary masterpiece.

As he was admiring his creation, Shu Yun hurried upstairs and whispered to Lin Xu, "Boss, lots of customers have arrived downstairs. They're queuing up at the door right now, and they're posting check-ins under the Lin Ji topic. I took a quick look, and more and more customers are on their way here."

Lin Xu: ???

It's just a soft opening, and these customers are already this excited? I just wanted Lin Ji to stop selling out every single day. Why is that so hard?

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Since the customers had arrived, he naturally couldn't turn them away.

Lin Xu thought for a moment and said to Shu Yun, "It's awfully hot outside; let them come in. Those who need to order can order, and those who need to place an order can do so. While we have some time, I'll make more dough. Hopefully, everyone can get something to eat."

After speaking, he picked up a freshly cut slice of Crystal Pork Hock and tasted it.

Hmm, it was cool on the palate, savory and delicious. The aspic was slippery, the bits of pork rind within were pleasantly chewy, and the hock meat itself was satisfyingly firm.

A single slice of meat actually offered three distinct textures, and it wasn't greasy at all.

He had to admit, this Crystal Pork Hock was a real success.

Seeing Shu Yun about to leave, Lin Xu quickly handed her a pair of chopsticks, "Try our restaurant's new Crystal Pork Hock; see how it tastes."

Shu Yun, preoccupied with the worry of having too many customers to serve, hadn't even noticed the glistening, translucent slices of meat on the plate.

"This is pork hock?"

She picked up a slice and was immediately captivated by the dish's appearance.

The pork hock she was used to seeing was always fatty and greasy, glistening with oil. However, the one before her sparkled. Even the texture of the pork rind and the fibers of the lean meat encased within were clearly visible.

So beautiful!

Girls have no resistance to shiny things. Even though Shu Yun knew it was pork hock, she found it so pretty that she was almost reluctant to eat it.

But there were so many customers downstairs.

When she put the slice in her mouth, her eyes lit up.

Cool, smooth, pleasantly chewy, and springy... A variety of textures melded in her mouth, yet without the greasiness she'd expected. The taste was savory and fresh, free from any heavy braising-spice flavors, with just the faintest numbing hint from Sichuan peppercorns.

"This is so delicious, Boss! Is this going on the menu today?"

"That's right, this is Crystal Pork Hock. Later, take this portion down to the cold dish display case. If customers order it, just put in the order, and we'll slice and plate it up here."

"Okay, Boss!"

After speaking, Shu Yun took the plate to leave. But upon seeing those sparkling slices of meat again, she couldn't resist picking up another piece.

Ah, this is so good! The more I chew, the more flavorful it becomes.

As the restaurant's front-of-house manager, she naturally knew that the glistening aspic was full of collagen, which is good for the skin.

This thought made the Crystal Pork Hock seem even more delicious.

After all, eating more collagen is good for your skin, isn't it?

With this mindset, Shu Yun clacked down the stairs to the first floor in her high heels, while Lin Xu felt somewhat blindsided by the sheer number of customers.

He had originally prepared only about two hundred bowls of hand-rolled noodles for lunch today.

But now, it seemed that amount was woefully insufficient.

After all, customers had been waiting for a month. Now that they'd heard about the soft opening, everyone wanted to come try the food and see what the new restaurant looked like.

Sigh...

He had planned to find some time to livestream and give his fans a look at the new restaurant, but who knew they'd skip the stream and come directly to the site?

If he'd known, he would have asked Wu Kexin to do a livestream tour a couple of days ago.

Thinking this, he took out his phone and posted an update under the Lin Ji's Food topic, "I originally planned a quiet soft opening, treating it like any regular restaurant. But your overwhelming enthusiasm has changed things! So, no more pretending—I'm laying my cards on the table: we are in our soft opening! Our menu is limited for now, and so is our service capacity. If you're not in a rush, I suggest visiting over the weekend when we'll have more dishes available."

As soon as the message was posted, netizens who had been questioning whether the opening was real or just a rumor erupted with excitement.

Diligent Lazy Sheep: Wow, it's actually true! I'm getting up and heading to the restaurant now!

Weight Loss Class Bad Example: Got it! I'll go today and then again on the weekend. Double the surprise!

Fair-Skinned Beauty with Slightly Thick Legs: I haven't had Lin Ji's hand-rolled noodles in a month, and now you're telling me to wait a few more days? Boss Lin, doesn't your conscience bother you?

Sorry, I am a cop: I'm eating Lin Ji's hand-rolled noodles today, and not even Jesus can stop me!

