

Culinary 501

Chapter 501: A Dish of Pork Belly for Each Person! Is this a gas station or an oil field?

In the kitchen, Xie Baomin set up the wok to start cooking.

"Senior Brother, don't we need to prepare side dishes?"

Lin Xu was curious. He remembered that when he ate this dish in restaurants, there would be many side dishes, typically green and red bell peppers, onions, and other ingredients.

Although it looked quite appealing and seemed to be a generous portion on a large plate, once you started eating, you'd realize there weren't many kidney pieces, just a lot of side dishes.

After coating the wok with oil and heating it, Xie Baomin added some more cooking oil.

"Today, I'm making this as a one-pot dish. Aside from scallions, no other side dishes can be added. In restaurants, to lower the difficulty and cost, they cook it in stages. First, they quickly blanch the kidney flowers in oil, then stir-fry the aromatics and side dishes, and finally add the blanched kidney flowers back in, season, and serve."

Making it all in one pot is a greater test of cooking technique.

Chefs in ordinary restaurants generally don't possess such high culinary skills, and since they can't add cost-reducing side dishes to a one-pot preparation, they opt for the method of cooking in separate stages.

Besides kidney flowers, similar dishes prepared this way include fresh liver and chicken gizzards.

After speaking, Xie Baomin placed his hand over the wok to test the temperature. It wasn't quite hot enough. He turned to Lin Xu and remarked, "Sichuan cuisine's Spicy Fried Kidney Flowers is very similar to this. If you want to make it as a one-pot dish, you have to mince Doubanjiang and marinate the kidney flowers with it. That way, the kidney flowers will take shape properly, and the Red Oil will also be rendered out."

Most one-pot dishes are prepared this way.

However, restaurants rarely do this, primarily due to the costs involved. It's more practical for them to add side dishes to reduce costs.

The oil in the wok was finally hot enough.

Xie Baomin poured the kidney flowers into the wok, tossed the small basin aside, and grabbed a towel to hold one of the wok's two small handles. His other hand gripped a ladle, already stirring in the wok to spread out any clumped kidney flowers as much as possible.

Then, one hand shook the wok while the other rapidly moved the ladle, stir-frying the contents.

Under the high heat of the oil, the kidney flowers quickly curled up, and the scored pattern bloomed open.

Once all the kidney flowers had taken shape, their surfaces completely changed color in the hot oil.

At this moment, he poured in the prepared sauce.

He continued to stir-fry rapidly, ensuring the sauce evenly coated the kidney flowers.

Once there was no sauce left at the bottom of the wok, he quickly removed it from the heat and plated the dish.

The entire process took just over seven seconds, yet Xie Baomin handled it with practiced efficiency, without any hint of rush. He even had a moment to glance towards the doorway as he was plating.

Then, he felt a jolt.

He noticed that his junior brother's father-in-law had somehow reappeared.

Oh, Boss Shen, are you planning for a second child? Your demand for these energy-boosting dishes seems even more urgent than for this old Xie.

"Master Xie, your culinary skills are amazing! It's rare to see Stir-fried Kidney Flowers made as a one-pot dish like this. Today has truly been an eye-opener," Shen Guofu said, giving a thumbs-up. This time, however, he didn't reach for the dish on the table.

Seeing Qiu Zhenhua in casual clothes, the big boss realized these dishes might not be for him. Perhaps the chefs from Fishing Platform were here to support their son-in-law. It would be inappropriate to take another dish.

Lin Xu explained to him, "Dad, a supplier has reserved a whole roasted lamb to treat Senior Brother and the others to a meal."

Upon hearing this, Shen Guofu's face flushed red. "My apologies for earlier, Master Xie, those two dishes..."

Chef Xie waved his hand dismissively. "Nonsense, dishes are made to be eaten. Take this plate of kidney flowers too, Boss Shen. In another two minutes, they'll overcook and become tough."

Kidney flowers are an incredibly delicate ingredient. They need to be eaten quickly once cooked, or the residual heat will make them tough, worsening the texture.

Shen Guofu genuinely wanted to try these kidney flowers without the side dishes. But since it was a meal hosted by someone else, he felt he shouldn't impose. He could always ask his son-in-law to cook it for him later.

He was about to refuse when Lin Xu handed him the plate. "Dad, take this and enjoy it. In a little while, I'll make them a dish of Quick-fried Kidney Flowers. The taste will be just as good as the Stir-fried Kidney Flowers."

Quick-fried Kidney Flowers?

Xie Baomin, who had been lamenting the "theft" of another "gas station" dish, suddenly brightened.

"Junior Brother, when did you learn that quick-frying method?"

"Chef Guo taught me during my engagement party."

Back then, Dai Jianli had been teaching the method for Boiling Fish. However, due to his mischief of not turning on the exhaust fan, the kitchen in Building Number Ten became so filled with smoke that no one could enter, and an enraged Guo Weidong had sent him away. The Fried Fish Fillets that Dai Jianli had intended to teach were then "stolen" by the furious Guo Weidong, who taught it instead.

"Since that's the case, show us your skills. When Old Dai arrives later, let him make a dish of Spicy Fried Kidney Flowers as well."

Stir-fried Kidney Flowers, Quick-fried Kidney Flowers, and Spicy Fried Kidney Flowers—these three stir-fried dishes might sound confusingly similar by name, but their flavor profiles are quite different.

Stir-fried Kidney Flowers is a classic Shandong dish, salty and savory with a hint of sweet aftertaste.

Spicy Fried Kidney Flowers is a typical Sichuan dish, numbing and spicy with a rich flavor.

And Quick-fried Kidney Flowers, also a Sichuan cuisine, doesn't use Doubanjiang. Instead, it's prepared with Pickled Peppers or minced chili peppers. Those who prefer a sour taste might even add some pickled ginger and sour radish, making the dish sour, spicy, appetizing, and a perfect accompaniment to rice.

At this point, only two pig kidneys remained in the foam box, hardly enough for so many dishes.

Lin Xu spoke to a kitchen assistant, "Ask Boss Hu to quickly send over some pig kidneys. Don't send too few; we need at least ten."

Hearing that his son-in-law was offering one of his own dishes in exchange and that more pig kidneys were on the way, Shen Guofu took the plate from Lin Xu's hands and hurried back to his seat.

Chapter 502: One Loofah Stir-Fry per Person! Is this a gas station or an oil field?

After taking his seat, he couldn't wait to pick up a mouthful with his chopsticks. The kidney flowers were cut into a wheat spike pattern and coated with a thin layer of sauce, giving them a glossy sheen. As soon as he took a bite, a salty fragrance burst forth in his mouth. The surface of the kidney flowers was tender, smooth, and crisp due to the dry starch coating. It's truly a dish worthy of a State Banquet chef, bringing out the best in this ingredient! He took a bite of the kidney flowers, then picked up his glass to sip a little Liquor. Delightful!

As he was eating, Shen Guofu suddenly remembered the Spicy Fried Kidney his son-in-law wanted to trade with Chef Xie. He couldn't help feeling an insatiable desire for more. I'll definitely have to try it when I have time, he thought. Sour and spicy kidney flowers... just thinking about them makes me want a drink!

「In the kitchen.」

Lin Xu carefully removed the transparent membrane from the surface of the pig kidneys. He then laid them flat on the chopping board and, using a chef's knife, sliced them horizontally, splitting each in two. The series of glands inside the kidneys now lay exposed. These were the source of the kidneys' off-putting smell, so he had to press down on the tender kidney with one hand while carefully slicing the glands away with the knife in the other. The glands had to be completely removed, or the dish would be inedible. After slicing, he washed the kidneys again to ensure no residual smell lingered on their surface from removing the glands. Then, he placed the kidneys on the cutting board and started making decorative cuts. Only after being incised this way could the kidneys truly be called "kidney flowers." Sticking to the wheat spike pattern suitable for pig kidneys, Lin Xu soaked the prepared kidney flowers in fresh water to remove any lingering smell and blood. While they soaked, he went to the storage room to get some Pickled Peppers and pickled ginger, starting to prepare the ingredients for the Spicy Fried Kidney.

