

Culinary 491

Chapter 491: The King Covers the Land Tiger, Little Chick Stewed with Mushrooms! Boss, add more vermicelli!

Chicken Stewed with Mushrooms is very similar to Shandong Fried Chicken. The chicken isn't blanched during cooking. Instead, the chopped pieces are placed directly into hot oil, where high heat helps to maximally reduce their moisture content.

This cooking requirement means that only freshly slaughtered chickens can be used for this dish.

If frozen chicken were used, the effect would be greatly diminished.

Plus, eating unblanched frozen chicken doesn't feel reassuring.

This step requires patience, needing prolonged stir-frying to allow any unpleasant odors in the chicken to evaporate with the steam.

Keep stir-frying until the oil in the pot becomes clear again before proceeding to the next step.

"I guess when people from Shandong ventured to the Northeast, they brought Fried Chicken with them. Then, they adapted it to the cold, icy conditions of the Northeast by adding locally foraged dried Hazel Mushrooms and vermicelli."

Wei Qian observed Lin Xu's process, analyzing it like a scholar.

Upon hearing this, Lin Xu also thought that the method for Chicken Stewed with Mushrooms was indeed quite similar to that of Fried Chicken, especially the initial steps, which were almost identical.

When the chicken in the pot was sizzling and the oil had turned clear again, Lin Xu poured Cooking Wine along the side of the pot. After the alcohol evaporated, he added Light Soy Sauce, Dark Soy Sauce, and two small spoons of salt to enhance the base flavor.

He stirred the chicken in the pot again to evenly coat it with the Dark Soy Sauce, then added the soaked Hazel Mushrooms, followed by the water used to soak them.

Not all the soaking water from the bowl should be used; the dregs at the bottom containing potential sediment had to be discarded to prevent any grit from getting into the dish.

Since there were many people today, more vermicelli was needed. The water from soaking the Hazel Mushrooms wasn't enough, so Lin Xu added two more bowls of water, ensuring it completely covered the chicken pieces.

Then he covered the pot and began to stew.

This free-range chicken was different from the fast-growing chickens from poultry farms. The meat of the latter is soft and loosens quickly upon simmering, whereas free-range chicken meat remains firm even after stewing for a long time.

Lin Xu adjusted the stove to medium-low heat, planning to let it stew for half an hour initially.

For Chicken Stewed with Mushrooms, the vermicelli shouldn't be added too early, as it absorbs the sauce and can easily stick to the bottom and burn.

The softened vermicelli should only be added when the chicken is almost fully stewed and it's time to reduce the sauce. This allows the vermicelli to absorb the excess sauce, making them smooth and satisfyingly chewy.

Forty minutes later, the chicken was perfectly stewed.

Without even lifting the lid, one could smell the unique savory aroma of the Hazel Mushrooms and the delicious scent of the chicken.

The combined aroma was incredibly tantalizing.

Lin Xu scooped out the softened vermicelli and stirred in some Dark Soy Sauce to color it, enhancing its appetizing appearance. Then, he lifted the pot lid, added the vermicelli to the pot, and turned up the heat for a vigorous simmer.

While it simmered, the large iron pot had to be constantly shaken to prevent the vermicelli at the bottom from sticking and burning, and also to accelerate the evaporation of moisture.

When only a little sauce remained in the pot, it was ready to be dished out.

The reddish-brown chicken pieces, glossy vermicelli, and Hazel Mushrooms—swollen from absorbing the sauce—all exuded a rich and tempting fragrance.

No wonder this dish is considered one of the Four Great Stews of the Northeast—the flavor was simply unbeatable!

The portion today was quite large, just enough to fill three large bowls.

Just as he finished plating, Song Tiantian appeared at the kitchen door. "Boss, is it ready?" she called out. "I've been waiting to eat!"

Wei Qian picked a bowl with more vermicelli and handed it to her. "Didn't you ask for extra vermicelli at noon? This bowl has the most. Take it and enjoy. If it's not enough, remember to come up for more. We probably won't finish all of ours."

"All right, all right, thank you, Master Wei."

"Nothing to thank me for. Once you're at Lin Ji, you're family. Hurry up and go eat."

Although Wei Qian was also a big man, he carried a lot of flab, almost the complete opposite of Song Tiantian, who was muscular and trim with no excess fat.

So, seeing Song Tiantian, Wei Qian's face filled with envy.

When will I ever be able to get that muscular?

Once the kitchen was sorted, they also began their dinner.

By now, Shen Guofu's family of three and Chen Yan were already waiting in a booth on the second floor. Seeing Lin Xu arrive with a small pot of Chicken Stewed with Mushrooms, Shen Guofu couldn't help but sniff. "They used to say, 'When a son-in-law visits, the chickens meet their doom.' Our family is the opposite. We've never fed our son-in-law our home-raised chickens; instead, we're always here freeloading off his meals."

Lin Xu smiled. "Please don't say that, Dad. It's my honor to have you all here for meals. If you didn't come, other customers might think the food is so bad that even my own family won't eat it."

As soon as Lin Xu said this, Shen Guofu was so pleased he immediately wanted a cup of Liquor.

Unfortunately, he had driven there today and had been scolded by Director Han just last night for drinking. So, Old Shen reluctantly smacked his lips and started on his rice.

"Wow, this vermicelli is delicious!"

Shen Jiayue loved eating vermicelli. The moment Lin Xu put down the pot, she picked up a chopstick-full of vermicelli, placed it on her rice, and slurped it down as if it were noodles.

After that, she took a couple more mouthfuls of rice.

That was truly satisfying!

The dish, stewed in the iron pot, was richly aromatic. After the vermicelli were added, they absorbed much of the sauce. Thus, when she slurped the vermicelli, the savory chicken flavor and the fresh taste of the Hazel Mushrooms went right down with them, making her exclaim in enjoyment.

Chen Yan initially wasn't very interested in this dark-looking stewed dish.

But seeing her cousin enjoying it so much, she decided to try a few pieces herself.

The moment she tasted it, she immediately felt she hadn't gotten enough rice.

With such fragrant chicken, such smooth vermicelli, and such flavorful Hazel Mushrooms, how could one bowl of rice possibly be enough? If people from the Northeast saw me eating so little, they might think I look down on Northeastern cuisine! Right, I need to get another big bowl later, lest people accuse me of regional bias.

Downstairs, Song Tiantian was heartily eating her meal, taking large mouthfuls of rice.

The boss's skills are amazing! The young chicken and Hazel Mushrooms are stewed perfectly, and the potato vermicelli are delicious too, having absorbed the sauce while remaining smooth and tender. It really feels like I'm back in my hometown! But this place is home too. Didn't Master Wei just say it? Once you're at Lin Ji, you're family. And family should support and take care of each other! So, how should we take care of each other?

Thinking of Wei Qian's flab and then of the grueling physical training she had endured at the sports school, Song Tiantian's eyes suddenly lit up. What if I supervise Wei Qian's weight loss?

Chapter 492: Grand Opening Celebration Plan! Brother Xu, do you know how to make that kind of Pumpkin Soup from the barbecue restaurant?

"Time for dinner, Zhu Yong. With that long face, has Tyson given you another task?"

Upstairs, oblivious to being watched by Song Tiantian, Wei Qian was urging Zhu Yong to eat, his words full of teasing.

Clearly, he thought Zhu Yong wasn't manly enough.

He was actually bullied by Lu Lu to the point of resembling a young wife who had suffered all kinds of grievances.

He was completely undeserving of the 'Yong' in his name, which meant 'brave'.

Might as well change his name to Zhu Coward.

Zhu Yong shoved his phone into his pocket, came over, picked up his bowl of rice, and took a bite. Then he picked out a chicken foot from the serving bowl and, while gnawing on it, said,

"She said that last night, under the Lin Ji's Food topic, all the posts were photos of roast suckling pig from the proprietress, CEO Chen, Lele, and their group. She wants me to make one for her too. But I'm not good at making that kind of thing, and besides, our rental apartment isn't set up for roasting a suckling pig."

Zhu Yong, Qin Wei, Wei Qian, and Ji Minghui shared a four-bedroom apartment.