Tokyo's Foodie Leader of 800,000: On the subway now, arriving soon! Does the new place still have table sharing? It just doesn't feel the same without it!

Lost Roasted Whole Sheep: Still away on a business trip. Tears of envy are practically drooling from the corners of my mouth! When I get back, I absolutely have to wolf down a couple of bowls of Lin Ji's hand-rolled noodles.

...

After posting the message, Lin Xu went to the pastry station to start making more dough. He also instructed the kitchen assistants to prepare more ingredients for the noodle toppings.

Fortunately, there were many hands in the kitchen, and they had bought plenty of ingredients that morning. Otherwise, they really would have struggled to keep up with the customers' enthusiasm.

Downstairs, Shu Yun placed the Crystal Pork Hock in the cold-dish display case. To boost sales, she deliberately positioned it in a conspicuous spot.

After arranging it, she savored the memory of the pork hock's taste while waving Song Tiantian over, "Tiantian, it's too hot outside. Let the customers in. All areas are open except for the private rooms on the third floor."

Soon, the foodies queued outside were welcomed into the restaurant.

"Wow, it's so spacious!"

"There are so many more seats than before! Finally, we don't have to worry about not getting a table."

"Oh, is that little chubby cat Dundun?"

"Dundun! My Dundun!"

"Miss, can we take a picture with it?"

"Are there any new dishes? Can we see the menu?"

"..."

Several servers methodically answered the customers' questions. Nearby, by the service counter, Shu Yun was explaining the responsibilities and key points of being the front-of-house manager to Song Tiantian.

The beautiful restaurant manager, who had just snuck a taste of the Crystal Pork Hock, was dressed in a light gray business suit. Her long, straight legs were clad in light gray sheer stockings, and her warm, approachable smile captivated several customers as they walked in.

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"Is this the new manager Boss Lin dug up? She has such a gentle smile, just like the girl next door."

"She's our manager, Shu Yun. She previously worked as the front desk manager at Fishing Platform and joined us because she absolutely loves Dundun."

Upon hearing the waiter's explanation, several customers were immediately shocked.

A front desk manager from Fishing Platform becoming Lin Ji's store manager? Is the new store's staffing really that high-level?

"What about the chefs in the kitchen? Besides Chef Xu, Master Niu, Master Ma, and the others, are there any newcomers?"

"Yes, there are. We have Wei Qian, who participated in two food competitions. There's also Master Zhu, the nephew of the head chef from Building Fifteen of Fishing Platform; Master Ji from Gate Six, who excels at rolling dough; Master Qin from Building Two; and Master Zhuang, who ranked fourth in the last competition. Our boss poached them all."

When the customers heard this, their expressions turned even more shocked.

They weren't familiar with Zhu Yong, Ji Minghui, and Qin Wei, but they knew Wei Qian and Zhuang Yizhou.

"I didn't expect Boss Lin to poach even his rivals from the cooking competitions! Must work hard, must make money! From now on, Lin Ji will be my canteen!"

With so many experts gathered at Lin Ji, the prices of the dishes would surely rise significantly.

So, I need to work hard and earn money so I can frequently treat myself at Lin Ji.

The customers took out their phones to take pictures of the restaurant's interior, and they also snapped a photo of the beautiful manager from Fishing Platform.

Once they posted it under the Lin Ji's Food topic, it immediately drew gasps of admiration from netizens.

「In the tearoom of Building Two at Fishing Platform」

Xie Baomin placed two Big Red Tangerines in front of Qiu Zhenhua, who was looking at his phone. "Don't bother getting Old Guo to appraise these, alright? That old scoundrel changed his hiding spot for his tea leaves. I searched for ages and could only find these two—I'm giving them both to you."

Qiu Zhenhua scrolled through his phone, a helpless expression on his face. "I never thought Shu Yun would really go to Lin Ji. And the netizens are even saying Dundun lured her away! Is my junior becoming so disingenuous now? Blaming it on a cat... Is he afraid I'll cause trouble for him?"

Xie Baomin recalled Lin Xu's time working at Fishing Platform and said with a smile, "You know, that's quite possible. Back then, Dundun clung to Shu Yun like a child and actually turned her into a cat slave... Look at how sensible their cat is! Unlike you lot, always giving me endless worries."

What's with him? Qiu Zhenhua thought. Has that scoundrel been a drill instructor or something? Why has he started making such snide remarks lately?

He finished his tea and returned his attention to the phone. "Gotta say, your junior's store is really popular. It was a soft opening without any promotion, yet so many people showed up. If I didn't know better, I'd think it was a mall's anniversary celebration."