As he was busily working, a trainee entered the kitchen carrying a box of pig kidneys, followed by Dai Jianli and Guo Weidong, who had come for the banquet.

"My god, what are all these kidneys for?" Dai Jianli asked, his curiosity piqued upon seeing the kidneys the trainee was holding. He looked at Xie Baomin, then at Lin Xu, and finally asked in a hushed tone, "Who's feeling weak here? Old Qiu?"

Not far away, Qiu Zhenhua, who was making Loach and Chinese yam soup, immediately grabbed his chef's knife and approached. "Old Dai, are you asking for trouble again?"

Although Chef Qiu usually appeared genteel and easy-going, he became furiously indignant whenever someone suggested he was feeling weak.

"Ha, he's getting riled up! Looks like he really is weak," Dai Jianli said, ducking behind Xie Baomin. His mouth, however, didn't stop as he continued to analyze the situation with mock seriousness.

Qiu Zhenhua was speechless. There's no reasoning with such a thick-skinned rascal.

Xie Baomin said, "Old Dai, I just cooked a stir-fried kidney flower dish, and my junior apprentice brother here is preparing Spicy Fried Kidney. Do you want to show off by cooking up a fiery kidney flower dish too?"

"Sure... But why are you making so many kidney dishes? Are we having a kidney flower banquet or something?"

Xie Baomin whispered, "You probably don't know, but Old Huang is feeling a bit down, so we've prepared a bunch of kidney-strengthening ingredients... Weidong, maybe you'd like to show your skills too?"

Guo Weidong glanced at the pig kidneys the trainee had brought in. "Then, I'll make Drizzled Kidney Flowers later."

Drizzled Kidney Flowers is a slightly less common dish. The intricately cut kidney flowers are blanched in water, then served in a shallow dish with a special sauce drizzled over the top. It's refreshing and delicious, particularly suited for summertime consumption.

Lin Xu, busy working, felt a pang of regret. What a great learning opportunity, but I don't have a Cooking Learning Card!

And it wasn't over yet. When He Baoqing from Building One came in and heard that everyone was making kidney flower dishes, he immediately declared he would make Oil-Poured Kidney Flowers. Zhu Yong's uncle, Song Dahai, decided to make Boiled Kidney Flowers. Then came Cold Mixed Kidney Flowers, Blanched Kidney Flowers, Mushroom Soup Kidney Flowers, and Soup-Fried Kidney Flowers. Shen Guofu, already full, felt a surge of excitement hearing all this.

Goodness me, Shen Guofu thought, they say pig kidneys are a man's fueling station. But this table of dishes isn't just a simple fueling station; it's like we've struck oil! I'll definitely have my son-in-law cook them all someday, so Old Shen here can also enjoy the thrill of diving into an oil field!

「Once all the head chefs were present, dish after dish was taken to the private dining room.」

Upon seeing all the kidney flower dishes, the chefs teased each other, all curious about who was feeling under the weather enough to warrant such an array. Each one claimed they felt absolutely fine. Today, it's just roast lamb for me. I won't touch a single bite of kidney flowers, they all seemed to declare.

However, when Lin Xu finished his work and went to toast the chefs, he discovered that the roast lamb had barely been touched. Instead, it was these kidney flower dishes, which they had all claimed they wouldn't try, that the chefs had devoured completely.

As Lin Xu entered, Song Dahai was still rummaging in the serving dish that had held the Drizzled Kidney Flowers. He grumbled as he searched, "Cantonese cuisine really isn't generous. Such a big bowl, all that sauce, and it's gone in just a few bites."

TSK. TSK. TSK.

So, these middle-aged men, who just moments ago claimed they were all in fine form, are actually like this in private? Lin Xu mused.

Qiu Zhenhua was goading Xie Baomin to drink more when he saw Lin Xu enter. He immediately put down his chopsticks and said, "Old Xie, you're in your junior apprentice brother's territory now; you've got to lead the drinking! The brothers here are all waiting to clink glasses with you."

With that, he gave Song Dahai a wink.

Song Dahai raised his glass and said, "That's right! I've always wanted to have a few drinks with Old Xie but never got the chance. Today, even if the King of Heaven himself showed up, this glass I must—"

Before he could finish his sentence, he saw Xie Baomin pulling out a box of cephalosporin from his bag.

Chapter 503: One Person, One Stir-Fried Pork Dish! Is this a gas station or an oil field?

"Ouch, it finally hit me that I forgot to take my medicine... Old Song, what did you say? Even if the Jade Emperor himself showed up, I still had to do what?"

This sneaky guy shook the medicine box in his hand.

Then he opened the box, picked out a white pill, and popped it into his mouth. He didn't even drink any water, just chewed it up and swallowed it raw.

"Oh my goodness, so bitter. Boss, hand me that Pumpkin Soup in front of you so I can wash it down..."

All the people who had been ready to mob him and force him to drink were dumbfounded.

This damn guy, taking his pill in front of everyone on purpose, was really asking for a beating.

But everyone knows you can't drink alcohol after taking cephalosporins.

So, even though they felt like they missed out on an excellent chance to get Xie Baomin drunk, nobody said anything more. They could only wait for the grand opening to plot again.

Somehow, they had to get this damn guy drunk to vent their frustration.

Qiu Zhenhua looked disappointed as he set down his glass.

However, when he saw Dai Jianli gnawing on a lamb rib, his spirits immediately lifted.

Can't get Old Xie drunk? Couldn't we get Old Dai instead?

Just as he was about to speak up, Xie Baomin tossed his medicine box to Dai Jianli.

"Old Dai, haven't you been a bit stuffy these past few days? Take a pill and you'll be fine."

"Oh, that's just perfect. Only Xie Bro really gets me."

Dai Jianli put down the lamb rib, opened the medicine box to look, then took out a pill and swallowed it with a couple sips of water.

These two scoundrels!

Guo Weidong looked at the pair and said speechlessly, "You don't have to resort to pills if you don't want to drink, right? Taking medication when you don't need it isn't good for you."

Xie Baomin and Dai Jianli just laughed it off and then shifted the topic to the opening ceremony on Saturday.

"Junior Brother, this Saturday, all our head chefs and Director Liao from the Dining Department are coming, and a few leaders from the Fishing Platform as well. I'll introduce you to them then."

Besides Head Chef Yin, who had gone to the Northwest for inspiration, all the other head chefs would be there, just to support Lin Xu and show the world the strength and heritage behind Lin Ji's Food.

"Then I'd like to thank Senior Brother and all the head chefs."

Lin Xu lifted his glass and drained it in one go, showing his gratitude with action.

After finishing, he went around and toasted all the chefs in turn.

When it came to Dai Jianli, this chef, whose mouth was greasy from eating and who had no sign of a cold, stealthily slipped the medicine box into the pocket of Lin Xu's chef coat.

After the toasts, just as he stepped outside the private room, Shen Baobao, who was waiting at the door, noticed the half-exposed medicine box poking out from his pocket.

"What's this, Xu Baobao? Cephalosporins? Are you catching a cold?"

"No, this... seems to be the medicine Senior Brother and Chef Dai took."

Lin Xu held it in his hand, examining it as he and Shen Baobao went back upstairs.

The medicine box must have been quite old, as some of the writing had even become blurry. It was only after some effort that he found the expiration date—over a year past due.

This...

Opening the box, he saw a strip of white pills inside.

After taking one out, he realized it was two sizes larger than the average pill.

While he was still puzzled, Shen Baobao, next to him, happily snatched the strip of pills.

"Yay, dairy candy! This was my favorite snack when I was little. Were there kids in the private room just now? Why is someone carrying dairy candy?"

Remembering his Senior Brother's performance earlier, Lin Xu couldn't help but show an expression that was a mix of amusement and disbelief.

"No kids, but a couple of old rascals, indeed."

Shen Baobao took a piece of the dairy candy and tasted it.