Though called a four-bedroom, it was actually a converted two-bedroom. Because it was cheap and close to the subway station, they had settled there.

As soon as he heard "cooking in the rental," Wei Qian immediately remembered the terror he had felt the last time Zhu Yong made Snail Noodles.

To make the flavor stronger, that guy had purposely added extra pickled bamboo shoots and even poured some of the pickling liquid into the pot.

Afterward, a pungent odor wafted through the apartment and lingered for a long, long time.

It got to the point where a neighbor pasted a plumber's business card for unblocking drains on their door, subtly reminding these young men to get their plumbing fixed if there was a problem, instead of messing around with it themselves at home.

Wei Qian said,

"Why don't you just have her come eat at the restaurant next time they make roast suckling pig? The boss wouldn't mind you bringing family, and your Tyson is a regular customer at Lin Ji's. She still has that bit of privilege."

That's what Zhu Yong thought, too.

But Lu Lu felt too embarrassed and didn't want to impose.

While the two were discussing this, Lin Xu, who was eating nearby, spoke up.

"Master Zhu, let Lin Daiyu know that during the grand opening ceremony on Saturday, the restaurant will hold an event under the Lin Ji's Food online topic, inviting netizens to participate. If she's not busy, she should come over. They'll have roast suckling pig that day."

Saturday was the grand opening celebration for Lin Ji's Food.

Initially, Lin Xu had thought about just going through the motions, but his father-in-law and senior brothers had advised him to make it lively.

Now that he had opened a large restaurant, the more high-profile it was, the better the advertising effect.

Moreover, with such a large investment in the premises, he couldn't rely solely on nearby residents and passersby to keep the place bustling, as he could before the expansion.

A restaurant of this scale needed at least a segment of high-end customers patronizing it, just to avoid making a loss.

Otherwise, no matter how well the hand-pulled noodles sold, it wouldn't be enough to support such a large establishment and so many staff.

Since they were going to hold an event, they might as well go big. It was a perfect opportunity to mobilize the enthusiasm of their online followers and boost the popularity of the Lin Ji's Food topic even further.

Although reaching the top spot might be impossible, they should at least aim for the top five.

The next time an opportunity arose, he would aim for the number one spot and complete the system's main mission.

"Xiao Xu, do you need me to send some people from the company to help with the opening ceremony?" Shen Guofu asked curiously as he got up to get more rice.

The Shen Group had ample staff and all sorts of talent; organizing a store celebration was a piece of cake for them.

Lin Xu picked up a piece of meat, saw it was a chicken wing, and immediately put it in Shen Baobao's bowl. Then he picked up a chicken neck and, while eating it, said,

"No need, Sister Wenjing has everything arranged. The restaurant staff hardly need to get involved."

After moving the company to the Huixuan Building, Dou Wenjing had quickly recruited a batch of new employees.

Some were responsible for managing Lin Ji's Food's official online accounts, some for store promotions, and others for promoting group meal catering services.

The workforce had more than quadrupled compared to before.

In the future, the restaurant, as the terminal for generating revenue, would be solely responsible for serving customers.

The company, meanwhile, while overseeing the restaurant's operations, would be responsible for attracting customers and expanding the clientele as much as possible.

Clearly defined division of labor.

Hearing that his help wasn't needed, Shen Guofu said,

"On opening day, I'll have the marketing department come and deposit one or two million. For future business dinners, as long as the client doesn't specify a location, we'll hold them at Lin Ji's."

He knew very well what his son-in-law's restaurant needed, so he was actively providing practical support.

In fact, Shen Guofu's dinner with his old friends and Han Shuzhen's gathering with her close friends yesterday were both intended to help promote their son-in-law's restaurant.

A restaurant like this couldn't do without the patronage of high-end customers.

So, they had to use their personal connections as much as possible to attract customers for their son-in-law.

Han Shuzhen picked up some Hazel Mushrooms with her chopsticks and put them into her bowl. While eating, she asked,

"Xiao Xu, when are your parents coming? I'm planning to take your mom for a spa treatment or something. The mountain winds are harsh; her skin needs proper care."

"They'll be driving over early on Friday. My dad has already arranged the permit to drive into the capital."

Driving?

Han Shuzhen and Shen Guofu were both puzzled.

"Isn't it very convenient to take the high-speed train? Why choose to drive?"

Shen Baobao, happily eating the chicken wing in her bowl, explained to her parents,

"It's all for you guys. The fruit vinegars that have been fermenting for two weeks are ready to drink. So, Lin Xu's parents decided to drive here. They want to bring as much of it as possible so that every one of you can have some..."

Young Shen Baobao wasn't yet overly concerned about her appearance, so she didn't quite understand the intense desire her mother, her mother's cousin, Sister Wenjing, and Sister Xiaoqi had for the fruit vinegar.

Chapter 493: Grand Opening Celebration Plan! Brother Xu, do you know how to make that kind of Pumpkin Soup from the barbecue restaurant? [

Upon learning that her in-laws were driving over, Shen Baobao couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy for them. It was such a long drive. Since they were hauling so much fruit vinegar, they couldn't go very fast. They probably wouldn't make it to Beijing until mid-afternoon.

Hearing this, Han Shuzhen and Chen Yan's expressions immediately lit up. Was the beauty-enhancing, qi-boosting, blood-invigorating fruit vinegar finally on its way? Fantastic! This was great news!

Chen Yan immediately said, "We'll trade things with you; we won't let your mother-in-law lose out. Girls who marry out usually do everything they can to bring things back to their maiden families. But look at you! You're treating us like strangers even before you're married in."

"Well, at least I've married myself off already!" Shen Baobao retorted.

Chen Yan: !!!!!!!!!!!!! After this meal, I'm signing up for boxing lessons with Lu Lu! Once I'm trained, if I don't thrash you eight times a day, I'll start calling you 'Big Sis'! Always leaving people speechless... How did I end up with a cousin like you? This is infuriating!

「After the meal.」

Everyone slumped in their chairs, looking thoroughly stuffed.

Han Shuzhen announced, "Starting tomorrow, we can't eat like this anymore. Consuming so many carbs and fats daily won't help us slim down; at best, we'll just become agile but overweight people."

Shen Guofu wasn't too pleased to hear this, but now was not the time to contradict his wife, or else he'd be in for it when they got home.

Chen Yan said, "I saw many bloggers online using pumpkin as a meal replacement. Brother-in-law, how about you steam some pumpkin tomorrow to replace our main carbs?"

"Okay, I'll have someone bring some in later," Lin Xu agreed. Perfect timing, since Mom is coming. I'll ask her to make some pumpkin congee. I've been eating the restaurant's staff meals for so long; I'm starting to miss her cooking.

「Shortly after dinner.」

Shen Baobao went back to her apartment in the residential community behind the restaurant to change into sportswear, then left to play tennis with Chen Yan.

Shen Guofu drove Han Shuzhen home so they could do their exercise dance routine.

Around six in the evening, the guests who had reserved the roasted whole lamb began to arrive at the restaurant.

These three tables had ordered several other dishes in addition to the roasted whole lamb. By the time all the other dishes were served, the lamb was also perfectly roasted.

Lin Xu, with the help of Wei Qian and Zhu Yong, carefully removed the roasted whole lamb from the oven.

They then undid the supports and the huge roasting spit, placing the lamb, back-side up, onto a large wooden tray lined with lettuce leaves.

Soon, the waiters carried it out to the diners.

Zhuang Yizhou, having just finished his cooking tasks, remarked, "The last time I dined with some streamers at the Mongolian Cultural Garden, they played Mongolian music when they served the roasted whole lamb, and the waiters even performed a Mongolian dance."

Hearing this, Zhu Yong suggested, "Why don't we do the same?"

Lin Xu smiled. "Then you'd have to lead the dance."

Me, lead the dance? Zhu Yong pictured the embarrassing scene and immediately started to backpedal. "I think Lin Ji needs its own unique style," he said. "We can't just keep copying others. Besides, as pioneers of new Chinese cuisine, we should reject all unnecessary frills!"

