

Culinary 511

Chapter 511: Burn the Turtle! Stew the Turtle! Another Happy Father-in-Law Meal Tonight!

"Girl, your cooking skills are really amazing, way better than your mom's. She can only make simple home-style meals and still often messes them up," Lin Hongqi said.

Shen Guofu glanced guiltily towards the stairs, then chuckled dryly. "Well, she's not here right now..."

After tasting the steamed egg, Chen Meijuan and Lin Hongqi couldn't stop praising it.

This time, the praise was genuine.

This was because the steamed egg, whether in terms of texture, flavor, or presentation, was perfect. You wouldn't necessarily find a dish this good even in a typical restaurant.

After all, restaurants had to consider costs and wouldn't use ingredients as lavishly as Shen Baobao could.

For the hot oil-drizzling step, she had various Seasoning Oils to choose from, such as pork lard, chicken fat, and shrimp oil.

After the meal, Shen Guofu and his daughter accompanied Lin Hongqi and his wife to the residential area out back. They planned to drink tea and chat while waiting for dinner.

After seeing his parents off, Lin Xu was just about to go upstairs to check on the dinner preparations when Shu Yun approached him, smiling.

"Boss, how do we drink that fruit vinegar? Could you teach us?"

Teach? I think you just want to taste it, right?

"It's not busy right now. I'll mix some for you, but don't drink too much. A small cup a day is enough."

"Okay, okay."

The fruit vinegars had already been moved to the upstairs storage room. Lin Xu took a glass pitcher, the kind usually used for Pumpkin Soup, and filled it with some of the vinegar.

The fruit vinegar was a beautiful amber color, and in the glass pitcher, it looked quite high-end.

Lin Xu added a few spoonfuls of honey to the pitcher, adjusting the amount based on the vinegar, then stirred it thoroughly with a long chopstick until the honey was evenly dispersed.

Once it was well mixed, he poured a small cup for himself to taste.

The flavor was sweet and sour, with a strong fruity aroma.

Lin Xu didn't know if it was actually good for one's health, but it certainly felt pleasant to drink.

"How is it, Boss? Tasty?"

"It's quite good," Lin Xu replied. "Take this and let everyone try some. If they all like it, I'll buy some good quality fruit later and make another batch."

Hearing this, Shu Yun's face immediately lit up with a delighted surprise.

"Ha! I must have done something truly wonderful in a past life to deserve a boss as good as you!"

"No, it must be *I* who did something truly wonderful to have such an excellent employee like you."

After this round of mutual flattery, Shu Yun carried the glass pitcher downstairs to share the fruit vinegar with the waitresses.

A daily cup of fruit vinegar might have minimal effects on one's complexion. However, if it could lift everyone's spirits and positively contribute to their work, then it was worthwhile.

Lin Xu planned to find some time to buy some better quality fruit and make more at his father-in-law's villa. The villa's second basement level, much like a cellar, was ideal for making these kinds of fermented beverages.

After Shu Yun left, Wei Qian curiously asked, "Fruit vinegar can be homemade, so fruit wine should be possible too, right?"

Lin Xu nodded and told him, "It's possible, but I wouldn't recommend making your own fruit wine. Homemade versions can easily produce methanol. Fruit vinegar is comparatively simpler; at worst, it might spoil, but there are no other harmful side effects."

Hearing about methanol, Wei Qian, who had been contemplating brewing some grape wine, immediately gave up the idea.

Forget it, forget it. My life is more important. It's better to just buy it if I want to drink some in the future.

"Ah, this fruit vinegar is delicious! So sweet and sour!"

"I feel different already, just from drinking it."

"Exactly! Just look at Manager Shu—her complexion is glowing! It must be from drinking the fruit vinegar."

"..."

At the first-floor service counter, after drinking the fruit vinegar Shu Yun had brought, the waitstaff looked as though they had just consumed an Elixir.

The fruit vinegar itself wasn't the main point. What truly mattered was that the boss remembered to share good things with his employees. This feeling of being valued was what everyone cherished most.

Ever since they started working here, the boss almost never ate separately. Whatever he wanted to eat, he would eat it together with the employees.

Staff meals at other restaurants were typically capped at five yuan per person, or even less, but Lin Ji had never imposed a cost limit on them.

Who wouldn't appreciate a boss like that?

After everyone had finished their small cup, Shu Yun announced, "Alright, now that you've had your drink, get back to work diligently! I'll try to prepare a pitcher for you all every day."

This beverage wasn't meant for heavy drinking. Even after everyone had one small cup, half a pitcher still remained. At this rate of consumption, a good amount would likely still be left even when the boss finished brewing the new batch of fruit vinegar.

Hearing that it might become a daily treat, the waitstaff were even more delighted.

"Thank you, Manager Shu!"

"We'll work hard!"

"Manager Shu, Boss, please rest assured!"

「Four o'clock in the afternoon.」

Xie Baomin burst through the shop door, full of energy.

Instead of going upstairs, he made a beeline for the seafood tanks near the service counter.

Catching sight of the softshell turtles inside, he couldn't help but exclaim, "Mm, these are definitely wild! And look at the size—absolutely top-grade among wild turtles!"

As he was observing them, Lin Xu walked over.

"My father-in-law wants to eat 'Farewell My Concubine,' and he'd also like turtle soup. Senior Brother, could you teach me?"

"Can I? Of course, I can! Absolutely!"

The so-called 'Farewell My Concubine' is essentially a dish made with softshell turtle and chicken. It's quite common, with regional variations like braising, simmering in a soup, or clear stewing.

Xie Baomin used a hand net to scoop the largest softshell turtle out of the tank. "This one is fat and large. We'll braise it with chicken later."

Then, he netted another one—not as large, but quite firm and well-proportioned. "This one is good for soup. We'll steam it in the steam cabinet. While it's steaming, add some angelica root, goji berries, and such. Drinking that soup is so potent, it'll practically make your nose bleed!"

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After skimming them out, he thought for a moment and also scooped out the few smallest ones.

"These are too small; they're not suitable for soup or being red-braised. Doesn't your shop have brine for duck products? After blanching them later, use some of the spicy brine for duck products and braise them for a good half hour. We'll make whole spicy soft-shelled turtles."

Soon, Xie Baomin had made clear arrangements for the turtles.

"Since everything is arranged, let's get started!"

Lin Xu understood his Senior Brother's and father-in-law's craving for such ingredients, so he took the turtles straight upstairs to the kitchen to prepare them.

"Red-braising doesn't take that long. Let's start with the turtle soup."

Xie Baomin took a cleaver and taught Lin Xu how to butcher the soft-shelled turtles.

This was a process that required skill because many people had been bitten by turtles while butchering them, and some had even cut their hands trying to avoid a bite.

"When butchering market-bought turtles, it's best to chop off their heads in one stroke. Most of them are caught using hooks, and their heads often still contain the hook, which could easily injure a person's mouth if eaten. However, for these turtles, since we know their source, there's no need to chop off the heads. It is meat, after all; it would be a pity to throw it away."

Xie Baomin placed a turtle on the cutting board, pressing down on it with his left hand while scratching its tail area with his fingers. As a result, the turtle's head extended.

Placing his hand on the tail also effectively prevented bites.

Once the turtle's head was fully extended, Xie Baomin took the cleaver and tapped the turtle's neck with the tip of its blade.

Before Lin Xu could clearly see the action, the turtle stopped breathing.

Wei Qian, who was standing by hoping to learn a trick, couldn't help but mutter, "Chef Xie, what was that technique? How did it die with just a light tap from the cleaver tip? Could it be that turtles also have a vital point?"

Xie Baomin held the turtle's still-twitching neck and showed Wei Qian the cut, explaining, "This is the trachea. A light prick with the tip of the cleaver is enough to sever it. Once the trachea is broken, the turtle naturally dies."