"Mm, sour and sweet, with a strong milky flavor. Try some, Xu Baobao."

After saying that, she took out a piece and popped it into Lin Xu's mouth.

Tasting the sour and sweet candy and thinking about how Senior Brother had chewed up the 'medicine' earlier... he really was a performing artist lost to cooking.

Arriving on the second floor, Chen Yan, who was still sipping Pumpkin Soup, said to Lin Xu upon seeing him, "Brother-in-law, are you busy tomorrow morning?"

Tomorrow would be Friday. Dad and Mom are going to drive over, but they wouldn't arrive in Beijing until around three or four in the afternoon. He probably didn't have anything in the morning.

He asked his sister-in-law, "What's up, Sister Yan? Is something wrong?"

Chen Yan said, "I'm planning to visit Grandma this Sunday, and it wouldn't be proper to go empty-handed, so I thought I'd learn to make that Crystal Skin Jelly you mentioned. If I can master it, I'll be able to show off a little in front of my grandma."

"Sure, no problem. It's easy to learn."

Crystal Skin Jelly is simply about blanching the Pork Skin and then steaming it; it's not difficult at all.

By comparison, Lin Xu felt that the dipping sauce was a bit more complicated because it involved the seasoning aspect of cooking. If the proportion of ingredients in the seasoning went even slightly awry, the taste of the dipping sauce could be greatly diminished.

Upon hearing that Chen Yan wanted to learn this, Shen Baobao immediately said, "Then I'll learn it too; you promised me before."

"Are you not working tomorrow?"

"I'm the lunch procurement officer at Tianpeng Audit Firm. It's completely normal for me to inspect food safety issues when visiting lunch vendors, right?"

Lin Xu: "..."

She hasn't learned much in the way of skills, but she sure picked up the official jargon quickly.

He nodded and said, "Alright, I'll teach you both how to make Crystal Skin Jelly tomorrow."

Seeing that her brother-in-law agreed readily, Chen Yan asked excitedly, "Then can you also teach us how to make Crystal Pork Hock? It seems not too different from Crystal Skin Jelly."

You might as well save yourself the trouble. Just deboning is much more difficult than making Crystal Skin Jelly, not to mention preparing the pork skin... It's good to have dreams, but could you please be realistic?

Lin Xu said, "We'll have to wait a bit longer for the Crystal Pork Hock since deboning is quite challenging. If you really want to learn another dish... I can teach you both how to make Minced Meat Steamed Egg. It's easy to get started with that one, and it's hard to mess up."

After acquiring the Steamed Egg Technique, Lin Xu was able to make all kinds of steamed egg dishes.

These dishes are simple, convenient, and much easier to master than Crystal Pork Hock and the like.

Minced Meat Steamed Egg? This is simply fantastic! Both Chen Yan and Shen Baobao's eyes lit up.

"I'll steam a few portions first thing in the morning, so you two can taste it. Having a general idea of the flavor will make it easier to learn."

After Lin Xu finished speaking, he headed down the stairs to check whether there were enough farewell gifts prepared for the head chefs.

No sooner had he left than Chen Yan spoke earnestly to her cousin, "Yueyue, you either wake me up with a phone call tomorrow morning or don't send me a message at all. The message this morning nearly gave me a conniption from frustration."

"Got it, got it. You too, you sleep like the dead. Could it be that last night you... AHEM AHEM..."

I knew it, I guessed right. This brat really knows how to tease. Luckily, my brother-in-law isn't here right now... Looking at Shen Baobao winking and making faces, Chen Yan felt a surge of annoyance.

"Enough, enough, do you think I'm like you two, exercising during the day and 'exercising' at night? I stayed up late watching a drama last night, that's why I didn't get up."

"Yes, yes, I believe you, I believe you. Why don't you go and pay respects to Dundun, Yan Bao? Lele just scored first in his grade again and further widened the gap with the second-place student."

Upon hearing that, Chen Yan couldn't resist curling her lip. "You saying that praying at Baiyun Temple works wonders is more believable than this. Don't say such things too often in the future, lest my brother-in-law start questioning your IQ and consider returning the goods."

"Pfft, believe it or not!"

As the sisters were quibbling, Lin Xu was downstairs, surrounded by a group of customers.

"Boss Lin, can we get a share of these Shakima and Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake? We'd love to try them."

"Exactly, it's been so many days, shouldn't they be on sale by now?"

"Hurry it up, and don't forget to sell the other snacks, as well. We've been waiting to try them!"

"Boss Lin, can you give us a definite answer? When can we buy these snacks?"

"..."

Lin Xu hadn't anticipated the customers to be this actively enthusiastic.

He said, "These snacks are prepared for the head chefs from Fishing Platform. They're having a gathering upstairs. How about this: our shop will make a hundred boxes of Shakima and a hundred boxes of Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake tomorrow. If you want them, come back tomorrow."

He had originally planned to start selling the snacks after the opening celebration was over.

He hadn't expected the customers to be so proactive and enthusiastic.

After making a promise to the customers, Lin Xu immediately took out his phone and began to check the hot topic rankings for Lin Ji's Food...

Chapter 504: The Emotional Expert Makes a Second Comeback! The Secret to Delicious Minced Meat Steamed Eggs!

Thanks to the fervent creations of meme-loving netizens, the topic of Lin Ji's Food swiftly climbed to the fifth spot on the Yanjing Region's topical chart.

Upon opening the topic of Lin Ji's Food, it had turned into a sea of comedic skits.

There were all kinds of bizarre stories, mixing elements of time travel, fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, cultivation, martial arts, post-apocalyptic settings, history, and primeval myths. These attracted numerous online writers seeking inspiration.

Looking at the like rankings, the top spot already had over one hundred thousand likes.

Driven by curiosity, Lin Xu clicked to see the content of the skit, but he was stunned by the first line:

"Boss Lin's college entrance exam scores were not so promising..."

Lin Xu: ?????

Can't you guys produce something normal for once?

He thought there would be some explosive content next, but the second line of the skit took a sudden turn:

"So, Boss Lin went to Mount Tai, hoping to burn some incense to change his luck. But just as he reached the summit, nine giant dragons descended from the sky, pulling an enormous Ancient Bronze Coffin..."

What the heck!

This is turning into a Heavenly Cover storyline?

Indeed, watching those meme-creating YouTubers is just for fun. The real meme creators are the netizens.

He scrolled further. In just a few hundred words, the skit bizarrely mixed "Ah Bin," "Heavenly Cover," "Journey to the West," "Heavenly Dragon Eight Trigrams," "Battle Through The Heavens," "Sword Coming," "Master of Mysterious," and multiple other well-known novels.

One can't help but admire this guy's story-building ability—smooth plot transitions, natural progressions. No wonder it's number one in the like rankings.

But when he saw the author's name clearly, he couldn't help but pause for a moment.

[High Priest of the Meow Meow Sect]

Was this... written by that girl, Lele?

The teachers at Haidian Middle School are really dropping the ball, aren't they?

Can't they put a little academic pressure on this girl?

Upon seeing her boss reviewing the skits under the Lin Ji's Food topic, Shu Yun said with a smile,

"Lele wrote dozens of skits; this one has the highest number of likes. Colleagues from both the company and the store have also written skits. Some are funny, some not, but everyone is contributing to the topic's popularity."

Lin Xu glanced at the delighted-looking general manager.

Smiling so happily, you really enjoy the thrill of roasting the boss, huh?

He didn't mind the employees doing this.

It not only relieved the employees' stress but also enhanced the topic's popularity—it was the best of both worlds!

Other companies might need to offer bonuses to get their employees to post, but Lin Ji's employees posted voluntarily, making it a far more cost-effective approach by comparison.

Returning upstairs, Lin Xu went to the pastry section and started directing everyone in making Shakima.

Although the process of making Black Sugar Shaqima was complex, the dough-rolling part was much simpler than hand-rolled noodles, manageable by almost anyone with a bit of cooking technique.

"Are we going to sell Shakima, Boss?"