If Lu Lu found out I was dancing in a Mongolian robe, wouldn't she laugh herself silly? Best to drop this topic quickly before word gets to her.

[In the upstairs private room.]

Zhen Wensheng, the director of the travel channel, raised his glass of beer and said, "Thanks to everyone's hard work recently, our travel channel has finally made a comeback! Bonuses will be doubled this month. Please, eat and drink to your heart's content, don't hold back!"

He drained his beer in one gulp, then turned to Geng Lishan, who was seated beside him, and asked, "Mr. Lishan, do you have anything to add?"

Geng Lishan waved his hand and said very down-to-earthly, "What's there to say? Let's eat! Everyone's starving."

Sitting next to him, Geng Lele had already slipped on a pair of disposable gloves, ready to dig in the moment the director finished speaking.

Just yesterday, Chen Yan had treated her and her grandfather, Geng Lishan, to a meal where they'd tasted the renowned roasted suckling pig. So when the travel channel invited them for roasted whole lamb today, and even specifically invited her grandpa from home, how could she miss such a great opportunity? Naturally, she tagged along.

Seeing everyone eyeing the roasted whole lamb in the center of the table with hungry anticipation, Zhen Wensheng announced, "Alright, let's begin! Waiter, please have someone come and carve this lamb."

A whole roasted lamb is difficult to handle. It's better to carve it into smaller pieces before eating, making it easier to pick up and enjoy.

Soon, Zhu Yong, who had eagerly volunteered, came in with a sharp boning knife. He deftly carved the roasted whole lamb into smaller pieces, even separating the ribs one by one.

Once it was all prepared, everyone eagerly reached out, grabbing pieces of lamb and starting to savor them.

Zeng Xiaoqi, who had eaten roasted whole lamb at a tourist attraction before, unhesitatingly picked up a piece of meat from the lamb's back and handed it to Geng Lele. "The meat from the back is the crispiest and most delicious."

"Thanks, Xiaoqi. In a bit, I'll go to the second floor to see if Lin Xu is secretly making something delicious. If he is, I'll bring some back for you."

"Great!"

Everyone knew by now that the truly best dishes at Lin Ji were the ones not listed on the menu. So Geng Lele planned to scout around the kitchen entrance, hoping to chance upon some of those special dishes they shared among themselves. If she managed to find some, it would be a real score!

They ate and chatted, and when they were nearly finished, Geng Lele removed her disposable gloves, wiped the grease from her mouth, and said to Geng Lishan, "Grandpa, drink a little less. I'm going to see what Lin Xu is up to."

"I'll stop after this glass. Just don't disturb Lin Xu while he's working," Geng Lishan replied.

"I won't," Geng Lele promised.

By then, Zeng Xiaoqi had also eaten her fill. Seeing her colleagues starting to raise their glasses for toasts, she removed her gloves and left the private room with Geng Lele.

Chapter 494: Grand Opening Celebration Plan! Xu Ge, can you make that kind of Pumpkin Soup from the barbecue restaurant?

Following the stairs to the second floor, just as the two of them were about to try their luck at the kitchen door, they saw Che Zai and Lin Xu pushing a handcart with two baskets of pumpkins coming out of the elevator.

The pumpkins in the basket were only slightly bigger than a palm.

Geng Lele couldn't help but tease after seeing them,

"Wow, are these little pumpkins starting to work and support the family before they're even a month old?"

Lin Xu explained,

"These are Bebe Pumpkins. They taste both dry and glutinous, and are very fragrant when eaten, particularly suitable as a meal replacement... The kitchen isn't too busy right now, how about I steam a few for you to taste?"

As soon as she heard they were suitable as a meal replacement, Zeng Xiaoqi was immediately tempted.

Why did the ordinary-looking pumpkins become so appetizing after Boss Lin's introduction?

Geng Lele patted her belly and said,

"I just ate too much whole grilled lamb and am having a bit of trouble eating solids."

But these little pumpkins looked so cute. She thought for a moment and asked,

"Lin Xu, can you make that kind of Pumpkin Soup they serve at Korean-style Grilled Meat restaurants? It has a silky texture when you drink it, and it also has a milky flavor. I especially love it, and I always have at least five refills whenever I eat grilled meat."

Pumpkin Soup from grilled meat restaurants?

Lin Xu actually knew how to make that.

In the summer of his sophomore year, his parents resigned to contract a scenic area.

The day they resigned, the whole family and relatives ate grilled meat together in a famous restaurant in Yinzhou City.

Chen Meijuan was deeply impressed by the Pumpkin Soup that day.

She asked the staff in detail about the preparation method. After returning home, she tinkered for two days and finally made Pumpkin Soup that was exactly like the one at the grilled meat restaurant.

As his mom's designated little lab rat, Lin Xu naturally drank Pumpkin Soup for two straight days too.

Not only did he get a bit sick of it, but he even remembered the recipe.

Now, hearing Geng Lele say this, he said,

"Then you two wait a moment. I'll go get ready in the kitchen and try to make Pumpkin Soup that's just like the one from the grilled meat restaurant."

"Thank you, Lin Xu, you're the best."

"Thanks a lot, Boss Lin."

Zeng Xiaoqi hadn't expected that following Geng Lele downstairs would lead her to stumble upon something delicious. She planned to taste it later—if the Pumpkin Soup was really just like the one sold at the grilled meat restaurants, that's what she'd feature in the next episode...

Wait a minute, how many ideas for the next episode have I accumulated these past few days? Why am I acting like the lady boss, seeing everything as my favorite? No, I must make a list when I get back. I'll list all the dishes we're considering for filming, and then let Boss Lin choose. I shouldn't be too greedy; I need to take it one step at a time. Yes, it's definitely not because I'm craving it...

In the kitchen, Lin Xu took a few pumpkins, washed them in the sink, then cut them open to remove the seeds and pulp.

Despite their small size, these pumpkins had plenty of seeds. He thought it would be a waste to throw away these plump seeds, so he saved them in a bowl, intending to make some pumpkin seeds later.

These would make delicious little snacks while watching dramas or movies at night.

Once the pumpkins were cleaned, they were placed on a steaming tray and then into the steamer to begin cooking.

To make delicious Pumpkin Soup, the pumpkins must first be thoroughly steamed to bring out their sweet flavor, ensuring the resulting Pumpkin Soup is fragrant and tasty.

To make tasty Pumpkin Soup, besides pumpkins, you need pure milk, White Sugar, cheese, and a little bit of glutinous rice flour for thickening.

The addition of cheese is to enhance the fragrance and create a smooth texture.

This was a trick Chen Meijuan discovered after many attempts. Only with cheese could the Pumpkin Soup's flavor and texture be faithfully replicated to match that of the grilled meat restaurants.

If you don't add it, the Pumpkin Soup turns out just like the pumpkin porridge you make at home.

Before long, the pumpkin was thoroughly steamed.

When he opened the steamer door, a rich, sweet aroma wafted out.

This time, just serving it on a plate would suffice as the meal replacement pumpkin Zeng Xiaoqi had specifically requested.

However, for Pumpkin Soup, further processing was necessary.

Lin Xu took out the blender. Holding a pumpkin in one hand, he used a metal spoon with the other to scoop the golden pulp into the blender.

The skin of the Bebe Pumpkin was actually quite tasty—fragrant and sticky.

But adding it to the Pumpkin Soup would significantly lower its visual appeal, taking away that tempting bright yellow color. So, the skin had to be removed, leaving only the yellow flesh.

After scooping out all the flesh, Lin Xu added a carton of milk and then turned on the blender's pulp function to make a thick pumpkin puree.

Today, he had steamed a surplus of pumpkin, and it took him several rounds of blending to finish it all.

Once all the pumpkin puree was ready, he set a stainless steel saucepan used for desserts on the stove, added two cartons of milk to it, and then some cheese slices to simmer.

While simmering, he constantly stirred with a spoon to speed up the melting of the cheese.

After the cheese had melted, he poured in the prepared pumpkin puree. He then started to continuously stir with a spoon to evenly mix the milk and the pumpkin puree.