"Such amazing knife skills! You were so close to the blood vessels... Oh, wait. Chef Xie, don't we need to bleed the turtle?"

"No need. Turtle blood is flavorful, and retaining it enhances the dish."

There were diverse methods for cooking turtles, and the debate over whether to bleed them had always existed. But for Xie Baomin, a proponent of medicinal cuisine, turtle blood must absolutely not be discarded.

Once the turtle stopped struggling, he used the cleaver to cut off the carapace along the skirt.

He gutted the turtle, removing the internal organs, and also plucked out the large chunks of yellow fat from the belly. This fat had a strong, unpleasant fishy smell and was inedible.

After gutting the turtle and removing the fat, he placed it in a basin and poured water at about 85 degrees Celsius over it to scald it.

The turtle's surface is covered with a mucous membrane that protects against bacteria and viruses. This membrane has a strong, fishy odor and must be carefully peeled off after scalding. However, the water cannot be boiling hot, or the skirt will be damaged.

Those who knew how to appreciate turtle meat were aware that the skirt is a treasure.

Its gelatinous texture is comparable even to Cubilose and Fish Fin, which is why the skirt is listed as one of the Water Eight Treasures.

After soaking in 85-degree water for a minute, when the black membrane on the turtle's back shell came off with a simple rub, it meant the scalding was perfect, and the shell could be carefully scrubbed clean.

However, the turtle's belly wasn't ready yet and needed to soak a bit longer.

The membrane on the turtle's belly is thick and tough, so it requires a longer soak before it can be peeled off.

Once the outer membrane was stripped clean, Xie Baomin chopped the turtle into large pieces and placed them into a pot. After adding Cooking Wine, he began to blanch the pieces.

While the turtle pieces were blanching, he fetched a stewing pot and added a handful of washed goji berries, a small pinch of Cordyceps, angelica, and other medicinal herbs.

Finally, he added spring water, two small spoonfuls of salt, two small spoonfuls of black pepper, half a kitchen ladle of Floral Carving Wine, and a few pieces of Crystal Sugar to complete the seasoning.

By this time, the water in the pot for blanching had also started to boil.

After skimming off the scum with a ladle, he removed the blanched turtle pieces, rinsed them, and then placed them into the stewing pot. He covered it with the lid and put it into the steaming cabinet to steam.

"In an hour, this soft-shelled turtle will be ready," Xie Baomin said to Lin Xu as he closed the door of the steaming cabinet.

"Blanching actually causes some nutrient loss. The best method is to briefly fry the soft-shelled turtle in lard, using the lard to extract its fishy smell. This makes the soup even better, but the downside is it ruins a pot of lard."

Soft-shelled turtles are known for their strong fishy smell, especially inside the abdominal cavity. Even if thoroughly washed, frying them in oil would leave the fishy smell in the fat.

So Xie Baomin didn't use this wasteful method.

Besides, when drinking soup, something too greasy isn't very pleasant; Clear Soup is more enjoyable to drink.

Once the soft-shelled turtle soup was set to simmer, the free-range chicken was delivered.

It was time to make the red-braised "Farewell My Concubine."

While busy, Xie Baomin said to Lin Xu, "In the soft-shelled turtle soup we just made, it would be even better if an old hen raised by a local farmer could be added. Unfortunately, they're not easy to buy now; the so-called old hens are usually just spent laying hens from commercial poultry farms."

As he lamented the scarcity of good ingredients, he skillfully butchered the other soft-shelled turtle.

After butchering it, he chopped the turtle into large pieces and quartered the shell to make it easier to arrange attractively on the plate when serving.

The free-range chicken was also chopped into pieces similar in size to the turtle meat.

Once the main ingredients were prepared, he cut a large piece of aged ginger into chunks, halved the garlic cloves, chopped scallions into inch-long sections, sliced Green and Red Peppers into rings, and set aside two Star Anise, a few Sichuan peppercorns, and several bay leaves.

With everything ready, he began to cook.

He set up a wok, added a large ladleful of lard, and heated it. Then, he added the soft-shelled turtle and chicken pieces, followed by a handful of Crystal Sugar, and began to stir-fry.

This stir-frying method helps the soft-shelled turtle release its fishiness while allowing the Crystal Sugar to caramelize and evenly color the ingredients.

When most of the moisture from the soft-shelled turtle and chicken pieces had cooked off, the Crystal Sugar had completely melted into caramel, evenly coating all the ingredients.

Xie Baomin continued to stir-fry, imagining himself devouring wild soft-shelled turtle and feeling incredibly vigorous. He even proudly hummed a tune from "Shajia Bang."

Just as he was getting into the rhythm, he turned and was startled to see Guo Weidong standing nearby.

"Damn it, Guo Weidong! What are you doing here?"

Guo Weidong nodded his head towards someone behind him. "Xinghai is in Beijing for tomorrow's opening ceremony. I brought him to meet Master Lin first. It's just a soft-shelled turtle, Old Xie. Why are you acting like you've found an Elixir? If you have some health issue, go get it checked. Don't just try to power through it."

Xie Baomin was speechless. Keep running your mouth, and I swear I'll crack this wok ladle over your head!

Chapter 513: How to Make Home-style Soy Sauce Chicken! Shen Guofu: Who really calls the shots in this home?

"I really didn't expect your new store to look so grand!"

At the kitchen entrance, Guo Xinghai, having made a round inside the store, marveled, full of admiration for the place.

The newly renovated Lin Ji's Food was not only stylish but, more importantly, boasted exceptional talent in the kitchen. Wei Qian, Zhuang Yizhou, and Zhu Yong were all masters who had competed in cooking competitions.

Qin Wei and Ji Minghui might not have competed, but they were also quite famous at Fishing Platform, a place teeming with talent.

Looking back now, the previous two cooking competitions hadn't really been about culinary skills at all. They were purely recruiting fairs for Lin Xu.

"Hello, Xinghai, welcome to our Lin Ji. What would you like to eat tonight? I'll cook it for you personally."

Seeing Guo Xinghai, Wei Qian stopped trying to secretly learn from Xie Baomin and came out to greet him actively.

"Today, I'm just here to feast, so I'll eat whatever you prepare."

Qin Wei handed Guo Xinghai a cup of Sour Plum Soup. After taking a small sip, he smiled and started chatting casually with Wei Qian.

In the kitchen, Guo Weidong, looking like he had Xie Baomin right where he wanted him, said, "Old Xie, if you keep giving me that sidelong glance, I'll instantly send a message in our Fishing Platform group chat, inviting everyone to come and taste your softshell turtle."

Xie Baomin's fight left him all at once.

That damn crowd had snatched all the pork kidneys clean last night. If he notified them to come today, he feared not even a drop of sauce from these softshell turtles would be left.

Thinking this, Old Xie immediately put on a smile and bumped Guo Weidong with his shoulder. "Weidong, what do you think about braising it this way? Do we need to add other ingredients? You absolutely can't leave tonight—we good brothers need to have a few more drinks."

Guo Weidong was speechless. You shameless dog, you're certainly adaptable, aren't you? And now we're good brothers again?

He looked at the softshell turtle being stir-fried in the wok and said, "It's time to add the aromatics. After stir-frying them until fragrant, you also need to deglaze with Rice Wine. If you keep stir-frying like this, you'll ruin the softshell turtle!"

Hearing this, Xie Baomin quickly dumped the aromatics into the wok and continued stir-frying.

When the stir-frying was almost done, instead of adding Rice Wine, he splashed in a generous half-ladle of high-proof Liquor.

As soon as the Liquor was added, he deliberately tilted the wok, allowing the stove's flame to leap over the rim. The Liquor in the wok instantly ignited, completely enveloping the turtle and chicken pieces in flames.