"If the customers want to buy them, we can't refuse to sell."

Lin Xu poured low gluten flour suitable for making Shakima into a large basin and began to beat eggs into it, mixing the flour with egg, fats, and sugar to form a dough.

While he was busy, Shu Yun contacted Dou Wenjing on the first floor:

"The boss got excited and wants to sell a hundred boxes of Shakima and a hundred boxes of Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake. Director Dou, please quickly contact the factory to send over some of Lele's newly designed packaging boxes. We can't delay their use for tomorrow."

For sending gifts to some regular customers, the store did have some gift boxes.

But that was nowhere near a hundred boxes.

After making the promise to the customers, Lin Xu casually left, but Shu Yun, as the general manager, couldn't just shirk her responsibilities. She had to quickly arrange for the packaging boxes.

Additionally, she needed to have some exquisite cards printed to include, with a friendly reminder on them.

This type of homemade delicacy, which contained no preservatives, had to be consumed quickly to avoid the risk of molding.

After arranging these, just as Shu Yun was about to play with Dundun for a while, Song Tiantian suddenly approached:

"Director Shu, I have something I'd like to ask your advice on."

"What's up, Tiantian? Just tell me what's on your mind."

"I want to help someone lose weight. Where do you think I should start?"

Song Tiantian had pondered long and hard, feeling it was quite a challenging task to help Wei Qian lose weight.

Firstly, dieting was out of the question. The guy spent his days in the kitchen, and he could fill his stomach just by tasting a few dishes whenever he was hungry. Dieting was wholly ineffective for him.

As for physical exercise...

Chefs are already quite exhausted daily. Adding physical training would probably make Wei Qian lose his temper instantly—wrecking my plan to help him lose weight.

After much deliberation, she decided to ask Director Shu for advice.

Director Shu is several years older than me and is more knowledgeable and experienced. Surely, she would know what to do.

But then Shu Yun: ?????

You don't ask the person who needs to lose weight, but you come running to ask me?

But wait... helping someone lose weight?

Shu Yun seriously thought about who in the store might be a good candidate for weight loss, and Wei Qian's chubby figure involuntarily popped into her head.

So...

Is Tiantian launching a love offensive?

Way to go!

Next time Wei Qian argues with the reception staff, I'll just let Tiantian handle him!

To ensure Song Tiantian's success in winning the... oh, no, capturing the chef, Zhuge Shuyun mentally shook her non-existent feather fan and devised a strategy:

"You could invite him to cycle home together on shared bicycles after work. Maybe have him give you a ride... ah, never mind. Considering your builds, it's better if you each ride your own bike. Exercising on the way home from work would be perfect for losing weight."

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This remark made Song Tiantian's eyes light up.

That's right! She lived on the same subway line as Wei Qian. Although they were several stations apart, biking wouldn't be a problem at all.

"Then how should I approach him, Boss Shu?"

Having decided to ride a bicycle, Song Tiantian faced a new problem. Even Shu Yun found this one tricky. She had experienced a naive romance in college, but that was years ago.

Furthermore, the romantic strategies from her student days couldn't simply be replicated, or they would surely backfire.

As the two exchanged hopeless looks, Chen Baiwan, fully satiated, sauntered down from upstairs, heels clicking and drawing glances with her poised demeanor.

Today, Chen Yan wore an off-shoulder dress in tender green. A dark ribbon tied around her waist not only highlighted her slender figure but also conveyed an unburdened, neat appearance.

Indeed, when it came to attire, Boss Chen always had it nailed.

Upon seeing her, Shu Yun was struck by inspiration.

Tiantian and I are novices, but Boss Chen is an expert, reputed to be an emotional guru even lauded by the boss's wife.

If she's an expert, then helping Tiantian win over Wei Qian should be a piece of cake.

With that thought, Boss Shu approached and whispered, "Boss Chen, I have a favor to ask for your expert advice."

"What's up?"

Soon, Chen Yan—the 'Emotion Expert'—had successfully joined their group of amateur advisors, taking a central role without any objections.

"Let's keep this under wraps for now and craft a perfect plan before we execute it," she insisted.

Recalling the chaotic scene in the group chat when Panda pursued Wu Kexin, with everyone throwing in their ideas helter-skelter, Chen Yan decided to personally craft a strategy for Song Tiantian this time.

"Don't worry, if I can't land you Wei Qian, I'll hire someone to knock him out and deliver him to your door," she declared fiercely.

This threat startled Song Tiantian, "I didn't say I was chasing him, I just wanted to help him lose some weight."

"You're helping him slim down and not taking the opportunity? Slimming down a guy like that is almost like giving him a facelift. You wouldn't want some vamp to take advantage later, would you?"

After delivering her earnest advice, Boss Chen clicked her heels and strode out.

She needed to return and sink into a bathtub filled with milk and petals to thoroughly devise Song Tiantian's boyfriend-catching plan. This time, without her cousins causing trouble, she was certain it would be a success.

[It was just past six in the morning.]

Lin Xu arrived at the store on time, holding Dundun.

The morning chef asked, "Boss, are we having Pumpkin Soup and Meat Dragon for breakfast again?"

"Switch the Meat Dragon to buns and beef patties today. It's a good chance for you guys to practice making these flour-based items. If they turn out well, we'll add them as staples on the menu."

In other restaurants, morning chefs disliked preparing breakfast.

Colleagues complained about the taste, and the boss fretted over the cost, unlike at Lin Ji, where breakfast was only for staff but came without budget constraints.

They could even hone their cooking skills while preparing it.

Such opportunities were hard to come by.

After giving his instructions, Lin Xu fetched several large bags of Horse Hoof Flour from the storage room, planning to make use of the quiet morning hour in the steaming room to prepare a hundred portions of the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake.

Using the steamer was relatively easier for making Horse Hoof Cake. The steamer could accommodate extra-large trays. This allowed various colors of Horse Hoof Paste to be spread out evenly and steamed layer by layer, resulting in large portions of Horse Hoof Cake.

A few cuts were all it took to pack numerous boxes.

While busy, he noticed Shen Baobao yawning as she walked in, her eyes barely open, relying on the walls to prevent herself from tripping.

"Baobao, why are you up so early?"

Lin Xu was curious. Usually, that girl couldn't be woken up even if you pulled off her covers, but now she had come to the store on her own initiative.

With a gait like Ke Zhen'e's, it was a testament to her superb sense of balance that she hadn't toppled over.

"I'm so mad at Yan Bao. She kept calling me to wake up for breakfast and said she'd come flip my covers if she couldn't find me here."

Lin Xu: "..."

That's karma for bombarding her with messages yesterday morning. Serves you right!

Now that his Baobao was awake, Lin Xu wiped his hands and said, "I'll steam some eggs for you. It's time to start fattening up for the fall, and my Baobao needs to fatten up a bit too."

"Hmm... I only want to stick close to you. Let Yan Bao do all the fattening up. With her short legs and flat chest, she needs a big belly to balance things out."

Lin Xu burst into laughter at the comment.

Luckily, his sister-in-law wasn't around, or she would've surely exploded in anger at such a statement.

He took a small piece of front leg meat, cleaned it and removed the skin, then minced it. He then added salt, Light Soy Sauce, sugar, oyster sauce, and pepper to marinate it briefly.

After marination, he placed the mince into a deeper bowl, covered it with a lid, and set it in the steamer to cook.

There are several ways to steam minced meat with eggs, and Lin Xu chose one of the simpler methods.

After setting the mince to steam, he cracked the eggs into a large bowl, added a pinch of salt, and beat them with chopsticks before incorporating a small bowl of warm water.

Steaming eggs alone can result in a less tender texture. Adding clear water helps.

The optimal ratio of water to egg liquid is 1.5:1; this ratio yields the most tender steamed eggs that jiggle just like pudding.

After mixing thoroughly again, he strained the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve to remove surface foam.

After the mince had steamed for a full eight minutes, he took the small bowl out of the steamer. Once he removed the lid, a savory, fragrant aroma wafted from the bowl.