At the same time, he aimed to fully simmer out the flavors of the milk, cheese, and pumpkin.

During this process, depending on the thickness of the Pumpkin Soup, he would flexibly add milk to prevent it from becoming too thick and burning on the bottom.

Once the aroma was fully developed, he added a small spoonful of White Sugar into the pot, followed by pouring in most of a bowl of thickening slurry made with glutinous rice flour.

Glutinous rice flour not only helps to thicken but also adds a silky smooth texture to the Pumpkin Soup.

The finished Pumpkin Soup was golden and delicate, with a creamy, thick consistency.

When ladled into a bowl, it even had a slight stringy effect.

After serving it, Geng Lele and Zeng Xiaoqi, who had been eagerly waiting at their seats, quickly came over.

"Wow, it's just like the one we had! That sweet fragrance hits you immediately... Lin Xu is awesome!"

Geng Lele had barely received her bowl of Pumpkin Soup when she slurped a mouthful from the edge. She immediately lauded Lin Xu's skills; this flavor, she realized, was even more authentic than the Pumpkin Soup at the grilled meat restaurants!

After Zeng Xiaoqi tried it, she immediately cast aside the plan she had in mind for the next TV show.

"It's so delicious! How about we shoot this for the next episode?"

Weren't you just saying we should film the Winter Melon Stuffed Chicken Breast? Lin Xu was somewhat surprised, but since Xiaoqi was the show's director, he nodded and said,

"Sure, no problem."

"Then you'll have to make more next time. I plan to fill a thermos so I can sit in the office and enjoy it slowly."

Lin Xu: "..."

Sister, this isn't just pumpkin and milk. There's also a lot of cheese and White Sugar in it! If you keep drinking it like this, forget about losing weight; you might actually gain twenty pounds!

After returning to her seat with the delicious and sweet Pumpkin Soup, Geng Lele took out her phone to snap a photo, and then posted it to the Lin Ji's Food topic,

"Haha, came to the back kitchen on a whim and just happened to catch Lin Xu making Pumpkin Soup! It has a fragrant, sweet taste and a silky texture. You can always trust Lin Ji!"

She had just posted this update.

Shen Baobao was resting and drinking water by the tennis court when she saw it. She immediately lost all interest in another round and asked Chen Yan, who seemed to want more tennis,

"Yan Bao, shall we go back?"

"Tsk tsk tsk, have you started missing your brother-in-law after such a short time? You can take a taxi home by yourself. I need to take advantage of today's peace and quiet to practice more, to welcome my thirtieth in the most beautiful and healthy state..."

Before she could finish the word "birthday," she glanced at the Pumpkin Soup on Shen Baobao's phone screen. She then immediately began to pack her equipment and possessions, saying,

"Life should be balanced. Since you want to go back, as your cousin, I'll sacrifice some training time and drive you home. After all, we have such a deep sisterly bond..."

Chapter 495: Lin Ji's Tyrant Feast Event! Junior Brother, Let Me Teach You a Dish to Strengthen the Waist and Replenish the Kidneys!

The photo of the Pumpkin Soup not only successfully attracted Chen Yan and Shen Baobao, who were exercising.

Even Lu Lu, who had just finished teaching students power techniques at the boxing club, was captivated.

She pulled out her phone, tapped on the contact labeled "Willows Dangling," and rapidly typed out a message:

"Your boss's Pumpkin Soup looks good. When you're not busy, can you make some for me to try? If you're busy, no worries, no pressure. [fist][fist][fist]"

After sending it, she followed up with a sticker of Red Wolf hitting Grey Wolf with a frying pan, then continued her training at the club.

As for the other netizens surfing the web, a chorus of laments arose:

"I just want to know when these will be added to the restaurant's menu."

"Does Boss Lin have a grudge against money? Why is he always making delicious food that's not for sale?"

"Is there a possibility that these dishes haven't met Boss Lin's standards, which is why he hasn't allowed them to be added to the menu?"

"The Roast Suckling Pig, Frozen Tendon, Steamed Egg with Brain, Silverfish Omelet, Chicken Stewed with Mushrooms, Winter Melon Stuffed with Chicken Breast, and Beef Sandwiched in Sesame Bread haven't been added to the menu these past few days. Did none of them meet his standards?"

"Hiss... Stop it, stop it! I'm hungry again just after finishing my takeout."

"I really want to go to Lin Ji and splurge on a meal, but sadly, my wallet's too thin; I can hardly afford to eat at Sand Ji's Hotel anymore..."

While the netizens were discussing this, an official account verified as Lin Ji's Food suddenly posted an update:

"Hello everyone! To celebrate Lin Ji's opening, our restaurant is launching a 'King of Dinners' event. From now until 10 PM this Friday, the top fifty posts with the most likes under the #LinJisFood topic will receive an invitation to Lin Ji's opening. With this invitation, you can enjoy a lavish lunch at our restaurant and receive a 20% discount on all purchases for one month..."

The company had initially planned to announce this promotional event during the day.

However, there weren't many active netizens online at that time, so the post didn't make much of an impact.

Just as Dou Wenjing and the marketing department staff were fretting, Geng Lele provided a timely assist.

Riding the wave of the Pumpkin Soup's popularity, they used the newly registered official account to post an update under the Lin Ji's Food topic and also released the menu for the 'King of Dinners' event.

All the dishes netizens were clamoring for—such as Roast Suckling Pig, Frozen Tendon, and Steamed Egg with Brain, among others not yet available in the restaurant—were included.

There were twenty dishes in total, including hot and cold dishes, soups, and desserts. The netizens' enthusiasm was instantly ignited.

What? The top fifty liked posts win a free feast fit for a king and a 20% discount for a month? What are we waiting for? Let's hurry up and write some creative posts!

Instantly, aspiring literary talents, hidden folk poets, and wandering wordsmiths emerged from the woodwork, all eager to showcase their skills.

Shuangyashan Wensheng: My last piece, 'Boss Lin's Battle with the Queen of Egypt,' was unfortunately rejected. It made me realize the limitations of my writing. This time, I plan to craft 'Boss Lin's Three Encounters with Li Mochou.' Stay tuned!

Good Dry Spell from Liang Mountain: I've already requested leave from my foreman. I plan to work through the night on my latest piece, 'Boss Lin's Midnight Raid on Daughter Country.' If you're a fan, don't forget to like it!

The Keyboard Warrior Can't Stand By: Hey, bro upstairs, last time you wrote about a night raid on Ultraman Saintess, and now it's a midnight raid on Daughter Country—why does the Boss Lin in your stories always operate at night?

Me, The Thinnest in the Family at 300 Pounds: I was going to write 'Boss Lin's Night Raid on Medusa,' but since Good Dry Spell bro is doing something similar, I'll change it to 'Boss Lin Sold Ninety-Nine Portions of Snake Soup, and Medusa Went Bald.' Brothers, feel free to critique!

Invisible Chicken Wings: Although I'm in the voiceover circle now, I was a core member of the literary club back in college. I'm going to write 'The True God Descends, Only to Be Scared Away by Boss Lin's Glare.' Please give it a like!

Blind Taxi Driver: Masters, please guide me! I'm planning to write 'Boss Lin Dreams of Returning to the Three Kingdoms to Lock Up the Two Qiaos.' What kind of lock should I use? And is tortoiseshell binding necessary?

Invisible Chicken Wings: ?????

Me, The Thinnest in the Family at 300 Pounds: ???????

The Keyboard Warrior Can't Stand By: ???????

...

While the netizens' creativity was in full flow, Shen Baobao and Chen Yan, having rushed over from the tennis court, were in a booth on the second floor of Lin Ji's Food, holding bowls of the freshly made Pumpkin Soup.

After Geng Lele posted the update online, many people in the restaurant saw it.

The shyer ones hinted subtly to the waiters, while the bolder ones went straight to the second floor to ask for some.

Lin Xu had no choice but to have the waiters serve the remaining Pumpkin Soup for everyone to taste. Since Zhu Yong and Qin Wei weren't too busy at that moment, he also asked them to make some more.

