

## Culinary 521

Chapter 521: Dishes That Comfort Homesickness! Unexpected Gains from the Opening Ceremony?

The roasting started right on time, ensuring it wouldn't delay the noon tasting.

Three whole roasted lambs, along with a few suckling pigs, comprised the menu for today's guests.

"Wei Qian, is everything ready with the food?"

"Don't worry, Lin Xu, everything is arranged. Today's honored guests will have lunch in the private rooms on the third floor, while the first and second floors continue operating as usual."

As they were speaking, Chen Yan arrived upstairs, lifting the hem of her dress.

"Brother-in-law, what did the restaurant serve for breakfast this morning? I haven't eaten yet!"

This question actually stumped Lin Xu.

"I ate at home today; I didn't come to the restaurant. My mom made steamed pancakes, served with our homemade watermelon bean sauce, and I had millet pumpkin porridge."

Chen Yan was dumbfounded. He ate well behind my back again... It's not even that the food was so amazing, but why do I get so hungry when my brother-in-law describes it like that?

"So, did you... finish everything this morning?"

"There's a bit left. If you want some, have Yueyue take you."

Upon hearing this, Chen Yan quickly lifted her dress hem and rushed downstairs.

She loved this kind of homey, everyday food, unlike at home where they always had things like fried eggs, toast, and jam, making it feel like a hotel buffet.

After steaming the Horse Hoof Cake, Lin Xu went to the cold storage, retrieved a piece of Mackerel, removed the fish bones, peeled off the skin, and then sliced it into pieces about half a centimeter thick.

Once sliced, he arranged the pieces on a baking tray and placed them in the oven to roast.

I promised Dundun I'd make dried fish, so I have to keep my word.

Unfortunately, there were no small river fish available for purchase at the moment, so he had to make do with Mackerel. After baking it until dry and fragrant, he would let it cool slightly until it softened a bit, then tear it into strips and store it in airtight bags.

This way, it would be convenient for Dundun to eat.

Of course, it would also be convenient for a certain big Baobao to sneak some in the middle of the night.

To prevent all of Dundun's snacks from being eaten, Lin Xu planned to roast a larger batch this time.

Processing this type of sea fish was quite simple; no salt was needed, as it naturally had a mild saltiness after roasting.

At half-past nine in the morning, Lin Xu's father-in-law, along with relatives from the Shen Family and the Han Family, had all arrived.

Old Mrs. Shen hugged Dundun the moment she entered and shared Dundun's amusing antics with Old Mrs. Han, actually turning Old Mrs. Han, a re-employed professor from Xiehe, into a fervent cat lover.

"Listening to you, Dundun sounds smarter than a child! Dundun, dear, I'm your great-grandmother. How about you come home with me today? Great-grandma has fish for you at home."

Old Mrs. Han extended her hand towards Dundun, initially thinking the little creature wouldn't pay her any mind. To her surprise, it immediately jumped from Old Mrs. Shen's arms, landed in hers, and curled up like a baby. This made Old Mrs. Han so delighted she immediately went to show off to Old Mr. Han.

But at that moment, Old Mr. Han wasn't paying attention to Dundun; he was wearing his reading glasses, engrossed in examining the calligraphy Geng Lishan had brought.

Last time, Geng Lishan had gifted "Harmony Brings Wealth" and "May Your Business Thrive."

Today, he had brought a transcription of Li Bai's "Bring in the Wine" and a huge plaque inscribed with "May Wealth Flow In Abundantly."

The two calligraphic works made many present turn their heads in admiration. It was hard to imagine that such an eccentric and hard-to-please calligrapher could have such a good relationship with Lin Xu.

Heard about a renovation? He sent calligraphy. Heard about an engagement? He sent calligraphy. Heard about joining a TV program? He sent calligraphy. Last time the restaurant served roasted suckling pig? He sent calligraphy. And today, for the new restaurant's opening, he sent calligraphy again.

Whenever Lin Xu had any kind of event, big or small, Mr. Lishan would promptly send over some calligraphy.

If he kept this up, Mr. Lishan's calligraphy might even depreciate in value.

Soon, the crew from the TV station also arrived.

Everyone first presented their gifts at the ceremonial table, then filmed some footage, planning to insert it into the travel news segment as a news report.

Yanjing was a tourist city. Now that it had a new dining venue capable of accommodating tourists, it was perfectly reasonable to feature it in the travel channel's news, right?

Not long after the TV station crew arrived, the head chefs from the Fishing Platform, led by Director Liao of the Dining Department, also came to the restaurant.