"Hey! That's a nice move!"

Guo Weidong had been curious why Xie Baomin hadn't quickly deglazed with Rice Wine to dissipate any gamey smell while enhancing the dish's mellow flavor. He hadn't expected Xie Baomin to immediately use this flaming technique.

Compared to Rice Wine, the burning Liquor enhanced the mellow flavor more significantly and had a better effect in removing gamey and off-putting smells.

This trick wasn't complex; all chefs at Fishing Platform at the head chef level or above could easily pull it off.

But knowing the technique didn't mean knowing how to apply it.

Cooking, once a certain level is reached, evolves from a mere display of techniques to their artful combination and arrangement.

How to best use learned cooking techniques to enhance and showcase the flavor and texture of ingredients is a challenge every chef faces.

But Xie Baomin seemed never to have such dilemmas.

Every time he cooked, he could flexibly adjust his techniques according to the ingredients.

This is probably what talent looks like.

"Weidong, what do you think would be good to add and stew in this dish?"

Quite a few people were dining together tonight: three from the Lin Family, three from the Shen Family, plus the Guo family's uncle and nephew. The originally planned single chicken and one softshell turtle seemed somewhat inadequate.

Guo Weidong said, "You definitely have an idea. Just go ahead and make it; I'm not picky."

Hearing this, Xie Baomin immediately instructed Wei Qian, who was by the door, "Little Wei, get some Chinese yam and wood ear mushrooms. Since we're adding ingredients, let's add something warming and nourishing."

Guo Weidong couldn't help but laugh. "Be careful you don't overdo it and give yourself a nosebleed. When you're not busy, come to Building Ten. I'll teach you some soup recipes to save you from flailing around for quick fixes, looking like you're at death's door."

"Weidong, if you say that again, I'm adding chili peppers—a whole big bowl of dried chili!"

"Then I'll post on Moments to promote this softshell turtle and chicken dish of yours."

Xie Baomin felt as if his vital spot had been hit; his defiance vanished instantly.

As he busied himself, he asked, "My wife got a gym membership and wants me to work out at least three times a week. Weidong, do you think exercise is more effective, or dietary therapy?"

"Dietary therapy is effective, but it has to be built on a foundation of exercise."

Xie Baomin felt somewhat defeated.

Among the trio of master and apprentices, his junior brother was out of the question. He was in his vigorous twenty-somethings, an age where one is so full of beans that even tripping could practically crater the ground. Their master, though nearly seventy, was all sinew and muscle, fit enough to haul heavy sacks at the docks.

Only he, Xie Baomin, was a bit frail. He hadn't felt it before, but recently, with his wife taking the initiative so passionately, he suddenly felt a bit overwhelmed.

Drinking goji berry water all day couldn't seem to put the spring back in his step.

It's really true: "Midlife crises inevitably strike, and these jokes are all about me"!

After the Liquor had burned off, he added Light Soy Sauce and Dark Soy Sauce, then white sugar and pepper powder, and finally a bit of Oyster Sauce for extra savoriness, completing the seasoning for the dish.

He stirred everything a few times to distribute the seasonings evenly in the wok, then added boiling water. After covering the wok with a lid, he turned down the heat and began to simmer.

Braising is essential for red-braised dishes. This process not only ensures the ingredients are thoroughly cooked but also allows the flavors to penetrate deeply. For this particular dish, simmering served an additional purpose: to render the collagen from the softshell turtle's skin, thereby enhancing both the texture and flavor of the dish.

The softshell turtle's fringe is rich in collagen, as are its bottom shell, limbs, and even its entire outer skin.

Chapter 514: How to Make Home-Style Soy Sauce Chicken! Shen Guofu: Who Really Calls the Shots in This Family?

"These ingredients need to be stewed for a longer period, so that they'll have the best texture when eaten."

When Wei Qian entered, Guo Xinghai and Lin Xu stopped chatting and started to clean the small softshell turtles. These turtles were perfectly suited for whole braising.

Guo Xinghai was adept at handling these small turtles.

In the midst of speaking, he had already slaughtered the turtles. He used a kitchen knife to cut from the tail, splitting the top shell from the body by about a third.

This large cut not only made it easier to clean out the internal organs but also allowed the turtle to maintain a complete and appealing appearance. It also helped the turtle absorb flavors better during the braising process.

After cleaning them, Zhu Yong carried them downstairs to Xu Xinhua for braising.

After cleaning the small turtles, Guo Xinghai felt energized and wanted to show off a bit.

Seeing a few free-range chickens that Old Huang had brought, he said, "Since there are many people for dinner tonight, I'll add another dish. Let me show you my Soy Sauce Chicken."

Soy Sauce Chicken?

Lin Xu had tasted it last time during the engagement dinner at Building Number Ten. Although he was immersed in the joy of engagement and did not pay much attention to the flavors, the rich aroma of the soy and the crispy skin and flavorful meat of the Soy Sauce Chicken had left a deep impression on him.

But isn't making Soy Sauce Chicken supposed to start with simmering various spices and ingredients in soy sauce?

He curiously asked, "Will there be enough time?"

"Not if you use the hotel version," Guo Xinghai replied. "The hotel's Soy Sauce Chicken needs several hours just for simmering the soy sauce. I'm doing the home-style version, which you can learn instantly."

The hotel's method was complicated and hard to learn on the spur of the moment. But upon hearing it was the home-style version, Lin Xu became interested.

One day, if his father-in-law or Shen Baobao craved it, he could show off his skills, Lin Xu thought. And since it's so easy to learn, if Shen Baobao and her older sister suddenly got the urge to learn cooking, this dish would be perfect to demonstrate.

Thinking this, he smiled and said, "I don't know how to make Soy Sauce Chicken yet, so this is a good time to learn."

Guo Xinghai picked a chicken with tender meat, brought it over, placed it in a basin, sprinkled two handfuls of salt, and started to seriously rub it onto the chicken skin.

Although these chickens had been cleaned after being slaughtered, there was still some dirt residue on the surface, like the yellowish membranes on the wings and other parts. There were also some tiny dirt particles in the chicken's pores, which could only be cleaned by rubbing firmly with salt.

After rubbing with salt, the chicken skin looked much cleaner. He rinsed it in clean water to wash off the salt and also pulled out the lymph nodes from the chicken's neck.

After doing this, he started boiling water in a pot and added Scallion and Ginger to it. When the water in the pot was almost boiling, he poured in half a spoonful of Cooking Wine. Then, holding the chicken by the neck, he placed it over the pot and scooped water from the pot to rinse the chicken.

The moment it was rinsed, the chicken skin obviously tightened.

He rinsed the whole chicken once, then held it by the neck and submerged it fully in the pot. He pressed it down slightly with the back of the ladle to fill the chicken's cavity with hot water. After immersing it, he lifted out the chicken, and bloody water clearly flowed from the cavity.

Seeing this, Lin Xu asked curiously, "Does Plain Chicken also have similar steps?"

"Yes," Guo Xinghai explained. "This process tightens the chicken skin and, as much as possible, cleans the bloody water from the cavity to enhance the chicken's umami and flavor."

Guo Xinghai repeatedly scalded the chicken in the pot three times. He then lifted it out, let it drain, and placed it into ice water to cool down.

"With this treatment, the crispness of the chicken skin is fixed," Guo Xinghai continued. "No matter how it's cooked later, the skin will be smooth and crispy when eaten."

Upon hearing this, Lin Xu's spirits lifted. Both his father and father-in-law loved dishes with smooth, crispy skin, finding them perfect with alcohol. He'd have to get his father and father-in-law together to try this later. Those two in-laws, who had nearly performed a sworn brotherhood ceremony on several occasions, would surely appreciate it. If it was good, it would become another signature dish for family gatherings.