Since everyone was so interested, each person could try a small bowl.

But starting tomorrow, they would have to pay for it.

This was because Shu Yun had already instructed the company to update the menu overnight, adding the universally praised Pumpkin Soup to the top of the soup section.

While Zhu Yong and Qin Wei prepared it, they also garnished the Pumpkin Soup with thinly sliced, rehydrated goji berries to enhance its presentation as much as possible.

"Wow, this is delicious! It tastes just like the one at the Korean-style Grilled Meat restaurant," Chen Yan exclaimed.

She had originally planned to eat cucumbers as a meal replacement but found the Pumpkin Soup equally appealing. Since they're both pumpkin-based, the calorie count should be the same whether it's eaten directly or as a soup, right?

Never mind, I'll just come over tomorrow morning and have three big bowls first, she decided.

"Brother-in-law, what's for breakfast tomorrow? Will there be Pumpkin Soup?"

"Tomorrow morning, it might be steamed Meat Dragon or something similar, depending on what the morning shift chef decides to make," Lin Xu replied. "If there's anything specific you'd like, let me know, and I'll give the morning shift chef a heads-up."

Chapter 496: Lin Ji's Free Meal Event! Junior Brother, Let Me Teach You a Dish to Strengthen the Waist and Replenish the Kidneys!

Meat Dragon?

This delicious Pumpkin Soup paired with Meat Dragon must be very tasty, right? Chen Yan was immediately tempted. Experts say to eat a full breakfast, a good lunch, and a light dinner, so I guess stuffing myself tomorrow morning wouldn't be a problem. Right, let's do that. Worst case, I'll just eat less tomorrow night. My little tummy definitely won't get chubby.

She planned it all out perfectly.

However, when she opened her eyes the next day, she realized it was almost nine o'clock. She had planned to go to bed early and wake up early to have breakfast at Lin Ji, but she had overslept.

Upon checking her phone, she saw a bunch of messages from her cousin:

"AAHHH, Yan Bao, you have no idea how delicious the Meat Dragon tastes with Pumpkin Soup."

"Hurry over. I've saved a bunch for you; I guarantee you'll want more after eating it."

"HAHA, my parents are here too, and they also praised how delicious the Meat Dragon is."

"Old Uncle Yu from next door came over for a meal and insisted on paying thirty yuan. Such a cute old man."

"Professor Liang and the others also came by to eat while out for a walk. Lin Ji's breakfast is really attractive."

"Yan Bao, the breakfast I saved for you got eaten by everyone else. Just keep sleeping; I'll try to figure out how to retract those earlier messages..."

Chen Yan was utterly bewildered.

She was better off not knowing. The thought of everyone else snatching up the delicious food meant for her made her chest tighten with frustration.

That rotten cousin! I hope her boobs sag to her navel!

Lethargically sitting up in bed, Chen Yan prepared to get dressed and out of bed. She planned to wash up and then buy some extra thin and crispy stuffed pancakes from a street vendor to tide her over, waiting until lunch to eat a proper meal at the restaurant.

If my cousin finds out I slept till nine before getting up, there's no telling how she'll tease me.

「At the restaurant.」

After instructing Xu Xinhua, Lin Xu finally heard the system notification:

"Host has completed the teaching training task and obtained one draw for an Excellent Level Basic Cooking Technique. Employee Xu Xinhua has obtained the Superior Level braising dish—Tiger Skin Chicken Feet Cooking Technique. Congratulations, Host."

Superior Level, huh? Though still a fair distance from Perfect Level, at least there's progress. Once I have enough points, I'll exchange them for an upgrade task. Then I won't need to worry about making Tiger Skin Chicken Feet in the shop myself. Right now, I need to save up points to exchange for the Eye of Discrimination. I'll strive to get it by the time we open. That way, even without a Cooking Learning Card, I can at least identify all the different ingredients in a dish and try to cook it myself. I can't rely on the system for every dish; I still need to practice.

Leaving the braising section, Lin Xu went to the reception desk.

At the moment, Song Tiantian was sitting at the computer at the reception desk with Shu Yun, counting the number of membership cards, while Dundun lay beside the computer, seemingly eager to help.

Lin Xu approached, scooped up the little rascal, and asked, "What are you doing so close? Do you want to play with the computer?"

He carried Dundun to the nearby fish tank, one of Dundun's favorite spots. Especially when there were fewer people around, the little guy had almost jumped onto the edge of the tank several times trying to catch fish.

"The bluefin tuna I bought for you today has arrived. It's much tastier than these fish, and it's boneless, so no worries about it getting stuck in your throat."

Upon hearing this, Dundun affectionately rubbed his head against Lin Xu's neck.

Seizing the opportunity, Lin Xu chose to use his prize draw, receiving a fairly useful Basic Cooking Technique:

"Congratulations, Host, on obtaining the Excellent Level Basic Cooking Technique—Steamed Egg."

Steamed Egg? Is this also a Basic Cooking Technique?

After absorbing the experience, Lin Xu realized that all kinds of steamed egg dishes, like Steamed Egg with Brain, Minced Meat Steamed Egg, Abalone Steamed Egg, and others, were all related to the Steamed Egg Technique. That meant, from now on, he could prepare a full range of steamed egg dishes.

Back at the reception desk, Shu Yun, who had finished counting the membership cards, asked, "Boss, there are more and more jokes about you under the Lin Ji's Food topic. Should we issue a statement or something to stop it?"

Although Lin Xu knew the jokes netizens made up were just harmless teasing, the content was becoming more widespread, and the titles increasingly blush-inducing.

Lin Xu chuckled and replied, "It's fine. As long as it increases Lin Ji's popularity, this harmless teasing is okay. With strict internet censorship nowadays, they can only sensationalize the titles a bit... What's the topic's ranking now?"

"Ranked sixth, but it's only a few tens of thousands of popularity points away from fifth place. By this afternoon at the latest, we should be able to break into the top five on the Yanjing Region's topic list."

Not a bad achievement. Though there's still a large gap to first place, with some effort, there's hope.

As Lin Xu was about to head upstairs, he suddenly remembered Old Huang was treating guests that afternoon. This reminded him of the evening's plans, so he said to Shu Yun, "The head chefs from Fishing Platform are coming to eat at the restaurant tonight. See if we have anything suitable here to prepare as a little gift for them. After all, we've poached quite a few people; we need to maintain good relations."

Shu Yun looked at her boss with a light smile. So he knows about poaching from Fishing Platform, huh? Good thing he hasn't been working at Fishing Platform recently; otherwise, those head chefs certainly wouldn't let it go, not even if Chef Xie tried to cover for him. As for the gifts...

Shu Yun thought for a moment and made her suggestion, "If you're not too busy, why not make some Shakima and Horse Hoof Cake now? They're handcrafted and would also represent Lin Ji's sincerity."

"Alright, I'll go upstairs and get started on that right away."

「Evening.」

When the surface of the roasted whole lamb in the oven started to turn rosy, the head chefs from the Fishing Platform also gradually arrived.

Chapter 497: Lin Ji's Free Meal Event! Junior Brother, Let Me Teach You a Dish to Strengthen the Waist and Replenish the Kidneys!

As the host of this gathering, Old Huang had arrived early and was waiting by the door.

Today, not only had he ordered a whole roasted lamb, but he had also brought many fresh ingredients, planning to have the kitchen help process them.

Xie Baomin, holding a thermos, had just entered Lin Ji's gate. Seeing Old Huang, he walked over and quietly asked, "Did you bring the ingredients I asked for?"

"I did, I did! They're all upstairs, all First Class. You can check them out later if you don't believe me... Old Xie, when did you start taking supplements?"

"I don't need that stuff; my Junior Brother asked for it."

What??? Old Huang thought. No way! Master Lin is only in his twenties, and he's already starting to take health supplements? Next time I come across ingredients for replenishing vitality, I'll have to send some more to Lin Ji.

Xie Baomin took a sip of wolfberry water from his thermos, then, looking at a smiling Shu Yun, asked, "How is it, Director Shu? Are you settling in well here?"

"Quite well. Haven't the head chefs been giving you any trouble?"