Shen Baobao, who had been nodding off, suddenly perked up and hurried over to ask,

Chapter 506: The Emotional Expert Makes a Second Comeback! The Secret to Delicious Minced Meat Steamed Eggs!

"What a delicious smell! Can we eat now?"

She saw the minced meat steamed in the basin and couldn't help swallowing.

Lin Xu took a small spoon, stirred the minced meat in the basin, then filtered the beaten egg liquid through a fine sieve into it. This allowed the meat, which was steamed until just cooked, and the egg liquid to mix together fully.

The steamed egg made this way, with the fresh fragrance of the eggs and the rich aroma of the meat combined, might not have looked the best, but its flavor and texture were superb.

Another method involved not stirring the meat but covering it with the egg liquid; this was called meat cake steamed egg.

Although it might have looked slightly better, the fragrance didn't spread evenly and wasn't as good as when the minced meat was stirred before steaming.

Besides these methods, one could also steam the egg custard separately. After steaming, a spoonful of minced meat, stir-fried with dark soy sauce, light soy sauce, table salt, and sugar, could be poured over it. This version had a higher aesthetic appeal but was more troublesome to make.

Although for Lin Xu it was as simple as drinking cold water, for Shen Baobao, who had absolutely no cooking skills, and Chen Yan, it was as challenging as asking a junior high student to learn advanced mathematics.

This was a classic case of asking too much of them.

"Xu Bao, why don't we just mix the minced meat and the egg liquid together and steam it?"

Shen Baobao yawned and leaned her head on Lin Xu's shoulder.

Being close to Xu Bao just feels so reassuring!

Lin Xu said, "If you steam them together, the steamed egg is likely to have a fishy smell, especially if the meat isn't marinated thoroughly or if the pork isn't fresh. By steaming them separately—first steaming the minced meat until it's just cooked, and then the eggs—you can avoid that problem."

Lin Xu briefly explained, then covered the small basin with its lid and started steaming again.

"Why cover it with a lid?"

"This way, the steamed custard will have no air pockets."

After speaking, Lin Xu chopped some scallions, which would be sprinkled on the steamed egg at the end.

By this time, the steamed buns, beef patties, and Pumpkin Soup were already done.

He brought out some dishes. Just as Shen Baobao was about to sit down to eat, Chen Yan appeared, dressed in a plaid shirt, jeans, and thin Doc Martens.

Shen Baobao glanced at her outfit. "Are you preparing to go work as a lumberjack in the Northeast Forest?"

"Tsk, you clueless fool who doesn't understand fashion."

"Right, I don't understand fashion, I don't get matching, and I'm not even good at makeup... But I have Xu Bao, such a perfect husband. Annoying, isn't it?"

Chen Yan was speechless.

Every time I try to mock my cousin, those mocking words quickly turn into bullets shooting back at me. If only my cousin couldn't speak so well... tsk tsk, wouldn't that be nice.

Lin Xu went back to the kitchen.

Before long, he opened the steamer and took out the small basin from inside.

As he lifted the lid, the aroma of eggs and meat instantly wafted out. Once the steam dissipated, the tender yellow egg, now solidified, could be seen inside. Some broth floated on the surface—the meat juices from steaming.

The rich meat scent at this moment was coming from this broth.

Although the egg was already steamed, it couldn't be eaten just yet.

It needed additional seasoning to take the taste and texture of the steamed egg to another level.

He drizzled a bit of Steamed Fish Sauce over the surface of the steamed egg and then sprinkled some chopped scallions. Finally, he poured a little hot oil over it, causing a rich, fresh aroma to instantly rise.

It was ready to eat.

Lin Xu brought the prepared steamed egg with minced meat outside. Shen Baobao, who was eating a bun, and Chen Yan, who was sipping Pumpkin Soup, both turned their heads.

This rich, savory, and eggy aroma... it's too tantalizing, isn't it?

"Brother-in-law, is this the steamed egg with minced meat you said you'd teach us to make last night?"

"Yes. Try it and see how it tastes."

No sooner had he finished speaking than Chen Yan and Shen Baobao took their spoons, originally used for the Pumpkin Soup, and gently scooped into the egg custard. They carved out trembling pieces of steamed egg, which even had a drizzle of Steamed Fish Sauce on the surface.

As they put the steamed egg into their mouths, the sisters' eyes widened. "Wow, it's so savory! The freshness of the egg envelops the aroma of the meat, and you can even taste the tiny pieces of minced meat inside. This is just perfect!"

"Brother-in-law, I want to learn how to make this!"

Lin Xu took Shen Baobao's spoon and scooped a bit to taste. He was very pleased with the tender and smooth texture, the rich egg flavor, the delicious taste, and the flavorful minced meat.

"After we finish breakfast, I'll make the hundred orders of Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake for the customers. Then I'll teach you how to make Crystal Skin Jelly and steamed egg with minced meat. Once you've mastered the technique for steamed egg, you'll be able to make all sorts of steamed egg dishes yourselves, like Okra Steamed Egg, Shrimp Steamed Egg, Steamed Milk Egg, Steamed Egg with Brain, Sausage Steamed Egg, and so on."

The preparation for these types of steamed egg dishes was quite similar.

As long as you got the ratio of egg to water right, strained it once before putting it in the pot, and covered the container with a lid, you could make tender and smooth steamed eggs.

With the steamed egg technique mastered, creating other dishes would be a breeze.

Listening to her brother-in-law's explanation, Chen Yan always felt that what he described as simple was on a completely different level from her understanding.

When Lin Xu returned to the kitchen to get busy after breakfast, Wei Qian and the others had arrived at the shop by subway. They were now sitting in the booth area, eating breakfast and chatting about food.

Seeing this chubby little guy chatting away while eating, Chen Yan couldn't help but think of the favor Song Tiantian had asked of her.

Yes, after last night's meticulous planning, Chen the Strategist had come up with a brilliant idea.

However, with the grand opening celebration imminent, it wasn't the right time to implement it.

She planned to arrange for Song Tiantian to make her move after the celebration, aiming to capture this little chubby fellow in one fell swoop and allow Song Tiantian to bring home her prize.

「Not far away.」

Wei Qian took a bite of his bun and whispered to Zhu Yong beside him, "I don't know what's going on today. When I first walked in, President Shu kept looking at me. Now that I've sat down to eat, President Chen is also staring. Do I have toothpaste on my face?"

"Nope... Could it be that President Shu and President Chen both want to lose weight, so that's why they're looking at you?"

Wei Qian elbowed his companion and mumbled to himself, "Do you think it's because they saw that joke I wrote last night before bed? Is that why they're reacting like this?"

"What joke?"

"The one I wrote anonymously: 'Beautiful Woman Throws Herself into His Arms, Boss Lin Adamantly Doesn't Refuse!'"

"Not... not refusing?"

Zhuang Yizhou spat his mouthful of Pumpkin Soup into the nearby garbage bin.

The nerve of him, actually spreading stories about the boss starting a harem! If that got out, the boss would flay him alive. I've heard he's pretty skilled at butchering pigs.

Zhu Yong took a bite of his bun. Just as he was about to join in with some teasing, Wei Qian said, "Less yapping from you. You're always so henpecked you don't even dare to fart. Isn't that pathetic? If it were me... three punches, and she'd be as docile as a kitten!"

Chapter 507:: Master Crystal Dishes in One Go! The Special Gift from Parents!

「9 a.m.」

Lin Xu had finished making the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake he promised his customers. Together with the Black Sugar Shaqima he made last night, all the snacks were now completed.

The Shaqima was already cut into small pieces, wrapped in special food-grade wax paper, and then each piece was placed in specially crafted boxes.

Last night, when Dou Wenjing heard Shaqima was being made, she had her company's videographer come over immediately to shoot the process. This morning, they edited it into a one-minute video and posted it on Lin Ji's Food's official account. This allowed customers to see the handcrafted snack-making process firsthand.

As soon as it was posted, netizens started commenting that they were tempted.

"Is it really good to post this early in the morning?"