While the chicken was cooling, Guo Xinghai started preparing the ingredients needed for the Soy Sauce Chicken: dried onions, fresh ginger, scallion knots, two Star Anise, a large piece of Crystal Sugar, a small bowl of Light Soy Sauce, half a small bowl of Dark Soy Sauce, more than half a bowl of Rose Wine, and two large bowls of clean water.

The ingredients were simple.

After preparations, Guo Xinghai placed a wok on the stove. He drizzled a bit of peanut oil into the bottom. Once the oil was hot, he added the halved dried onions and ginger slices to release their fragrance. Then, he poured in the clean water and added all the other ingredients.

Once it boiled on high heat, he stirred with a spoon for a while. As soon as the Crystal Sugar had completely dissolved, a pleasant soy sauce aroma wafted from the pot.

Guo Xinghai held the cooled chicken over the pot and spooned the sauce over its skin. After coating it once, he submerged the chicken completely in the pot. Then he scooped up the sauce and poured it into the chicken's cavity, reduced the heat, and covered the pot.

There wasn't enough sauce in the pot to submerge the entire chicken.

"How long will this take?" Lin Xu asked. He looked through the clear lid at the chicken, which towered over the sauce like an iceberg, and had a feeling it would be difficult for the chicken to absorb the flavors properly.

"Boil for twenty minutes, flip it, then boil for another twenty minutes, and it should be ready to serve," Guo Xinghai said.

Soy Sauce Chicken should not be eaten immediately after being taken out of the pot. It should be allowed to cool slightly to let the meat firm up again; that way, it tastes even better. And as it cools, the color of the chicken also becomes even more appealing.

As the chicken simmered on low heat, Wei Qian finished preparing the Chinese yam sticks and had also soaked some black fungus.

Chapter 515: Home-style Soy Sauce Chicken Recipe! Shen Guofu: Who Really Has the Final Say in This House?

"Chef Xie, all is ready."

Xie Baomin lifted the lid of the pot, releasing a wonderfully savory aroma; the reddish chunks of meat looked tantalizing.

But it wasn't time to eat just yet—they needed to keep simmering, as the meat would taste even better once it was tender enough to fall off the bone.

He poured the yams, cut into chunks, into the pot, stirring and mixing them with the chunks of meat, then covered the pot again to continue simmering.

「Forty minutes later.」

After work, Han Shuzhen was tasting the fruit vinegar Shu Yun had offered in the ground-floor lobby, just as the soft-shelled turtle and chicken dish upstairs was likely ready to come out of the pot.

Xie Baomin added some green and red peppers to the pot and stir-fried on high heat for ten seconds.

This was done not only to thicken the sauce in the pot but also to blanch the peppers used for garnishing.

During the frying process, the fresh and spicy flavor of the peppers would transfer to the meat, giving the dish a light and refreshing taste.

Soon, the peppers were blanched. The black fungus, added ten minutes earlier, was fully cooked. As for the yams, the iron stick yams had now absorbed the meat broth, their original white color turning into the reddish hue of the soft-shelled turtle and chicken pieces.

After drizzling some Sesame Oil, it was time to dish out.

Before turning off the heat, he used chopsticks to pick out the soft-shelled turtle's shell, limbs, and head.

He plated the dish, arranging the head and limbs, and finally placed the quartered turtle shell on top. This braised version, dubbed "The Hegemon-King Bids Farewell to His Concubine," was now complete.

"Hmm, this fruit vinegar tastes really good."

A cup of sweet and sour fruit vinegar went down, and Han Shuzhen felt her fatigue from work dissipate substantially.

Shu Yun took her finished cup and said with a smile, "There's still plenty of fruit vinegar left. Why don't you take a big jar with you when you leave later? Mr. Lin said he's going to stuff some more in a few days."

Stuff some more?

That would be wonderful, perfect for letting her old girlfriends try this beautifying and complexion-enhancing fruit vinegar, and incidentally bring in some high-end customers for the store.

While they were speaking, Lin Hongqi and his wife, along with Shen Guofu and his daughter, arrived at the restaurant.

"Shuzhen, your shift is over. You look even better than last time," Chen Meijuan greeted Han Shuzhen as soon as she entered.

Han Shuzhen replied with a smile, "I just had a cup of fruit vinegar, and it tasted so good. It really refreshed me; Xu's cooking skills are truly all-encompassing."

Shen Baobao pouted, "Always praising your son-in-law and not your daughter. I was thinking of making a steamed egg dish, but now you've missed out on it, Director Han."

Han Shuzhen looked at her daughter and said, "I heard the dipping sauce for the aspic was too salty?"

Shen Jiayue: "..."

The steamed eggs for tomorrow were also out.

Shen Guofu glanced at the message on his phone and said, "Come on, let's go upstairs to eat. The soft-shelled turtle with chicken is ready, and the turtle soup will be done in just over ten minutes. Shall we go wait in the private room?"

His most anticipated dishes were already prepared.

Now he was just waiting for all the dishes to be served so he could share a drink with his son-in-law's father, Lin Hongqi.

On the way upstairs, Han Shuzhen quietly asked her daughter, "Are steamed eggs and aspic easy to learn?"

"They're okay, I guess. Maybe because I graduated from Central Finance, I don't find them hard, but some from Fudan may need the teacher to explain it a few more times... Why do you ask? Do you want to learn too?"

"Isn't it your grandmother's birthday in a couple of months? I haven't cooked for her much over the years, so if it's easy to learn..."

As she talked about these things, Director Han couldn't help feeling a sense of guilt towards her parents.

However, just as her guilt began to surface, her daughter ruthlessly interrupted her, "It's probably because Grandma thought it tasted bad, right? I heard that when you and Dad were about to get married, to avoid eating what you cooked, Grandma voluntarily gave up her vacation to work overtime at Xiehe, and she even got praised for it... Ouch, I was wrong, Mom. Shall I teach you tomorrow?"

After receiving a slap on the back, Shen Baobao immediately cozied up to her mother's arm.

Han Shuzhen let out a light laugh, her heart filled with sentiment.

How time flew! She remembered being under twenty when she was secretly dating Shen, and now her daughter was already in her twenties.

Since there were many people today, they didn't dine in the second-floor booth area but went to a private room with a table for ten on the third floor.

In the private room, some cold dishes were already laid out.

In the center of the table stood two bottles of aged Luzhou Liquor, Lin Hongqi's favorite.

「In the kitchen.」

The Soy Sauce Chicken that had just been taken out of the pot had skin that was reddish and shiny all over, giving off a strong, rich fragrance of Soy Sauce.

Guo Xinghai, with a cleaver in hand, chopped the whole chicken swiftly and precisely. While cutting it into pieces, he also removed any excess fat and lymphatic tissue from beneath the skin to make the meat as clean and tidy as possible.

After placing the chicken on a plate, he handed it to the waiter to serve.

Not long after, the stew pots from the steam cabinet were also brought out.

Lifting the lid revealed that the previously clear spring water had now become a thick soup. It exuded a fragrance that combined the savoriness of meat with the aroma of traditional Chinese medicinal herbs.

Xie Baomin took a deep breath, "Mmm, that smells really good. I'll have to have a couple more bowls later."

With all the dishes ready, everyone went upstairs to dine together.

Upon reaching the private room and sitting down, Lin Hongqi opened a bottle of Liquor, filled everyone's glasses, and then raised his toast, saying, "Thank you all for looking after my son, Lin Xu. I'll finish this glass, and you can drink at your leisure."

After speaking, he drained his glass in one gulp.

His son's great achievements could not have come without the help of these people around him. As parents, the least they could do was express their gratitude as much as possible.

Everyone raised their glasses and emptied the Liquor, then began to eat.

Shen Baobao picked up one of the Chicken Feet and gave it to Han Shuzhen, "Mom, eat this. It's rich in collagen, great for beauty and complexion, more effective than beauty injections."