"They wouldn't dare, not even if they had eight times the nerve! I'm going to go upstairs and have a look; I haven't been here since the renovation."

He went up the stairs, pretending to admire the restaurant's interior. However, his steps quickened as he headed straight for the kitchen on the second floor.

At the kitchen door, he saw Chezai and couldn't help but ask, "Where are the ingredients Old Huang brought?"

"In the storage room. I just checked them. It's all Okra, leek flowers, Chinese yam, and stuff like that. Seems like things middle-aged people would love..."

Xie Baomin whispered, "You can tell by Old Huang's age, right? He's so frail that he gets winded just walking a few steps. That's why he's always thinking about strengthening his back and kidneys."

Chezai clicked his tongue in amazement. "No wonder he was so secretive when he delivered them. Turns out he was getting them for himself."

Upon reaching the storage room, Chezai opened a styrofoam box. It was filled with the ingredients Old Huang had brought.

"Chef Xie, shall I help you move these to the prep area?"

"Sure. I arrived a bit early anyway. I can handle these ingredients."

In the prep area, the two bumped into Lin Xu, who had just come from the pastry department. The Shakima and Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake meant for the head chefs were all ready, even packed in gift boxes.

"Senior Brother, you're here early!"

"I was free and came to see if you needed help... I'll take care of these ingredients. You go and attend to your other tasks."

Lin Xu understood as soon as Xie Baomin said that.

All these ingredients are for strengthening the kidneys and back. Could it be that Senior Brother came over so early because he's been overworking lately and needs to replenish his energy? They say young people don't know restraint. Unexpectedly, these middle-aged men get much wilder than youngsters when they let loose!

Seeing his Junior Brother's teasing smile, Xie Baomin cleared his throat and said, "Junior Brother, if you're not busy right now, let me teach you a dish for strengthening the back and kidneys. It's claimed to be a must-eat for men. Even if you don't need it now, you might later."

Lin Xu was speechless. "..."

Oh, Senior Brother, just because you're feeling weak doesn't mean everyone is, Lin Xu thought. However, even though I don't need this kind of dish, I could cook it for my father-in-law and others. If I learn it now, perhaps my father-in-law might even benefit from it at dinner.

Thinking this, he then said, "Alright then, I'll learn it. Senior Brother, what are you planning to make?"

Xie Baomin took the Okra out of the styrofoam box, opened the bag, and said, "This stuff is dubbed 'a man's gas station' and 'a woman's beauty salon.' It's good for both genders, so you really need to learn this carefully."

This? Lin Xu thought. He didn't like eating Okra; he always felt it was slimy, like it was stuffed with mucus. Unexpectedly, his Senior Brother seemed to really like it. So, he asked, "Senior Brother, what's the most authentic way to cook Okra?"

"Blanch it!" Xie Baomin declared. "I'll teach you right now how to blanch Okra. Although it's touted as a must-eat for men and all that, the method is quite simple—you'll pick it up in no time."

After saying that, he filled a basin with some clean water to wash the Okra. Then, he poured the water out, sprinkled in a handful of flour, and started to rub each piece of Okra.

"Okra has a layer of fine fuzz on its surface, which can easily trap dirt, so it needs to be cleaned thoroughly," he explained. "When washing, you can use flour or salt to rub it. This helps to clean off the fuzz effortlessly."

After rubbing, he rinsed it twice more, then put a pot of water on to boil. For blanching, you always needed to scald it in water.

"The essence of Okra is the mucilaginous slime inside," Xie Baomin continued. "To ensure that the nutrients aren't lost, you should blanch the entire piece without cutting it. That way, the nutrients inside are preserved."

Hearing this, Lin Xu curiously asked, "Can't it be eaten raw then?"

"That won't do. Okra contains oxalic acid, which isn't absorbed well if eaten raw. So, you need to blanch it first; then it's fine to eat. Besides blanching, you can also rub some oil on the surface of the Okra and steam it in a pot for two minutes. This achieves a similar effect to blanching."

Got it, got it! Lin Xu thought.

Once the water was boiling, Xie Baomin added a spoonful of salt and drizzled in some cooking oil.

Lin Xu knew this step well. Salt accelerates the cooking process, and cooking oil makes the Okra's color bright green and appealing.

When the water in the pot was almost at a rolling boil, Xie Baomin added the Okra.

After adding them, he stirred them with a spoon to ensure they heated evenly.

A minute later, he scooped the Okra out and plunged them into cold water to prevent overcooking.

Then, he cut off their stems and arranged them neatly on a plate.

After arranging them, he began to prepare the sauce.

He finely minced garlic, small hot peppers, and ginger. Then, he mixed a sauce with two spoonfuls of Light Soy Sauce, one spoonful of oyster sauce, one spoonful of salt, half a spoonful of sugar, and an additional small spoonful of cornstarch.

He put all these into a bowl, added half a bowl of clear water, and stirred until well combined.

Next, he heated oil in a wok, added the Ginger and Garlic Mince and minced red chilies, and sautéed them until fragrant before pouring in the sauce mixture.

Once it had cooked down and thickened, he drizzled in a little Sesame Oil, stirred it evenly, and then spooned the sauce over the Okra. The dish was now ready.

Just as they finished, Shen Guofu, who was off work, arrived at the kitchen doorway.

Seeing the Okra, he immediately exclaimed, "Wow, this is great stuff! Thanks, Chef Xie. I've been overdoing my workout routines lately and was just thinking about asking Little Xu to cook some Okra for me. If you don't mind, I'll take this and eat it."

With that said, he took the plate from Xie Baomin's hands and strode out of the kitchen.

Lin Xu and Xie Baomin exchanged a look. Both saw a full measure of helplessness in each other's eyes.

"Sorry, Senior Brother, my father-in-law, he..."

"It's okay. We're all men here; I understand. Besides, even without Okra, we have other ingredients. If one wants to 'nourish,' there's no shortage of options."

After saying this, Xie Baomin took out a bunch of leek flowers from the box...

Chapter 498: Shen Guofu: It's strange, the kitchen has been making my favorite dishes all day!

"Senior Brother, do chive stalks also have a kidney-nourishing effect?"

Lin Xu had figured it out; every ingredient Mr. Huang had sent over seemed to possess unique properties, all aimed at energizing middle-aged men.

Xie Baomin said, "Chive stalks are the essence of chives. Their main function is to nourish kidney qi. Sufficient kidney qi provides more energy—it's all interconnected."

Wow! Senior Brother should just go sell health supplements. With that kind of theoretical knowledge, he'd probably become an instant confidant to all those seniors. Who would have thought that the distinguished head chef of the State Banquet at Fishing Platform was actually a health supplement marketing genius, waylaid by his culinary career?

After taking out the chive stalks, Lin Xu saw his Senior Brother take out a small bag of what looked like tiny scallops.

"These are mussels," Xie Baomin clarified. "Very good for the body. Combined with chive stalks, they're simply unbeatable! Let me tell you, this is a health dish I eat every week. Otherwise, do you think my physique would be this strong?"

Lin Xu was momentarily stunned. I really don't think you're *that* strong, Senior Brother. Such blatant self-praise always felt counterproductive, like an anti-advertisement.

However, speaking of the dish itself, it should taste excellent. Fresh small mussels are naturally very flavorful, and chive stalks also have a rich umami. Seafood paired with the umami of plants—double the freshness, double the deliciousness.

As for the health benefits my Senior Brother boasted about... that's not something I need to worry about at my age. With my special abilities, a single night's sleep erases all fatigue. Who needs dietary therapy?

Xie Baomin poured the mussels out and, with a small knife, deftly pried open the mussel shells, quickly extracting the edible meat.

Not all parts of a mussel are edible. The internal organs and excretory parts must be removed; only the remaining meat can be eaten.

"These mussels may look small, but their meat is very tender. A quick stir-fry is all it takes to cook them through, no blanching needed. If you buy frozen mussel meat from the market, it's safer to blanch it first, just in case."

Xie Baomin explained the cooking method as he cleaned them.

After all the mussel meat was extracted, he rinsed it with fresh water and then placed it in a colander to drain.