After each presenting their gifts at the ceremonial table, they voluntarily went upstairs to help in the kitchen.

After all, this was their area of expertise. If the dishes somehow failed today, it would tarnish not only Lin Xu's reputation but also that of the Fishing Platform.

Guo Weidong stood before the roasting oven, looking at the whole lambs hanging inside and the suckling pigs marinating outside, and couldn't help but feel a surge of emotion.

Just last night, he had been amazed by Xie Baomin's exceptional talent.

But now, looking at these suckling pigs, he truly recognized Lin Xu's terrifying talent.

He had only taught him once, yet Lin Xu had managed to prepare the suckling pigs so professionally. With talent like that, he truly had the capital to be arrogant.

As he was musing, Dai Jianli came over and handed Guo Weidong some snacks.

"What's this?"

"Baked fish slices. It seems Brother Lin made them for his cat. They taste pretty good and are quite suitable for pairing with drinks."

Guo Weidong was speechless. You even eat the cat's snacks? Just how hungry are you?

Seeing that these fish slices were perfectly baked, Guo Weidong couldn't resist tearing off a piece to try.

It was indeed delicious. The subtle savory taste and the fresh flavor of the fish complemented each other perfectly. If I had a bag of these fish slices while watching a football game at night, with a couple of draft beers, it would definitely be very relaxing.

"How is it? You think it's tasty too, right? Everything at Brother Lin's place is exquisite; even the cat's food is this delicious. I plan to take some with me."

Guo Weidong shot him a look. "Stealing things at the Fishing Platform isn't enough for you? You've come here to embarrass yourself too?"

"What do you mean, embarrass myself? I'm planning to trade my skills. Last time, Brother Lin said my dry dip was quite good. I'm going to teach him how to make it. Taking a few pieces of dried fish as a tuition fee is perfectly reasonable, isn't it?"

It *is* reasonable. But hold on... that son of a bitch! Trading the recipe for the dry dip for just a few pieces of dried fish? How are we supposed to exchange techniques with Lin Xu in the future? With this pot-stirrer around, nothing good ever happens!

At ten o'clock, Liu Zhengyu also arrived with people from the Travel Association.

Huo Yifan, who had previously participated in the competition, also came with his father, Huo Yuanchao, bearing a gift. Upon seeing Lin Xu, Huo Yifan couldn't help but complain,

"You didn't even tell me about your engagement! Were you afraid I couldn't afford a worthy gift?"

"The competition had just ended," Lin Xu said with a smile. "I was worried you wouldn't be able to get away."

Once most of the invited guests had arrived, the grand opening ceremony officially began.

As the master of ceremonies delivered an enthusiastic speech on the canopied stage, Lin Xu suddenly heard the system's notification in his mind:

"Lin Ji's Food has officially opened! Reward: two Perfect Level Culinary Skill Cards and three Perfect Level Dish Lottery Draws. Draw now?"

There's even a lottery? I didn't expect hosting an opening ceremony would bring such unexpected rewards. Where's Dundun? Which elder is holding that little fella now? I need to find that little fella quickly and make the draws. If I need to show off my skills at lunch, this would be the perfect chance to demonstrate them.

While searching everywhere for the little chubby cat, Lin Xu saw a man in studded shoes, a studded hat, and a studded denim outfit, hand in hand with a middle-aged woman, arriving at the venue.

He stared dumbfoundedly at the man.

Holy crap! Is that Master? He's dressed even younger than Senior Brother!

At this moment, Xie Baomin also noticed the punk-dressed elderly man; he and Lin Xu exchanged a look and walked over to the elderly man together...

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"Master..."

Lin Xu smiled and greeted the Master, who was dressed more punk than a rock singer. My Master is really letting himself go.

"Master, with that outfit, anyone would think you're my senior brother," Lin Xu joked.

Xie Baomin greeted him cheerfully, then turned to the middle-aged lady and said, "Hello, Auntie!"

This must be the 'Leopard Print Auntie' my junior brother mentioned. I almost blurted out 'Leopard Print' when I greeted her. Good thing I held back.

「A month had passed.」

Master had dyed his hair black and was dressed much younger. Standing next to the 'Leopard Print Auntie,' they actually looked quite compatible.

"My younger apprentice is getting more and more successful," the Master observed. Then, noticing Xie Baomin's somewhat haggard appearance, he couldn't help but add, "My older apprentice, however... you should find some time to work out. Why do you look so drained?"