Han Shuzhen had a smile on her face.

Although her daughter was a bit naughty, her filial piety was still there.

She had just taken a bite of the chicken foot when she saw her daughter placing a piece of the turtle's calipash in Chen Meijuan's bowl, "Mom, this piece of calipash is for you. Taste it, this is an Eight Treasures delicacy! So rare!"

Han Shuzhen: "..."

More caring to your mother-in-law than to your own mother, you really are my dear daughter, aren't you!

As she was munching on the chicken foot, Lin Xu passed her a bowl of turtle soup, "Mom, try this. It's turtle soup my senior brother made himself. It contains angelica, Cordyceps, and other beneficial Chinese herbs. It's nourishing, good for the complexion, and beneficial to health."

My son-in-law is still the best.

After taking the soup, Han Shuzhen asked Lin Xu, "Shu Yun said just now that you're planning to make more fruit vinegar?"

"Right, I saw everyone liked it, so I decided to make some more on the second basement level of the villa."

Hearing that it would be done in the villa made Han Shuzhen even happier.

The second basement floor, besides housing a garage, also had a cigar lounge that Shen Guofu exclusively used for smoking cigars. Without a second thought, Han Shuzhen addressed her husband, "Starting from tomorrow, the cigar lounge on the second basement floor needs to be cleared out for making fruit vinegar. You can just smoke cigars in the yard from now on."

Shen Guofu, who was drinking with his son-in-law's father, was full of question marks.

What's going on?

My grand cigar lounge was just taken over like that?

Is there no law anymore?

Is there no justice?

"Can't we make fruit vinegar anywhere else? There's plenty of space in the garage..."

As he was grumbling, he suddenly noticed his wife's gaze turning icy, so he quickly said, "Dear, your idea is really good. The cigar lounge has constant temperature and humidity, indeed perfect for making fruit vinegar. This idea is truly brilliant; I'll clear out the things in there as soon as I get back..."

Chapter 516: Dishes That Comfort Homesickness! Unexpected Gains from the Opening Ceremony?

"This soup is really fresh."

Han Shuzhen tasted a spoonful of the soup her son-in-law passed to her, finding it fresh and sweet. It was not only free of any fishy smell but even had a pleasant aftertaste reminiscent of eating seafood. Beyond its sweetness, one could discern a subtle taste of Chinese herbs. The flavor was neither too strong nor too weak, just perfect. Her son-in-law's senior apprentice is indeed worthy of being the head chef at Fishing Platform. He managed to prepare the wild turtle to such a surprising degree.

Lin Xu took a sip and was also stunned by the taste of the turtle soup. Is this really made from the seemingly smooth yet greasy and fishy-smelling turtle? Even if one used live seafood, could it be any better than this? In my astonishment, I can't help but feel impressed. My senior apprentice truly deserves to be the five-time champion of the Fishing Platform cooking competition. This skill is truly breathtaking.

Guo Weidong said with a smile, "Your senior apprentice usually holds back when cooking. Looks like he really wanted to nourish his body with this turtle soup, showing his full prowess today."

As a Cantonese cuisine master, Guo Weidong had always believed that soup-making was his forte. It was only after tasting the turtle soup prepared by Xie Baomin that I truly felt this rascal's five consecutive wins were justified. The Kung Fu in preparing the soup has even reached a level of returning to simplicity and originality. A typical chef making turtle soup would use a multitude of condiments and spices: some to enhance flavor, some to remove fishiness, some to add aroma, some to improve presentation... However, in the turtle soup made by Xie Baomin, I could only taste salt, pepper, and sugar. Such a bold approach to ingredients could easily result in a bowl of greasy and fishy soup. Yet Xie Baomin found the perfect balance between seasoning and ingredients. The soup is not only fresh and tasty but also forms a perfect complement with several herbs. Such enviable talent! To think that Lin Xu's talent is even greater than this rascal's; the prowess of this master-apprentice pair is simply terrifying. The only downside is their scarcity. But perhaps it's just as well; if there were more of them, that rascal Xie Baomin would probably become insufferably arrogant.

While everyone was marveling at Xie Baomin's soup-crafting skills, Shen Jiayue, who had just finished a piece of the turtle's gelatinous skirt, picked up a piece of Soy Sauce Chicken, took a bite, and suddenly exclaimed, "Wow, this Soy Sauce Chicken is so delicious! The skin is crispy, and the meat is so tender."

I haven't had the turtle soup yet, so I can only start with the meat dishes on the table. After all, how can we fill our stomachs by just admiring a bowl of soup? Compared to the soup, eating meat is more satisfying.

Especially a dish like Soy Sauce Chicken, which was so well-seasoned and flavorful, was irresistibly tasty. The Soy Sauce Chicken was savory and slightly sweet on the first bite. With a gentle chew, one could savor the crispy, springy chicken skin and the fresh, juicy meat. Have a piece of meat, then scoop up some rice. This experience is just wonderful.

Soy Sauce Chicken was not as famous as Plain Chicken. However, in terms of flavor and texture, its sweet and salty taste was more aligned with the dietary preferences of Northern people. For Northerners, Plain Chicken went well with alcohol, but it was rather bland with just rice. But Soy Sauce Chicken had no such restrictions. It could be enjoyed both with liquor and rice. One could even pour some of the soy sauce used for cooking the chicken into a bowl, mix it with rice, and the flavor was indescribably delicious.

"You like it that much? Then I'll make it for you often," Lin Xu said.

I was just worrying about not having a guinea pig for practicing Soy Sauce Chicken. Since Shen Baobao likes it, this is perfect!

He tried a piece of the chicken himself. Indeed, it tasted great. The rich soy sauce flavor had a hint of sweetness. Paired with the savory chicken, it was appetizing and went perfectly with rice. Combined with the tempting reddish-brown color of the Soy Sauce Chicken, it truly was an ideal choice for a chicken dish.

It's a pity I don't have a Cooking Learning Card on hand. Otherwise, I would have definitely mastered this dish today, adding another tasty item to my repertoire.

After finishing the Soy Sauce Chicken, he quickly ate some rice and picked up a piece of braised turtle. This was the turtle's leg. It was covered with a gelatinous layer, but the meat inside was tender and delicious. Complemented by the rich braised flavor, it was appetizing and perfect with rice. The dishes prepared by my senior apprentice might be questionable in terms of nourishing the body, but they are certainly first-rate for accompanying rice.

The braised turtle had a lustrous red color, its surface coated with a rich, fragrant sauce. The savory flavor was delightful, with a hint of fresh green pepper mixed in. After eating it, a light sweetness lingered, tantalizing the taste buds and making one involuntarily crave another piece. Besides the turtle, the chicken was also cooked to perfection. With both meats cooked in lard, their savory flavors contrasted strikingly. Following the meat, he had a piece of yam that had been stewed until soft and flavorful.

Ah, satisfying!

As he was eating, the private room door was pushed open, and Shu Yun came in carrying spicy marinated small turtles prepared by the marinade section. The turtles were small and thoroughly marinated. Just as she entered, the strong, savory aroma of the marinade wafted into everyone's noses.

"The spicy marinated small turtles are here. Please have a taste," she said, placing the dish on the table.

After serving, Shu Yun looked at Lin Hongqi and Chen Meijuan and asked, "Uncle, Auntie, do you need anything else?"

Chen Meijuan, looking at the full spread on the table, laughed and said, "No need, Manager Shu. Please sit down with us and have some. Try these wild turtles; they must be hard to come by in Beijing."

Shu Yun waved her hand with a smile. "I've already had a taste, Auntie. When they were fetching the turtles, a leg fell off, and I shamelessly took a bite. It tasted really good."

After saying this, she didn't disturb them further and left the private room with a smile.