"I'm not someone who likes Shaqima, but I still found myself drooling."

"I could have stayed in bed until eleven, but this Shaqima made me order takeout—I hold Lin Boss responsible for making me gain weight!"

"I'm not interested in Shaqima, but that black sugar looks too tempting. Can I buy it in the store at noon?"

"I heard there's also Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake today. Has Lin Boss finally realized he's a businessman?"

"..."

In the kitchen, seeing these comments, Lin Xu said to the company's photographer, "Strike while the iron's hot. Let's get the video of making the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake out as well. Try to post a video of the kitchen cooking every day. It doesn't always have to be me; it can be other chefs as well."

As she sipped on her Pumpkin Soup, Dou Wenjing nodded in agreement, "Okay, okay, we got it... This Pumpkin Soup is so delicious. I regret moving the company away. If we were still across the street, I could have popped in for some tasty bites on a walk."

Shu Yun laughed, "It's better to be a bit further away. I've already gained a pound these last few days. Having a boss who excels at cooking is a sweet burden to bear."

At this moment, the kitchen was already bustling. Lin Xu, seeing Shen Baobao and Chen Yan in chef's outfits taking selfies nearby, said, "Shall we start?"

"Okay, okay, coming! Master Chen, is my hat on right?"

"It's on right. Master Shen, can you check mine too? My hat isn't crooked, is it?"

These two clowns were only learning how to make Crystal Skin Jelly but had asked Shu Yun for new chef's outfits and even specially donned the tall hats of a head chef. After changing, they instantly exuded the aura of beautiful chefs.

The method for making Crystal Skin Jelly was truly simple. The Pork Skin they bought this time was mechanically scraped, so all the bristles and subcutaneous fat had already been removed. Therefore, Lin Xu didn't have to get involved himself and simply directed the two to start the process.

"Take out the Pork Skin, blanch it briefly, and keep boiling until you can pierce it easily with a chopstick."

Crystal dishes utilize the gelatinous nature of Pork Skin to create their texture. Aside from Shandong cuisine's Crystal Pork Hock, there's also Huaiyang's Crystal Pork and Sichuan's Crystal Trotter, among others. Although regional methods vary, they are all quite similar.

After the Pork Skin was blanched and cooked through, it was removed from the pot and placed in cold water to cool. Then, using a knife, they scraped off any residual fat from underneath the Pork Skin and removed any remaining bristles.

For those with obsessive-compulsive disorder, this was a very satisfying experience.

Chen Yan, holding a pair of tweezers from the kitchen, even reminisced about tweezing her eyebrows at the beauty salon while removing the bristles.

After scraping and cleaning, the Pork Skin was put back into hot water to rinse off any surface impurities, then the water was drained off, and the Pork Skin was cut into strips.

"This Pork Skin is like a rubber band. How should I cut it, Xu Bao?"

Lin Xu had decided to teach them Crystal Skin Jelly, considering their poor cooking fundamentals. However, he hadn't expected them to struggle even with chopping; they were clueless about how to exert force with a kitchen knife.

He said, "Laying it flat like this does make it hard to start cutting. You can roll the Pork Skin up and cut, which makes it easier to cut it finely."

Lin Xu demonstrated for the two and taught them the correct way to hold a knife, finally helping the clumsy apprentices master the use of a kitchen knife.

"Wow, rolling it up makes it so much easier to cut—amazing!"

"Exactly, cooking is truly vast and profound. I, Head Chef Chen, still have so much to learn."

"As do I, Head Chef Shen. I must learn humbly to further develop and glorify the art of cooking."

Lin Xu himself hadn't known this cutting technique for long. He learned it while studying how to make Steamed Sea Bass under the guidance of his master, Grandpa Gao. It was then he understood the technique of splitting scallions to extract the Scallion Core, then rolling them up to cut into fine strips.

This method not only worked for slicing scallions and Pork Skin, but also for cutting kelp, dried tofu, and tofu skin, among other thin ingredients.

After the Pork Skin was cut, it needed to be placed in a basin with cooking salt, baking soda, and hot water for repeated scrubbing to enhance the crystal effect.

This step entirely cleaned the surface impurities off the Pork Skin, making the final skin jelly as clear as crystal while also making the Pork Skin tender and white.

After scrubbing for two minutes, the water in the basin turned muddy.

Pouring in fresh water and washing repeatedly, they continued until the water in the basin was clear and no longer murky.

Then, they drained the water and put the Pork Skin strips into a porcelain basin. They poured in half a basin of spring water, added Scallion and Ginger and salt, covered the basin, and placed it in a steamer to steam.

"Why use spring water?"

"This helps achieve a higher degree of transparency in the jelly."

After explaining, Lin Xu checked the messages his mother had sent on his phone.

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She and her dad had set off from their hometown at five in the morning. Having already covered half the journey, they expected to arrive in Beijing around three in the afternoon.

After reading the message, he said to Wei Qian, "My parents will arrive around three. Leave some food in the kitchen; make sure there's something to eat when they get here."

"Don't worry, I definitely won't let your uncle and aunt go hungry."

「An hour later.」

The Pork Skin had been thoroughly steamed.

He carefully took out the porcelain bowl containing the Pork Skin from the steamer. After lifting the lid, a distinct pork fragrance wafted out from the bowl. He carefully removed the Scallion and Ginger; the water in the bowl was still clear, and the Pork Skin had swelled slightly and turned white.

"Can this really set? Should we add some Agar?" As a self-proclaimed fruit curd expert, Shen Jiayue was somewhat skeptical that this pork skin jelly would set, as it looked too clear, just like a bowl of cold water.

Lin Xu laughed and said, "Don't worry, it will definitely set, but it won't look good if it sets like this. Let me teach you a way to improve its appearance."

He brought over several white porcelain bowls, wiped them dry, then placed two blanched broccoli florets at the bottom of each. Then, using chopsticks, he carefully removed some of the Pork Skin from the bowl, placed it loosely around the broccoli, and ladled the clear water from the bowl over it until it was about eight-tenths full.

Apart from broccoli, ingredients like red pepper strips or radish slices could also be placed in the jelly, which would look much more inviting once set.

Lin Xu guided them on how to arrange the Pork Skin mixture in bowls, similar to Crystal Pork Hock, and then put it in the cold storage to cool and set.

"The knack for crystal-like dishes is all in this. You two should practice more. When setting it in the bowls, you could vary it up, like using marinated Chicken Feet to make crystal chicken feet, or blanched Okra to make crystal okra; all are possible."

Shen Baobao's eyes lit up. "Can you make crystal bitter melon?"

Lin Xu was rendered speechless.

She made bitter melon curd the last time she learned about fruit desserts, and now that she's just learned how to make Crystal Skin Jelly, she wants to make crystal bitter melon? Baobao, your filial piety is really... something else.

He then said, "Theoretically, yes, but I don't recommend doing that. Otherwise, if Mom and Dad get on your case, I'm not getting involved."

"HAHAHA, don't worry, don't worry. I was just asking casually."

It's fine if Mom and Dad don't like bitter melon, Shen Baobao mused. However, Grandpa often mentions that bitter melon is good for health. He would really love the crystal bitter melon I make, right? I need to find some time to make it secretly at home and give Grandpa a surprise!

Mr. Han, who was reading patient reports at the Jishuitan Specialist Clinic, had no idea that he was already being targeted by his granddaughter.

Before lunch, Lin Xu taught the two chefs how to make Steamed Egg.

Compared to the time-consuming Crystal Skin Jelly, the quick and showy Steamed Egg was well-received by Chef Shen (Shen Baobao) and Chef Chen (Chen Yan). Frequently enjoying the dishes made by Lin Xu, they even creatively innovated on the hot oil finishing step.

For instance, when Chen Yan made Steamed Egg with Okra, she thought the taste of Okra and Egg was too bland, so she chose the more aromatic lard for the hot oil finish, which earned her praise from several chefs in the kitchen. And when Shen Baobao made Steamed Egg with Chicken Breast, she also chose to enhance the flavor with chicken oil. When the two were making Steamed Egg with Shrimp, they even had Lin Xu bring over the shrimp oil before the dish was fully ready.