Next, he took the chive stalks, rinsed them thoroughly with water, trimmed off and discarded the slightly tougher root ends, and then cut the remainder into inch-long sections, placing them in the colander.

With all preparations complete, he began to get the seasonings ready for the dish.

The seasonings were simple: a little minced ginger and garlic to counteract any fishiness, and some red pepper strips for color. Nothing else was needed.

After preparing the ingredients, he set up a wok. First, he seasoned the wok, then added a bit of vegetable oil and a touch of lard.

Mussels and chives are both umami-rich ingredients, so adding a little lard enhances the dish's rich texture, making it even more delicious.

Once the oil was hot, he added the minced ginger and garlic and stir-fried until fragrant.

Next, he tossed in the mussel meat, stir-frying it on high heat for ten seconds. This helped to cook off some of the mussels' moisture, intensifying their umami flavor.

Then, he swirled in cooking wine and Light Soy Sauce along the edge of the wok. After stir-frying to evenly coat the mussels with the seasonings, he added the chive stalks and red pepper strips, along with a small spoonful of salt for seasoning and a few granules of sugar. He continued to stir-fry.

Although chive stalks and chives are very similar, their cooking methods differ slightly.

Chives cook almost as soon as they hit the wok; if not removed quickly, they release liquid, making the dish watery. Thus, preventing chives from becoming watery is a key culinary focus for chive-based dishes.

Chive stalks, however, are cylindrical or quadrangular and take longer to cook than chives, despite also having a high moisture content.

Therefore, when cooking this ingredient, you can't just toss it in the wok and immediately take it out as you would with chives. It requires continuous stir-frying over high heat to ensure the dish remains crisp and tender without becoming watery.

Stir-fry vigorously for over thirty seconds. When the surface of the chive stalks in the wok looks coated in oil and their fresh aroma intensifies, it's time to remove them from the wok and plate them.

"This dish is simple to make and tastes fresh and fragrant. You should practice it more when you're not busy, junior."

After plating the dish, Xie Baomin didn't eat it immediately, nor did he have it sent up to the private room for the guests. Instead, using this dish as an example, he began to explain the key points of stir-frying to Lin Xu.

"When pairing seafood with green vegetables, adding a bit of lard can produce unexpectedly good results. Also, don't salt the green vegetables before they go into the wok. Seafood itself has a natural saltiness, and adding salt too early can make the meat tough."

Lin Xu nodded. I can try making this for my father-in-law next time. Even if it's not perfect, he won't mind. After all, for middle-aged men, the kidney-enhancing and waist-strengthening benefits are often more important than the taste. That's the top priority.

After explaining the key points of preparation, Xie Baomin added another reminder, "This dish should be eaten all at once. Don't leave any leftovers, and don't let it get cold. Otherwise, the fishy taste of the mussels will emerge, and both the flavor and texture will be greatly compromised."

"Alright, Senior Brother, I've noted it down."

As the two of them were chatting, Shen Guofu returned to the kitchen.

"It's tough being a man! The moment they heard that Okra has beautifying and skin-nourishing effects, my wife, daughter, and niece pushed me aside and wouldn't let me have a taste... Huh? Are these chive stalks? Oh, this is great stuff! I'll take this and try it first."

He wasn't aware of the guests being entertained upstairs. He assumed the two "brothers" were preparing dinner for him.

So, without any ceremony, he picked up the freshly cooked plate of Stir-fried Chive Stalks with Mussels and walked off with it. As he was leaving, he even called out for Xie Baomin to join him for a drink.

Walking out of the kitchen, Guofu muttered softly to himself:

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"Today is really something, huh? These little leeks, these baby scallops—they're treasures for giving a man a boost, and I'm already feeling years younger without even eating them."

Xie Baomin was speechless. My junior brother's father-in-law really doesn't see himself as an outsider, does he? But we're all men here; I understand.

Lin Xu chuckled awkwardly. "Senior Brother, this..."

"No worries, no worries," Xie Baomin said. "We may not have other dishes today, but we've got plenty of this kind. Let's continue. It's good for you to learn more too. Don't end up like me—I've been getting complaints from your sister-in-law these past few days."

Lin Xu was bewildered. I didn't ask anything; why are you spilling the beans?

Perhaps realizing he'd let something slip, Xie Baomin frantically tried to make amends. "Don't overthink it, Junior Brother. She's complaining I don't exercise enough. I used to be all muscle, not an ab missing from my eight-pack. But these years, I've neglected exercise, and the eight-pack has united into one."

Stop making it worse, Senior Brother, Lin Xu thought. The more you try to clarify, the murkier it gets.

Xie Baomin lifted a net bag of incredibly large oysters from the foam box and immediately instructed Qin Wei, who had just finished up nearby, "Xiao Qin, steam these oysters for me with minced garlic. Just call me when they're done; no need to bring them over yet."

Right now, he and Lin Xu were standing by the kitchen door. This allowed Shen Guofu to walk in from time to time to carry away the finished dishes. The steaming cabinets were at the very back, beyond the long cooking area, making it hard for outsiders to get there.

After arranging for the garlic oysters, Xie Baomin took out two Chinese yams. These weren't your average yams; they were iron stick yams, grown in the mountains. Though skinny and unattractive, they were tough as rock and known as a potent tonic.

After taking out the yams, he called over to a handyman, "Che Zai, go downstairs and catch me a few loaches—make sure they're the yellow mud loaches, alright?"

Is he planning on making a loach and yam pot? Lin Xu wondered.

As two more plates were carried off, Xie Baomin couldn't resist and decided to go big.

Having arranged for Qin Wei and Che Zai to assist, he then soaked some of the finest black fungus—small bowl-ear fungus—planning to blanch it later and mix it with purple onions for a cold dish. With such fine ingredients, there was no need for complicated preparation; their natural flavor was best.

After soaking the fungus, he took out two pig kidneys.

"Speaking of nourishing the body, it's got to be kidneys," Xie Baomin said. "Sheep kidneys would do too, but since we're having roast whole sheep today, making sheep kidneys would be repetitive. So, I asked Old Huang to get some pig kidneys."

As he was speaking, Che Zai happened to come in carrying several loaches he'd just scooped out of the fish tank.

Hearing this, the honest young man immediately asked, "Chef Xie, didn't you just say that all these dishes were arranged by Boss Huang? How has it turned into you asking him to get them?"

Xie Baomin was speechless. Lucky for you, you're an employee at Lin Ji. If you were working in Building Two, I'd have you washing dishes for a month before we spoke again!

He cleared his throat. "Old Huang kept saying he felt weak and didn't know what would be good to eat. He asked for my advice, so I gave him a menu and told him to prepare according to it... If you're not busy, why don't you help me clean these loaches? Scrub off the external mucus with some salt."

Che Zai agreed and went off to work by the sink.

Meanwhile, Xie Baomin started to prepare the pig kidneys.

「Downstairs.」

Shu Yun had just finished greeting an old customer when she saw Qiu Zhenhua walk in.

She hurried over to greet him. "Hello, Chef Qiu, we meet again... I'm really sorry about last time. It was all Chef Xie's arrangement; I just..."

Qiu Zhenhua waved his hand. "No need to explain. Only that bastard Xie could pull off something like that; it has nothing to do with you. But stepping out now, it isn't as easy as it was at Fishing Platform, is it?"

Back at Fishing Platform, clients were few, benefits were great, and there was even a bonus for the occasional reception task. But now, that ease was gone.

Shu Yun replied with a smile, "When Boss Lin invited me, I considered all that. But then I thought, if I don't take the chance to make a break for it while I'm young, there'll be no opportunity when I'm older."

Shu Yun was only in her twenties, educated and capable. That was why she had been able to get by at Fishing Platform.

But a front desk manager isn't like a chef—there's no "getting better with age" in this role. When she got older, she would likely be shifted away from a frontline position to make room for the younger generation. By that age, even if similar offers came up, one probably wouldn't dare to try. After all, at that stage of life, with elders to care for and children to raise, acting on a whim isn't an option.