I never thought Little Xu could lure Manager Shu from Fishing Platform over here.

Chapter 517: Dishes That Comfort Homesickness! Unexpected Gains from the Opening Ceremony?

Chen Meijuan smiled reflectively, thinking her son was really quite amazing.

Last time she went to the Fishing Platform for the competition, she had met this very approachable, smiling girl.

It was Shu Yun, then the front desk manager of Building No. 2, who had taken Chen Meijuan, Lin Hongqi, and Dundun on a tour of the genuine presidential suite upstairs.

This allowed the older couple to see the living quarters used by foreign presidents during their stays in the country.

There were a total of five small turtles.

Chen Meijuan, Han Shuzhen, and Shen Jiayue, the three ladies, each had one. The remaining two were divided between Lin Xu and Guo Xinghai.

The middle-aged folks weren't very interested in the spicy small turtles; they felt these didn't offer significant health benefits and preferred the more robust turtle soup and braised turtle instead.

While everyone was eating and drinking, a different scene was unfolding in the online discussions about Lin Ji's Food.

"Argh, just over two hours left, and I still haven't figured out what to write for my joke!"

"Hey, poster above, don't bother. Even if you write it, it won't make a difference."

"I racked my brains and pooled the wisdom of everyone in our office, and our crafted joke only earned just over a thousand likes, ranking 456th."

"As if the rat race at work wasn't enough, now even an online event is this competitive!"

"Who has time to care about the event now? Everyone wants to prove they're a true gag writer. They're fighting tooth and nail for the rankings."

"One netizen wrote over three hundred jokes in just two days, all of them about Boss Lin. The themes ranged from 'Boss Lin battling the Demon Sect Saintess,' 'Boss Lin battling the Fairy of the Bright Moon,' 'Boss Lin battling the Empress of the Ninth Heaven,' and 'Boss Lin battling the Undying Goddess,' to even 'Boss Lin battling Thanos...'"

"Poster above, don't you think something weird snuck in there?"

The netizens were discussing passionately, all wanting to know which lucky individuals would make it into the top fifty.

Such discussions caused the popularity of Lin Ji's Food to skyrocket.

By 8:00 p.m., Lin Ji's Food had officially climbed to the fourth spot on the Yanjing Region's trending topics list. This surprised many in the media, as the last time a food-related topic had garnered such attention in this position was the news about the unappetizing buns from Dog Ignore.

After so long, a culinary topic had finally made it to this rank. It was quite unexpected.

Out of curiosity, people began to search for what exactly Lin Ji's Food was. Judging by the name, it sounded like a nondescript roadside eatery. How had it managed to reach the fourth spot on the trending list?

In an instant, the search volume for Lin Ji's Food soared, which in turn further boosted its ranking on the charts.

"Fourth place now!"

At the first-floor service counter, Song Tiantian couldn't help but exclaim as she watched the constantly refreshing popularity rankings on her computer.

The boss is really something else! He casually stirred up such a buzz with just one event, nearly catching up to those celebrities who create drama over every trivial little thing.

Shu Yun inquired, "Have tomorrow's fifty portions of Shakima and fifty portions of Seven-colored Horse Hoof Cake been fully reserved?"

"They're all reserved. The customers are complaining that it's too few and want to order more, but I didn't agree."

Shu Yun smiled and said, "We have indeed made more, but those are for tomorrow's opening celebration, meant to be given as complimentary gifts to the guests. That's why we can only sell fifty portions of each tomorrow."

Last night and this morning, Lin Xu had made a hundred portions each of Shakima and Seven-colored Horse Hoof Cake. This should have lasted all day, but they had already sold out by noon.

The online hype had already made the customers incredibly eager.

So, as soon as they heard the sale had started, many people bought four or five boxes at once, not only for themselves but also intending to give some to relatives and friends.

Those customers who arrived late could only reserve snacks for the next day.

There were even people urging them to introduce more snack varieties quickly, so everyone would have more options.

Shu Yun and Song Tiantian couldn't make such decisions themselves. They could only say they would relay the feedback to the boss as soon as possible. As for when new snack varieties would be added, that was entirely up to the boss to decide.

Upstairs, after nearly finishing their meal, the group cleared the table and chatted over tea for a while before getting up to leave.

Xie Baomin had drunk nearly half a catty of liquor and was staggering a bit as he walked, but he still hadn't forgotten the turtles Lin Xu had promised him. He said, "Junior Brother, pack up those turtles for me. I need to take them home, to the Fishing Platform. That bunch would tear into them raw!"

Guo Weidong chuckled beside him, "They're not as desperate as you are."

Lin Xu selected two larger turtles, put them into a net bag, sealed them in a foam box, and handed it to Xie Baomin.

Once outside, Xie Baomin used an app on his phone to call for a designated driver.

While waiting for the driver, he said to Lin Xu, "Junior Brother, Master will be here tomorrow, and he has a surprise for you."

What? Has that old Sea King, who supposedly retired from the game, finally finished his honeymoon with the leopard-print lady? I wonder if Master has lost any weight over the past month. But surprises... there have been enough of those lately. What kind of surprise could Master still have?

Curious, Lin Xu asked, "What kind of surprise, Senior Brother? Tell me first, so I can brace myself."

Xie Baomin shook his head. "I don't know either. He's always been whimsical and unpredictable. The surprise could be as random as him picking up a rock for you from Daocheng Yading."

This... Although it seemed absurd, considering Master's character, it was indeed possible.

As they stood at the entrance for a while, a cool breeze blew past. Xie Baomin seemed to feel the alcohol's effects more keenly. Seeing his drunken state, Lin Xu asked with concern, "Senior Brother, why don't you go upstairs and rest a bit before leaving? If you go back like this, your wife might nag you again."

Chapter 518: Dishes That Comfort Homesickness! Unexpected Gains from the Opening Ceremony?

Xie Baomin had mentioned before that every time he came home drunk, his wife would not give him a warm welcome.

Drinking so much today, wouldn't it affect the little spark of love that had just ignited between them?

Xie Baomin heaved a sigh and then said, "Junior Brother, you're still young and don't understand the pressures middle-aged people face. Although I drank a lot, from another perspective, isn't it just giving myself a little break to catch my breath?"

Lin Xu: "..."

Heavens, has Sister-in-law really pushed Senior Brother to this extent?

No wonder Senior Brother's efforts to replenish his energy never seemed to work.

Lin Xu suddenly recalled the math problems he used to encounter in elementary school: a swimming pool could be emptied in five hours and filled in three hours. If both the drain and the inlet were open at the same time, how many hours would it take to fill the pool?

It felt like a waste of water at the time.

But thinking about Senior Brother's current predicament, he realized that there was a deeper meaning to that problem.

Could it be that the person who created the problem was also in the same situation as Senior Brother is now?

Before long, a designated driver arrived on a compact electric scooter.

After getting into the car, Xie Baomin rolled down the passenger-side window and called out to Lin Xu, "If it gets too busy tomorrow, give me a call. We'll come over to help first. Others can delay arriving for the feast, but it's not appropriate for our own people to do so."

TSK TSK, Senior Brother, you should be more concerned about when your own pool will be full.

Lin Xu said, "I can handle it; everything's arranged. Just come as usual."

After seeing Senior Brother off, Lin Xu returned to the store. Shu Yun approached him and said, "Boss, we're ranked fourth on the topic list. Tomorrow's fifty servings of Shakima and fifty servings of Horse Hoof Cake have all been reserved, and the customers still think it's not enough. The company has sent out all the invitations, and just now, Boss Dou took away a jar of fruit vinegar..."

She reported the store's matters one by one. After listening, Lin Xu said, "Tell the company to give the netizens a new surprise. Expand the original top fifty to the top seventy. Additionally, randomly draw thirty lucky netizens from all participants to attend the ceremony. For those who can't come, send them a cash red envelope. Let's make it lively for everyone."