Clearly, they had grasped the key to seasoning Steamed Egg.

"It turns out cooking isn't that hard!" Chen Yan, enjoying her own steamed egg custard, planned to head home in the afternoon to show off her skills to her parents and also make some Crystal Skin Jelly to put in the fridge.

Meanwhile, Shen Baobao kept sending messages to Chen Meijuan, "Mom, when will you arrive? I can't wait to cook something delicious for you and Dad."

Indeed, after learning to cook, the first thing she thought of was showing off her skills in front of her parents-in-law. Luckily, Shen Guofu and his wife weren't around; otherwise, they would have once again regretted not having a second child.

「At three in the afternoon.」

A Toyota Land Cruiser Prado with Yinzhou license plates pulled up in front of the store.

When taking over the scenic area, because there were no proper roads in the mountains at that time, the family's Honda couldn't be driven there, so Lin Hongqi had switched his car to this second-hand Prado. This SUV, commonly called 'Overbearing' in China, had strong power and performance, making it most suitable for mountain terrains and various rough roads.

Stepping out of the car and looking at the imposing facade of Lin Ji's Food, Lin Hongqi's fatigue vanished instantly.

"This store looks really impressive!"

"Indeed, our son is achieving more and more."

After getting out of the car, the couple opened the trunk. They didn't take the apple cider vinegar that had been jostled throughout the journey; instead, they retrieved a plastic box from inside the car, near one of the doors.

The box emitted a strong, pungent smell.

"Are they still alive?"

"Still alive! Second Brother is really incredible; he caught so many wild softshell turtles without anyone noticing."

Learning that Lin Hongqi and Chen Meijuan were coming to Beijing to attend Lin Ji's opening ceremony, Chen Meiliang, Chen Meijuan's second brother, had given them a bag of recently caught wild softshell turtles the previous night. For Chen Meiliang and the people at the scenic area, these weren't anything rare. Living by the reservoir, they could simply set a few traps whenever they felt like eating them and easily catch some.

But for city dwellers, it was a rare ingredient. Lin Hongqi could even imagine the expressions on Shen Baobao's parents' faces when they saw these turtles.

He carried the box towards the store entrance.

Chapter 509: Master Crystal Dishes in One Go! The Special Gift from Parents!_3

Chen Meijuan closed and locked the car door. Just as she was about to help Lin Hongqi open his, Lin Xu emerged from the store, followed by Shen Guofu and others.

Upon learning that his in-laws were arriving, Old Shen had immediately canceled the afternoon's board meeting.

Nothing was more important than welcoming his relatives.

They had traveled all this way, clearly tired from the journey, and even brought the fruit vinegar his wife and niece had been longing for. It was only right and proper to greet them warmly.

"Brother Lin, you must be exhausted from the long journey."

"Oh, Brother Shen, you're here too! It wasn't too tiring; the highway made for a convenient trip."

Shen Guofu was about to help move the plastic crates when he caught a strong fishy odor. "What have you got there, brother?" he asked curiously.

"I wasn't sure what to bring, so I brought some wild soft-shelled turtles that Xiaoxu's second uncle caught these past few days for you all to try."

Wild soft-shelled turtles!?

Shen Guofu's eyes lit up. Gosh! This is some great tonic! Brother Lin really gets me. Knowing that I've been feeling a bit weak lately, he brought such nutritious ingredients... If we weren't already in-laws, I'd insist on becoming sworn brothers with him!

He was about to take the box and carry it inside when he realized it was quite heavy.

This pleased Old Shen. It seemed there was a good quantity of turtles.

Zhu Yong and Wei Qian, ever observant, noticed Shen Guofu struggling slightly and quickly stepped in to help lift the crate.

Lin Hongqi instructed, "First, take them out and check if any are dead. We can't eat dead turtles."

After the two carried the crate inside, Lin Xu turned to his parents and asked, "What else is in the car? Let's bring everything down now, so the heat doesn't cause any problems later."

Although it was nearly September and, according to the traditional Chinese solar terms, past the End of Heat, the weather remained scorching. The intense sunlight could even melt some plastic items left in a car.

Soon, all the bottles and jars, cushioned with foam boards, were moved from the trunk into the store.

Most of the male staff had gathered around the aquarium to see the wild soft-shelled turtles.

Meanwhile, the female staff were clustered around the glass jars containing the orange liquid.

"Is this the beautifying fruit vinegar?"

"The color is lovely, and the sour aroma is quite strong."

"I wonder how effective it is. Manager Shu, can we try some later?"

Shu Yun replied, "Trying it is absolutely fine, but fruit vinegar is too sour to drink straight. It needs to be mixed with some honey. I'll ask the boss later if it's alright, and if so, I can prepare a pitcher for you to taste."

"Thank you, Manager Shu!"

There were indeed many turtles, nearly twenty in total, both large and small. Each one was alive and feisty, one even snapping at Dundun, who had come over to see the excitement.

"MEOW!!!!"

The little cat was genuinely frightened at first. But when it saw that the turtles retracted their heads when their shells were tapped, it began to tap on each shell with its paws, one after another.

It tapped any turtle that poked its head out, as if playing a game of whack-a-mole.

To prevent the turtles his parents had brought all this way from being tormented to death by the mischievous cat, Lin Xu had Zhu Yong and Wei Qian put them into the aquarium.

"Xiaoxu, about these turtles for tonight..." Shen Guofu gazed at the lively turtles in the aquarium, imagining himself just as vigorous and healthy.

Lin Xu said, "Let's slaughter a few for dinner tonight. We just had some free-range chickens delivered this afternoon, so I can make the classic 'Farewell My Concubine' for you to try."

"Good, good, good! Today, I'm prepared to face a scolding from your mother-in-law if it means I can have a few extra drinks!"

Lin Xu wasn't very skilled at preparing soft-shelled turtles.

But that wasn't an issue; Beijing had experts who specialized in this dish.

He took a photo of the aquarium with his phone and sent it to his senior, Xie Baomin: "Senior, my parents brought some wild soft-shelled turtles to Beijing. If you're not busy this afternoon, could you come over and teach me how to prepare them? And please take a couple with you when you go. I have a feeling these turtles will be all claimed by tonight."

Almost immediately after he sent it, Xie Baomin replied: "I'm in a meeting with Director Liao right now, but I'll head over as soon as it's done. Don't post about this on social media, or Qiuqiu and the others will see it. I barely got a few bites of the pork kidneys last night before that bunch snatched them all away."

"Okay, Senior!"

After ending the chat, Lin Xu gave his parents a tour of the restaurant, explaining the layout and the function of each area.

When they reached the second floor, they encountered Shen Baobao emerging from the kitchen carrying Crystal Skin Jelly and a dish of Garlic Paste for dipping. Dressed in a chef's uniform, she had swapped her tall chef's hat for a shorter assistant chef's hat, looking both mischievous and cute.

"Mom and Dad, you're here! Quick, try my cooking. I made it all by myself, from start to finish!"

As she spoke, Ji Minghui brought over two bowls of hand-pulled noodles. Qin Wei and a few assistant chefs followed with several stir-fried dishes and side dishes, while Zhuang Yizhou presented a small tureen of Silverfish Soup.

Hmm, with the head chefs personally serving the dishes, the sense of occasion was truly impressive.

Chen Meijuan graciously thanked everyone. She then picked up a piece of her daughter-in-law's jelly and tasted it. Her expression momentarily froze, then she gave Shen Baobao a thumbs-up. "Wow, our Yueyue is truly skilled! Her cooking is much better than Lin Xu's. Old Lin, you have to try this. It's even better than what we ate at the Fishing Platform on engagement day!"

Lin Xu: "... Mom, you should probably ease up on the praise, he thought. If she gets too confident and tries to whip up some experimental disaster in the kitchen, there'll be no recovering from it. The memory of his father-in-law's expression after tasting that bitter melon junket still sent a shiver down his spine.