Xie Baomin laughed. "That's nothing; just wait and see. This place will definitely become a benchmark in Yanjing's culinary industry."

When it was just a roadside stall, its daily revenue already exceeded fifty thousand. Now, with such a large venue and prices comparable to similar-grade restaurants, the daily turnover must be in the hundreds of thousands.

Those old-school, pretentious restaurants in Yanjing should just wait for the reshuffle!

「In the kitchen of Lin Ji's Food」

After touring the new store, the customers began placing their orders.

Looking at the order slips, Lin Xu told Wei Qian and the others, "The customers caught us off guard today; we'll have to eat in shifts. Even though it's a soft opening, we must strive for perfection and guarantee the quality of our dishes."

"Got it!"

"Understood, Boss!"

"Don't worry, we'll definitely put our heart into it."

After giving these instructions, Lin Xu packed some rice into insulated food containers, added several other dishes, and finally, sliced a portion of Crystal Pork Hock and one of pressed pig's head, sealing them with ice packs. He also prepared a garlic paste dipping sauce with vinegar on the side.

After packing all the dishes into a sealed carry bag, his father-in-law's lunch was ready.

He called for a runner service and handed the bag to Chef Xu. "Take this to the service desk on the first floor and have Tiantian give it to the runner."

"Alright!"

Downstairs, customers who hadn't yet ordered were intently studying the menu, filled with exquisite dishes.

"Wow! They've added so many dishes!"

"I had no idea the signature dishes section would even include chef profiles."

"Boss Lin has wooed so many talented people; it looks like he's planning something big."

"Waiter, are there any dishes made by Boss Lin on here?"

The nearby waiter said, "During our soft opening, our boss is mainly responsible for the hand-pulled noodles. Today, he only made two dishes: the pressed pig's head from the braised items section, and the Crystal Pork Hock displayed in the cold appetizer area."

"Really? Then give us one of each, and a large bowl of diced eggplant hand-pulled noodles for everyone."

The same scene occurred at other tables.

As soon as they heard that Lin Xu had made new pressed pig's head and Crystal Pork Hock, everyone couldn't wait to try them.

Once the dishes were served, many customers were captivated by the visual appeal of the two items.

"I never expected the pressed pig's head to look this beautiful."

"Back home, during Chinese New Year, my uncle always made pressed head that was so loose and messy. If Boss Lin could publish a tutorial, I could show off my skills to the family this Spring Festival!"

Seeing this dish really brings on the New Year vibe.

I have to take a photo and wish everyone online a Happy New Year! I'm going to blow those early New Year well-wishers out of the water!

Soon, a flurry of New Year's greetings appeared under the Lin Ji's Food topic online.

Various wishes like, "Bro, Sis, Happy New Year!" and "Wishing everyone a peaceful and joyful New Year!" left netizens both amused and bewildered, while also piquing their curiosity about this visually stunning dish.

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Many customers had even listed Pressed Pig's Head as their top dish to try when checking in at the restaurant.

Close to eleven, Shen Baobao came bouncing into the restaurant for lunch, also planning to take lunch boxes back to the audit office. She had expected the place to be empty, but upon entering, she found the first-floor dining hall already bustling with customers, some of whom were already eating.

This...

She raised her wrist to check her watch. It was only a little past ten-forty. Why are there so many people? Could my watch be broken?

Seeing Song Tiantian not far from the entrance, she curiously asked, "Why are there so many people?"

Song Tiantian responded with a wry smile, "Someone posted online about our trial opening today, so customers came flocking to check in. It's caught the kitchen a bit off guard."

"Thanks for your hard work, Tiantian. I'll go upstairs and take a look."

"Alright, Boss Lady."

When she went upstairs, Shen Baobao found Chezai preparing take-out lunch boxes for the audit office, Xinda Company, Joyful Media, and the Dundun Company. With the start of the trial opening, the restaurant's group meal service had automatically resumed.

Seeing Lin Xu busy, Shen Baobao didn't disturb him. Instead, she said to Chezai, "Give me a serving of Oil-poured Noodles and a Crystal Pork Hock, please."

Since Xu Bao couldn't join her for the meal, she decided to have something simple. She needed to get back to the audit office quickly, as dozens of hungry foodies were waiting there.

Soon, the Oil-poured Noodles and Crystal Pork Hock were served.

She had just taken out her phone, about to send a picture to her cousin Chen Yan, when she saw the glamorous woman herself walking up the stairs in a figure-hugging jumpsuit.