Since the netizens are so enthusiastic, naturally it's time to pour some gasoline on the fire to heat things up.

After that, Lin Xu went to the pastry department of the kitchen to start making the Shakima for tomorrow.

「Online.」

When the latest surprise was announced, the enthusiasm of the netizens soared even higher.

"My God, not only has it increased from fifty to seventy, but they're also going to randomly draw thirty lucky netizens. Is Boss Lin being too generous?"

"It's not enough to just invite people for a meal—there's also cash compensation for those who can't be there? That's so impressive!"

"Boss Lin accidentally stepped into the charity circle."

"I wasn't planning to participate, but with this momentum, I'd better craft a few jokes to take part."

"Me too! After seeing this message, I've been inspired like a flood. I plan to write a section titled 'A Few Anecdotes About Boss Lin and Chief Huang'."

"Chief Huang? Are you talking about Huang Rong, bro?"

"Hurry, hurry, I love the writings about Chief Huang..."

「At nine o'clock in the evening.」

The names of one hundred netizens participating in Lin Ji's celebration were announced.

Netizens from out of town who couldn't attend the event received a 588 yuan cash red envelope from Lin Ji's Food. This prompted many to exclaim they felt like they'd lost out on billions.

Even those who couldn't go were surprised by such a large cash red envelope.

The intense discussion among everyone made the topic of Lin Ji's Food even hotter, attracting all the netizens who used to write jokes.

Selected netizens were showing off in all sorts of ways, while those who weren't selected heaved many sighs and bit into their lemons enviously.

This fervor helped the topic of Lin Ji's Food successfully break into the top three.

Then, it triggered a system reward: "Host has successfully made the topic of Lin Ji's Food reach third place in the Yanjing Region's topic list before the official opening, completing the Hidden Task [Reaching the Top Three], and won a Perfect Level dish lottery draw. Would you like to draw now?"

Lin Xu, who had just finished making Shakima, looked surprised.

Are there actually such good things?

If he had known, he would have made the event even bigger just now.

Maybe he could have even broken into second place.

He took off his apron, washed his hands, and went downstairs, ready to go home with Dundun.

At this time, there were not many customers left in the store. The morning shift employees had already gone home, and the night shift employees were preparing to clean.

"Let's go, Dundun. Time to head home."

Lin Xu hoisted the chubby Dundun onto his shoulder. He then took the unsalted beef jerky Zhuang Yizhou had made for the little guy, bid everyone goodbye, and walked out of the Lin Ji doorway.

The store was busy closing up. Outside the storefront, however, was a different scene altogether. The celebration company's staff was busy setting up the stage, adjusting the inflatable archway, and preparing for tomorrow's celebration.

When Dou Wenjing saw Lin Xu come out, she quickly came over to greet him and also gave Dundun's chin a scratch.

"Dundun, Daddy's restaurant is officially opening tomorrow. You've got to dress sharp, okay?"

Dundun looked up, his eyes squinting slightly, enjoying the attention like a little boss. When Dou Wenjing let go to attend to her own tasks, he protested with a dissatisfied meow, "MEOW!"

Dou Wenjing asked curiously, "What's that about?"

"He wants you to keep scratching."

"Aww, you even know how to ask for an extension, huh, baby? Today's too busy. But when I'm not so busy, I'll come over and give you a good scratch with your Godmother Shu Yun, okay, Little Dundun?"

Chapter 519: The Dish that Comforts Homesickness! Unexpected Gains from the Grand Opening Ceremony?

Dundun, who had originally been looking dissatisfied, immediately stretched out his chubby paw and gave Dou Wenjing's hand a pat.

A consensus reached!

After saying goodbye to Dou Wenjing, Lin Xu carried Dundun into the gate of the residential complex.

Now that Dundun was in a good mood, and with the surroundings quiet, he silently chanted in his mind:

Draw a prize!

Soon, the system's prize wheel appeared on the mental screen.

After Lin Xu finished the process, the system prompt sounded in his mind again:

"Congratulations to the host for obtaining the Perfect Level dish—Sweet and Sour Pork!"

Wow, he actually received this divine Northeastern dish?

Northeasterners have many dishes to soothe homesickness, such as chicken stewed with mushrooms, pork stewed with vermicelli, and cold noodles. But no matter how you list them, Sweet and Sour Pork is indispensable. This dish, stamped into the genes of Northeasterners, is loved by almost everyone. In the Three Eastern Provinces, there are even several schools of thought regarding its preparation.

Now that I've obtained this dish, I should cook it for my family to try. Shen Baobao, with her sweet tooth, will definitely love it.

「At six in the morning.」

Lin Xu got up. Shen Baobao, sleepy-eyed, wrapped her arms around his waist and asked in a daze, "Can I sleep a little longer? I'm so sleepy."

Who let you stay up late watching dramas while munching on Dundun's beef jerky... Lin Xu kissed her on the cheek, "Keep sleeping, Baobao. I'll call you when it's time for breakfast."

Today, they wouldn't go to the restaurant for breakfast because his mom had come, and they would eat at home.

To not disturb her son and daughter-in-law's rest, Chen Meijuan had deliberately closed the kitchen door while cooking in the morning and hadn't dared to turn on the exhaust hood to its maximum.

When Lin Xu walked out of his room, Lin Hongqi was just taking Dundun to the rooftop for a walk, and Chen Meijuan was in the kitchen, stir-frying the watermelon bean paste she had brought yesterday.

"What's for breakfast today?"

"Your mom said the Pumpkin Soup from the restaurant is too fattening, so she made some millet pumpkin porridge and some steamed pancakes you like."

Upon hearing that his mom had made steamed pancakes, Lin Xu involuntarily swallowed.

If Sweet and Sour Pork is the dish Northerners eat to comfort homesickness, then steamed pancakes were the taste of home embedded deep in Lin Xu's heart.

The so-called steamed pancakes are made much like Roasted Pancakes. First, you prepare the dough, roll it out thinly, spread it with lard and Sichuan peppercorns, and sprinkle it with green onions. Then, you roll it up and form it into a pancake shape again, just like with Roasted Pancakes. The difference, however, is that Roasted Pancakes are cooked with oil in a flat pan. Steamed pancakes, on the other hand, are placed directly into a steamer for a few minutes until fully cooked, then removed.

The steamed pancakes have distinct layers and a chewy texture. Eaten with freshly stir-fried watermelon bean paste, they are so addictive you can't stop.

As a child, Lin Xu would pester for Roasted Pancakes. But once, the family's flat pan was broken. As a last resort, his mother, Chen Meijuan, came up with this method. It was a move born out of necessity, but to their surprise, the steamed pancakes turned out to be delicious.

Ever since then, whenever they made Roasted Pancakes at home, they would also steam a few. This way, those who wanted roasted ones could have them, and those who preferred steamed ones could have those too.

After freshening up, Lin Xu sat on the sofa with his parents and chatted for a while.

"Your second uncle and his family were planning to come," Lin Hongqi said as he pulled out a stack of red envelopes from his bag and handed them over. "They said we had too few people here and were worried it wouldn't look imposing enough. Your mom thought it was too much trouble. Besides, we're all family, so what's all this about being imposing? She told them not to come. These are red envelopes from relatives congratulating you on your grand opening. Your paternal grandmother and your maternal grandmother specifically climbed to the mountaintop temple to burn incense for you. I mentioned that little temple wasn't very effective and got an earful for it."

Hearing his father's words, Lin Xu felt deeply moved.

Chen Meijuan said, "Don't worry about things at home. Your father and I are still young and healthy. As long as you two are doing well here, you don't need to worry about us."

Lin Xu nodded. "You two also need to take care of your health and not overwork yourselves."