After hearing Shu Yun's words, Qiu Zhenhua said with emotion, "Your choice was right. If I'd had your courage back then, maybe by now I'd be the vice president of a listed catering company."

Years ago, a now well-known catering company, which wasn't prominent at the time, had invited Qiu Zhenhua to join them. After much hesitation, he listened to his family's advice and stayed at Fishing Platform. Now, that company had become a behemoth, while he was still just a chef. Although he lived without material worries, looking back, if he had taken that leap of faith, he might now have a net worth of over one billion.

But no one can predict the future. An imprudent decision back then might have led to losing everything, down to his last pair of shorts. So, Qiu Zhenhua merely felt a fleeting sense of "what if," without truly dwelling on any regret about his past decision.

"Chef Qiu, you're an industry leader at the pinnacle of the pyramid. Wherever you go, everyone respects you as 'Master.' That's the kind of status that shows you're a true winner in life," Shu Yun said, comforting him.

Qiu Zhenhua nodded at her words.

But then it occurred to him, I'm at the peak of the pyramid and still get bullied by that damn Xie! This won't do. Tonight, I absolutely have to team up with Old Song and Old He to get that bastard drunk.

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Whenever Qiu Zhenhua thought of Xie Baomin, the elegance that usually adorned him would vanish in an instant.

He looked at Shu Yun and asked,

"Has Old Xie already arrived?"

"Yes, Chef Xie has been here for a while; he's upstairs in the kitchen cooking with our boss."

"Is that so? Then I'll go have a look."

Qiu Zhenhua clomped upstairs. As soon as he entered the kitchen doorway, he saw Xie Baomin teaching Lin Xu the Wheat Blade Technique, often used in stir-frying pork kidneys.

The Wheat Blade Technique is a type of decorative cutting. Angled crisscross incisions are made on the pork kidney, and the slices are then cut every two to three centimeters at a steep angle.

As a result of the heating process, the slices of pork kidney will curl up on their own.

The decorative cuts on top will also separate and spread outward, resembling wheat spikes, hence the name Wheat Blade Technique.

Qiu Zhenhua glanced at the ingredients in the foam box and clicked his tongue, saying,

"Old Xie, Old Xie, just how weak have you been lately, with all these tonic ingredients? I think you should get a thorough checkup at a regular hospital and not delay treating your condition."

Well, even though he didn't know who had prepared those ingredients, he could just pin it directly on Xie Baomin's head.

After all, no one would speak in defense of this guy who had caused so much trouble.

Xie Baomin glanced at him and then said to Lin Xu,

"Pork kidneys have a strong odor. After slicing, they need to be soaked in clear water to remove some of the smell—to prevent these kidneys from donning a pair of gold-rimmed glasses and pretending to be intellectuals."

Qiu Zhenhua: "..."

Where the hell did you learn such "sophisticated" phrases?

Seeing Lin Xu learning to cook kidneys, this executive chef of Building Six did not disturb him but instead commented from the side,

"The key to cooking pork kidneys is controlling the heat. In addition, the sauce must be prepared in advance. Otherwise, the cooked kidneys won't be flavorful and will taste odd, like enjoying a beautiful view and then suddenly running into your senior brother."

"Qiuqiu, you're getting lively, huh?"

"Old Xie, when Old Yin comes back, if you don't make Master's Clear Soup Noodles dish, this matter of you helping Shu Yun set me up isn't over!"

Clear Soup Noodles?

This was the first time Lin Xu had heard of this. Intrigued, he asked,

"What is Clear Soup Noodles, Senior Brother? Is that also an original dish by Master?"

He was aware of Clear Soup Noodles, but given the formal manner in which Qiu Zhenhua mentioned it, it surely wasn't as simple as noodles boiled in clear water. It must be like Qingshui Furong and White Jade Lotus Root Strips, both original creations of their master.

He had already learned two of Master's original dishes.

If he could master this recipe for Clear Soup Noodles, wouldn't that mean he had completed the task for his master's original creations?

That task was linked to two lost dishes.

He needed to find a way to finish it as soon as possible.

"On the day Master retired, he made himself a bowl of noodles..."

Xie Baomin briefly introduced Clear Soup Noodles and then said,

"When Old Yin returns from his travels in the Northwest, I will make this noodle dish that embodies the essence of both pastry and cooking. Be there, Junior Brother, and let's work together to carry forward our master's culinary skills."

"Of course, Senior Brother!"

Even if you hadn't invited me, I would have found a way to get close and see for myself.

From now on, I shouldn't use Perfect Level Cooking Cards carelessly. I must keep at least one in hand so that when Senior Brother cooks, I won't be scratching my head, unable to learn.

Seeing Qiu Zhenhua with nothing to do, Xie Baomin instructed,

"Qiuqiu, if you're not too busy, go and prepare the Iron Stick Yam with Loach soup. We can't expect you to handle difficult dishes, but this refreshing small dish shouldn't be a challenge for you, right?"

"Do you have to be a sarcastic bastard to stay alive?"

Qiu Zhenhua gave Xie Baomin a light kick on the leg and then took the Iron Stick Yams over to the stove to start prepping them.

Meanwhile, the kitchen helper had just finished cleaning the loaches and stood beside Qiu Zhenhua, planning to stealthily learn a thing or two.

Scrub and rinse the pig kidneys twice to remove the blood and gamy odor.

After removing them from the water, place the decoratively scored pig kidneys into a large colander. Squeeze gently by hand to remove excess water, then put them into a basin to begin marinating.

Add Cooking Wine, Light Soy Sauce, pepper powder, egg white, and a little dry starch to the basin. Mix thoroughly by hand and set aside to marinate.

The starch helps lock in moisture, making the pig kidneys more tender and flavorful.

While the kidneys were marinating, Xie Baomin prepared another sauce.

Put salt, sugar, Light Soy Sauce, chopped green onions, pepper powder, and a little corn starch into a bowl, stir it evenly, then set it aside for later use.

"These two sauces seem almost the same. Why use them at two different times?" Lin Xu was somewhat curious. Wouldn't it be okay to just add everything in one go while marinating?

Xie Baomin said with a smile,

"That won't work. If you put in too much sauce at once, the excess moisture will affect the kidneys' shape. Moreover, adding the sauce into the pan at its highest temperature also helps to cool it down slightly, making the kidneys more tender."

When stir-frying the kidneys, the oil temperature in the pan should be over 80%. This high heat will cook the kidneys quickly while also greatly reducing their moisture content.

To prevent the kidneys from losing their tender texture, pour in the sauce right after they take shape in the pan to cool them down and allow the sauce to coat their surface.

Once coated, remove from the pan immediately, without any delay.

The Wheat Blade cuts on the surface of the kidneys aren't just for show; they help the sauce adhere better.

"The process of stir-frying kidneys is very short, about seven or eight seconds only. Once it surpasses nine seconds, the kidneys are basically overcooked, so it's crucial to control the heat."

Although the cooking time is just seven or eight seconds, many chefs spend seven or eight years practicing without mastering it.

This dish demands a high level of Knife Skills, heat control, wok technique, and seasoning—four fundamental skills—and any carelessness can lead to flaws or complete failure of the dish.

Just as Xie Baomin was about to start cooking, he suddenly went to the kitchen doorway to look around.

He was worried that Shen Guofu might suddenly come over and take away the dish he was about to make.

Two dishes had already been taken away.

If another one got taken away, would there be anything left for old Xie to eat?

Well, his junior brother's father-in-law is still eating, so it seems he won't be coming over. Then I can start cooking.

However, just as Xie Baomin went back in, Shen Guofu, who was enjoying stir-fried chive stems with mussels at a distant booth, immediately caught sight of him.

Hm?

Is there a new dish?

Today's dinner is too lavish, isn't it?

We're all practically family here; I can't just wait for Chef Xie and my son-in-law to deliver. I, old Shen, need to be proactive.

He took a bite of the chive stems with his chopsticks and sipped the Liquor that Director Han had only agreed to drink after much persuasion. Then he eagerly headed toward the kitchen.

I wonder what the new dish will be.

I'm looking forward to it!