"Yan Bao, was it you who posted online about our trial opening today? That's why all these netizens are flocking here to check in, right?"

"Not at all! When I came in, I was wondering why there was such a big fuss for a trial opening. So it was someone else who spread the word... Is this the Crystal Pork Hock? Feed me a piece to try..."

Shen Baobao pouted, but still, out of consideration for her single friend, she picked up a slice of Crystal Pork Hock, dipped it in the sauce, and popped it into Chen Yan's mouth.

"Wow, it's so cool and refreshing, absolutely delicious! No wonder my brother-in-law was raving about it yesterday. If I hadn't known beforehand, I'd never believe this was pork hock."

Chen Yan sat down and, without any ceremony, picked up her chopsticks and started eating.

"Don't forget to pay when you leave," Shen Baobao said. "This is all my Xu Bao's hard-earned money. You can't just eat and drink for free."

"Tsk, so stingy. When I leave, I'll get a card from Tiantian and load a million on it. That way, you won't have to nag me about it every day, just like my mom."

Upon hearing this, Shen Baobao immediately mimicked her aunt Shen Guofang's tone: "Yan'er, when are you finally going to get married and make your mother proud?"

Chen Yan: "..."

That was a spot-on impression. Don't do it again.

While the two sisters bantered as usual, up on the thirtieth floor of the Futong Building, Shen Guofu sat in his office, looking with pleasant surprise at the lunch his secretary, Little Zou, had brought him.

Not only were there Crystal Pork Hock and Pressed Pig's Head, but there were also two servings of rice. Alongside these were Sweet and Sour Pork Ribs, Black Bean Phoenix Claws, and Stir-fried Beef—a truly delightful surprise.

My son-in-law is so thoughtful! He knew I've been eating plainly recently, so he sent over so much meat. What a good son-in-law!

With a sense of ceremony, he arranged all the dishes on his desk. Then, he walked over to the liquor cabinet, opened it, and began to survey the rows of white liquor bottles inside. For Old Shen, having good liquor and meat, with no interruptions, was pure bliss. It was the happiest moment.

Eventually, he chose a bottle of Wuliangye produced in 2012.

It's been a whole decade. Time to taste it.

Each bottle in this liquor cabinet signified at least ten cases of the same kind stored in his cellar. If this bottle of Wuliangye is good, then the ten cases in the cellar should be of the same quality. I can serve it at the next banquet.

He carried the bottle of Wuliangye back to his seat.

Just as he sat down, Secretary Xiao Zou suddenly pushed the door open and walked in. "Mr. Shen, as you instructed, I posted another notice about Lin Ji's Food's trial opening under the relevant online topic. According to feedback from netizens, the restaurant is very crowded. Should I continue posting?"

"No need. Just letting people know about today's trial opening is enough. We don't need to promote it further."

Xiao Zou asked curiously, "Won't this catch the restaurant off guard?"

Shen Guofu opened the liquor bottle and, while pouring himself a drink, said, "In this world, how many things are ever perfectly prepared? We all muddle through as we go. My son-in-law is too steady and cautious; today, I'll give him a little nudge."

Lin Ji will soon be competing with the major restaurants in Yanjing. His competitors might resort to dirty tricks. Today will give my son-in-law a small taste of being passively led by the nose. This way, when he encounters sabotage from peers in the future, he'll be a bit more vigilant.

After Shen Guofu finished speaking, he waved his hand, and Xiao Zou wisely exited. She knew Mr. Shen was about to enjoy his private moment with his fine liquor.

Back at the restaurant, after lunch, Chen Yao was true to her word. She went downstairs with Shen Baobao and, upon reaching the front desk, said to Song Tiantian, "Tiantian, set me up with a card."

"Certainly, CEO Chen. How much money would you like to preload?"

"One million!"

"Huh? Are you joking, CEO Chen?"

Chen Yao shook her head and said with a smile, "From now on, this will be my go-to place for business banquets. Depositing a million upfront will save the embarrassment of suddenly being short on funds. Go ahead and set up the card; I'll transfer the money now."

In the kitchen, Lin Xu wiped the sweat from his brow after rolling out another batch of noodles. He was just wondering when he could redeem Master Ji Minghui's upgrade task when the system's notification suddenly sounded in his mind:

"Host earned one million yuan on the trial opening day, completing the hidden task: [Daily Income of One Million]. Reward: One Perfect Level Mushroom Dish lottery draw. Congratulations, Host."

A daily income of one million? What's going on?

He checked the system page and found his points had increased to 1.1 million.

What am I waiting for? Time to redeem Master Ji's upgrade task!