"We won't. The scenic area is improving day by day. Some of your fans even took pictures with us when they visited. Business is booming, and your mother and I are planning another expansion this winter."

Indeed, his parents are a pair that can't stand not staying busy. Lin Xu thought to himself, then said, "President Liu from the Travel Association is coming over this afternoon. Dad, you should have a few drinks with him. If there's any tourism support or initiative, we might be able to benefit from it."

"Sure! This afternoon, Dad will take care of the drinking for you. I won't worry about anything else."

Just as Lin Hongqi finished speaking, Chen Meijuan cast a sideways glance at him. "Drink, drink, drink! That's all you ever think about. Is your liver rented? If you ruin your liver from drinking, you'll be the one crying into your wine bottle then..."

Listening to his mom's nagging, Lin Xu suddenly had an idea. "Don't be in a rush to go back this time. Yueyue's maternal grandmother is at Xiehe Hospital. How about I take you both for a full physical checkup at Xiehe on Monday?"

Nowadays, major hospitals offer comprehensive cancer screenings. Although they're expensive, the examinations are very thorough and can help with early prevention. Lin Xu thought that since his parents were in Beijing, it would be a good opportunity for them to get a checkup.

Chen Meijuan was fine with it.

Lin Hongqi, however, upon hearing about a checkup, instinctively asked, "If they find something, does that mean I have to quit drinking?"

"Whether you quit or not, you shouldn't drink excessively. Try to drink less from now on. Drinking too much really isn't good for you."

At seven in the morning, the millet pumpkin porridge was thoroughly cooked. Lin Xu went back inside to wake up Shen Baobao, who had dozed off again.

After freshening up, the family sat down at the dining table for breakfast.

Chapter 520: Dishes That Comfort Homesickness! Unexpected Gains from the Opening Ceremony?

Shen Jiayue was still groggy from sleep, but when she saw the steamed cakes in the basket, she instantly perked up.

"Mom, what's this?"

"Steamed cakes. Lin Xu really liked these when he was little. I don't know if you'll like them, but if you don't, I can make you some pancakes right now."

Hearing they were her Lin Xu's childhood favorite, Shen Baobao immediately picked one up and said, "I like them, I like them a lot! I super like them!"

Chen Meijuan watched her daughter-in-law with a smile. It amused her that Shen Jiayue claimed to like the cakes without even tasting them; she was becoming almost joined at the hip with her son. No

wonder, Chen Meijuan mused. Last night, Yueyue's mother asked her to go home and rest, but the girl immediately chugged her Sour Plum Soup in one gulp and then pretended to be drunk, sprawling on the dining table.

Shen Baobao held a piece of steamed cake, imitating Lin Xu by tearing off a small piece and dipping it into the fragrant and savory watermelon bean paste before putting it in her mouth.

"Wow, this cake is so delicious!"

The steamed unleavened cakes were already chewy, and combined with the savory watermelon bean paste, both the flavor and texture leaped to a new level.

After finishing a piece of cake and then taking a sip of the millet pumpkin porridge, it was heavenly!

Chen Meijuan had simmered the pumpkin porridge for more than two hours; the millet had cooked until each grain burst open beautifully, while the pumpkin had completely melted into the porridge.

With one sip, the sweetness of the pumpkin and the fragrance of the millet mingled, enough to make one drink two big bowls even without any accompaniment.

"This is so delicious! Mom, everything you make is tasty," Shen Jiayue praised while eating.

My mother-in-law's culinary skills could leave Director Han in the dust by several blocks.

Chen Meijuan said with a smile, "I can only make these simple home-cooked meals. Later, if you want to eat something, just have Lin Xu cook it. The shop has a steamer, so making steamed cakes is very easy. And once the watermelon bean paste runs out, I'll send more from my hometown."

Shen Jiayue nodded vigorously. "Thank you, Mom!"

"Thank me for what? You didn't look down on our family for being poor. I should be the one thanking you."

"Oh, not at all. The first time I ate at the shop, I was prepared to work as a waitress and start a husband-and-wife business with Lin Xu. Unfortunately, the business developed too quickly, and I hadn't even started working before it turned into a proper restaurant..."

She had originally planned to endure hardships with Lin Xu and even elope if her parents pressured them. But things didn't go as expected; now her parents and Lin Xu were on the same team. Alas! She might never experience the feeling of wandering the world with her loved one in this lifetime.

While the family was enjoying their meal, Dundun, who had also taken a nap on the nearby sofa, jumped onto the coffee table, frantically pawing at the box from the previous night that had contained beef jerky.

Where's my beef jerky?

Where did that big box of beef jerky go?

Lin Xu, eating his cake, came over, scratched the little guy's head, and said, "That jerky wasn't very fresh anymore. If I'm not too busy today, how about I bake you some small dried fish with the oven? I guarantee it'll taste better than the beef jerky."

Dundun: "..."

Having small dried fish is naturally great. But why do I feel something isn't quite right?

After placating his "son," Lin Xu continued eating. After the meal, he changed into the formal attire his mother-in-law had bought for him two days ago—a white shirt paired with black trousers, and also a pair of black leather shoes that supposedly cost tens of thousands.

After he finished dressing, Shen Jiayue, who was trying on a new skirt, was stunned and blurted out, "Wow! Lin Xu, you look so handsome!"

Lin Xu looked at himself in the mirror, adjusted his hair, and said, "Why do I feel like I'm dressed like an insurance salesman in this?"

Shen Baobao immediately came closer and said with a giggle, "Can I take out an insurance policy then?"

"Sure, what will you use for the policy?"

"I'll use myself. How long can I be insured for?"

Lin Xu embraced her waist, kissed her, and said, "Ten thousand years."

"Thank you, Lin Xu. I want to kiss you back... MMM..."

After the young couple got ready, they had barely opened the door to step outside when Dundun approached, carrying his little bowtie in his mouth.

Although the little fellow still hadn't figured out the case of the missing beef jerky, seeing his "parents" dressed so nicely, he also demanded to be dressed up.

Lin Xu put a wine-red bowtie on him, then picked him up and carried him on his shoulder, heading to the shop with his parents.

The entrance of the shop had been decorated by the event company to look like a wedding venue.

It had everything: inflatable arches, a stage covered with a red carpet, various standing flower baskets, and cold firework devices.

Red banners hung from the shop's exterior wall.

They were printed with congratulatory messages for the grand opening:

"Fishing Platform State Guesthouse wishes Lin Ji's Food a very prosperous opening!"

"China Youth Travel Group wishes Lin Ji's Food a very prosperous opening!"

"National Tourism Association wishes Lin Ji's Food a very prosperous opening!"

"China Travel Group wishes Lin Ji's Food a very prosperous opening!"

"Yanjing City Television wishes Lin Ji's Food a very prosperous opening!"

"..."

Lin Xu initially thought there weren't many, but upon counting, he realized that the number of units and organizations connected to Lin Ji had unknowingly grown to twenty or thirty.

Of course, some were just there to make up the numbers, like the travel channel, which had contributed one itself.

Furthermore, Longqi Mountain Scenic Area, Ziqiang Shengjian Management Development Company, Dundun Catering Management Company, and other enterprises were actually Lin Xu's own.

Moreover, Panda and Wu Kexin's Xinda Company, Ou Hua's Jingou Company, and his elder sister-in-law's Joyful Media, among others, were all on the list.

The large red banners hanging from the rooftop instantly created the atmosphere of an opening ceremony.

Walking into the shop, the employees had also changed into brand-new uniforms.

Shu Yun saw Dundun and immediately hugged the little guy, exclaiming, "Oh my, my godson is even wearing a bowtie! He looks so gentlemanly!"

Lin Xu went upstairs. He started steaming the Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake needed for the day and also put the lamb, which had been marinating since yesterday, into the oven to roast.