Lin Hongqi took a bite, his eyes widening slightly in surprise. He then praised, "It's really good—smooth and tender, with a slight chewiness. Well done, Yueyue."

"It was no trouble at all. I'm just glad you and Mom enjoy it," Shen Baobao said modestly.

Just then, having finished inspecting the turtles, Shen Guofu slowly came up the staircase. Shen Baobao, brimming with confidence from her in-laws' praise, immediately approached him with chopsticks. "Dad, quick, try this dish! See if it suits your taste."

Shen Guofu asked curiously, "Did Lin Xu make a new dish?"

Shen Baobao said with a playful grin, "No, he didn't make it. It's from a new chef. We're having the elders try it to see if they're a good fit for Lin Ji."

Taste-test? The word piqued Shen Guofu's interest.

Chefs often gave their all—120 percent—during a taste-test, resulting in dishes that were significantly tastier than usual.

He took the chopsticks and picked up a slice of the jelly, inspecting it. "Hmm, this jelly is perfectly clear. They've got some skill."

Hearing this, Shen Baobao's face brightened.

Shen Guofu inspected the jelly, then dipped it into the bowl of Garlic Paste. After taking a bite, his face quickly contorted in pain.

"Good grief! Was salt free today? Why is the dipping sauce so incredibly salty?" he grumbled. "Even someone who knows nothing about cooking should understand you don't overdo the salt!" He then forced down the piece of jelly and quickly followed it with several gulps of water from the glass on the table.

After setting down the glass, he turned to Lin Xu and said, "Lin Xu, you can't hire a chef of this caliber. They wouldn't even qualify as an assistant! Their skills are terrible. This tiny bit of dipping sauce? I reckon it would take me three days to get through it. Good heavens, any more of this stuff, and you could pass it down as a family heirloom!"

After he finished speaking, he noticed his daughter's expression had become quite ugly and asked curiously, "Darling, what's the matter? You look so pale. Are you feeling unwell?"

Chapter 510: Burn the Softshell Turtle! Stew the Softshell Turtle! Tonight is Another Joyful Meal with My Father-in-law!

"Dad, this Crystal Skin Jelly was made by Yueyue."

Seeing that his precious Baobao was about to cry, Lin Xu quickly told his father-in-law the truth.

After saying this, he looked at his own parents. What amazing acting skills! he silently praised. His father-in-law's mouth was puckering from the saltiness, yet the two of them could still compliment her without a change in expression. Did they just come back from a praise group training?

"Yueyue made this?"

Shen Guofu couldn't believe his ears. It never crossed his mind that his daughter, who usually didn't lift a finger and couldn't tell grains apart, had managed to make the jelly so crystal clear and perfect. As for the dipping sauce... well, that was another story.

"I originally wanted to surprise you... but then..."

Shen Baobao felt so dejected. This morning, when she was learning, she thought she had unlocked the governor and conception vessels in cooking. She even felt a certain pride, as if holding a chef's knife meant she had the world in her hands. And the praise from her in-laws just now made her think she might be a culinary genius who had only been held back. But it turned out that her elders were just humoring her. Sigh! Am I destined to live in the shadow of my dear Xu, just being a carefree beauty?

Shen Guofu quickly picked up a piece of jelly, dipped a tiny bit into the sauce, and after putting it in his mouth and smacking his lips a few times, gave his daughter a thumbs-up. "I dipped too much sauce earlier; this taste is indeed not bad. Baobao, it's a good thing Chef Xie isn't here, or he would snatch you up to work at Fishing Platform. Your skill is truly amazing."

Shen Guofu's compliment made Shen Baobao blush a bit. "It's not as good as you say. If it's salty, it's salty. You always spoil me like this..."

From childhood until now, it seemed like her dad had never criticized her. Whether she did right or wrong, in his eyes, she was always praiseworthy. No wonder Grandpa always criticized Dad for being a 'daughter-slave'.

Lin Xu picked up a cup of slightly cooled tea, poured some into the dipping sauce, and stirred it with chopsticks. Then he picked up a piece of jelly, dipped it, and had a taste.

The flavor had improved slightly, but the saltiness was still noticeable.

"How much salt did you put in?"

"I didn't put that much... Chef Wei said adding some oyster sauce would make it tasty, Chef Qin said some Light Soy Sauce would be good, Chef Zhuang suggested a bit of Fish Sauce, and Chef Zhu said Caviar would make it delicious..."

Lin Xu was speechless. So she put all these salty seasonings in at once? No wonder it was so incredibly salty. Still, it was good that she thought to ask the chefs for advice. She just needed to make sure to get all the details next time, or she'd keep making the same mistakes.

"I think it's good. Maybe I just prefer stronger flavors," Chen Meijuan said. "Yueyue's version tasted just right to me. After Lin Xu added the tea, it became a bit too mild for my taste."

She was still trying hard to cover for her daughter-in-law. Nowadays, having a daughter-in-law willing to cook is such a rare find. Yet, this foolish son of mine doesn't hurry to compliment her. Instead, he's acting like a food critic, critiquing her dish! Has cooking made him silly?

Shen Baobao nestled beside her mother-in-law, feeling somewhat embarrassed. "Mom, please don't praise me so much. If it's salty, it's salty. Next time I'll make it again for you, and I promise it won't be salty."

"Yes, yes, yes! Our Lin Family has truly found an excellent daughter-in-law." She's from a good family, good-looking, and well-educated... Most importantly, she's so filial and sensible. A daughter-in-law like her is truly hard to find.

Shen Guofu asked curiously, "Baobao, when did you learn to make this Crystal Skin Jelly?"

"I learned it with Sister Yan this morning. She's probably at home waiting for praise right now too," Shen Baobao replied.

Learned it this morning? My daughter is so talented! Shen Guofu thought.

Shen Guofu picked up a piece of the Crystal Skin Jelly, examined it, and couldn't help but exclaim, "It's so crystal clear! If your mom saw this, she'd probably eat a whole bowl in one go."

Director Han had absolutely no resistance to such low-fat, collagen-rich delicacies, especially a Crystal Skin Jelly as visually appealing as this; she adored such things.

To whet his wife's appetite for dinner, Shen Guofu picked up a piece of the Crystal Skin Jelly, took a photo with his phone, and sent it to Director Han. "Our Baobao secretly learned how to make Crystal Skin Jelly! With this presentation, you'd believe it was made by a State Banquet master, right? Also, the fruit vinegar has arrived, and there are ten to twenty wild soft-shelled turtles. Finish up at your clinic and come over early. Lin Xu's parents have traveled a long way, so let's have dinner and then let them get some rest."

After sending the message, he was about to praise his daughter again but found that she had disappeared.

Not long after, Shen Baobao came out of the kitchen carrying a tray with two steaming bowls.

"Come, come, try the Okra Steamed Egg and Diced Chicken Steamed Egg I made! I learned these this morning too. I just drizzled a little pork lard over the okra and chicken fat over the diced chicken."

As she spoke, she lifted the lids of the two steaming bowls, revealing the fragrant steamed eggs inside.

The okra must have been sliced before steaming, as it was now faintly visible on the surface of the steamed egg, looking like a cluster of green, five-pointed stars floating on a tender yellow pudding.

As for the Diced Chicken Steamed Egg beside it, the savory aroma of the chicken fat not only lent the dish an enticing fragrance but also gave the egg a glossy, appealing yellow sheen.

"Such wonderful skill, Baobao!" Shen Guofu exclaimed, taking over as the head of the "praise group" and complimenting her before even tasting the food.

Shen Baobao handed spoons to the elders. "Don't just praise me all the time. Give me some constructive criticism so I can improve. I'm still hoping to surpass Sister Yan in making steamed eggs and become the best, second only to my dear Xu!"

Everyone took their spoons and began to taste the two kinds of steamed eggs.

The texture was silky smooth, and the fragrance was rich. Even from a professional standpoint, these steamed eggs were commendable.