Xie Baomin quickly replied, "I've already got a gym membership. I'll work out every day, striving to have eight-pack abs like yours, Master."

The Master chuckled, then introduced them. "Let me introduce you two. This is Auntie Luo."

He didn't call her Master's wife. Are they not married yet? Lin Xu murmured to himself. Then, he loudly greeted, "Hello, Auntie Luo! Thank you for the gifts in my livestream. You've spent too much."

Xie Baomin also quickly greeted, "Hello, Auntie Luo. Thank you for taking care of our Master."

While greeting, he was comparing her in his mind to his Master's former wives. Whether in terms of figure, temperament, or looks, this Auntie Luo seems inferior. Master is indeed getting old. The Master's wives he found in the past—which one wasn't elegant and outstandingly beautiful?

Could it be that once a playboy settles down, he chooses someone comparatively ordinary to spend his days with?

The 'Leopard Print Auntie,' whose name was Luo Shan, looked at the two apprentices greeting her. She took out two red envelopes from her bag and handed them over, saying, "Hello, hello. It's our first meeting, so Auntie has a small red envelope for each of you. Inside are two cards, each with one million yuan. The PIN is your Master's retirement date."

One... million?

Xie Baomin, looking at the thin red envelope which didn't feel thick at all, had thought it contained at most five hundred yuan. So when Auntie Luo handed it over, he had casually accepted it. But hearing it was one million, the hand holding the red envelope trembled. I was a bit reckless.

Do these rich people misunderstand the 'small' in 'small red envelope'? If one million is a 'small' red envelope, then how much is a 'big' one?

He smiled wryly and tried to hand the red envelope back. "Auntie Luo, this is too much, isn't it?"

Luo Shan waved her hand dismissively. "Too much? What's too much? When an elder gives you something, just take it. If you don't accept it, it means you don't acknowledge my status."

Your status?

Xie Baomin, feeling the outline of the bank card in the red envelope, immediately said, "Thank you, Master's wife! Our Master is truly blessed to have you."

This made the Master glare at him. This worthless dog! Sold me out for a million, did you?

However, the senior apprentice didn't notice his Master's murderous gaze at that moment; he was still lost in his own reflections. This new Master's wife is so much better than the previous ones! Those former ones, judging by their looks, weren't cut out for a settled life. Master has weathered countless storms and finally met the person most suited for him. This is truly worthy of celebration!

After taking the money, Xie Baomin immediately changed his opinion of Auntie Luo, and in his heart, he directly ranked her as No.1 among all the Master's wives. This is what a Master's wife should be like!

Seeing his senior brother change his address, Lin Xu also followed suit. "Thank you, Master's wife!"

"Thank me for what? Isn't it only right to give you red envelopes? Handsome, you talk to them. I'll wait for you in the car," Luo Shan said.

After speaking, the Master's wife walked towards the exit of the venue, apparently not planning to stay for lunch.

The Master nodded and then said to his two apprentices, "For the past ten-odd years, I've been cooped up in that little world of the Fishing Platform. I haven't seen the great mountains and rivers of our country, nor have I measured the land beneath my feet. After this trip, there are even more places I want to go. Your Auntie Luo and I plan to go to the Northeast, explore the old forests, and climb Changbai Mountain. Then we'll take a road trip around and finally settle down in Yangcheng."

What? Settle in Yangcheng?

Initially, Lin Xu thought his Master's plans were quite romantic. But if he settled in Yangcheng, it would be inconvenient to ask him for advice on cooking in the future.

"Master, why do you want to settle in Yangcheng?" Lin Xu asked.

"It's warmer, of course," the Master replied. "And Old Guo is setting up that Cantonese Cuisine Museum; I think it'd be fun to be his neighbor. When you guys have vacation time, you can come visit. Besides, in terms of culinary arts, Yangcheng is well worth exploring."

Xie Baomin tucked the red envelope into his pocket and asked the Master, "Are you leaving right now?"

"Yes, we're heading straight to the airport shortly. We've chartered a small plane direct to the Northeast. I used to worry that my skills would be lost, with no one to carry them on. Now that Little Xu is here, I don't have to worry anymore. Baomin, when you're not busy, teach your junior brother more. When he reaches your level, I'll teach him some high-end dishes."

"Understood, Master. I'll remember," Xie Baomin replied.

After speaking, the Master smiled apologetically at Lin Xu. "We won't be staying for lunch today. Please apologize to your family for me. Our time as master and apprentice hasn't been long, but we've really hit it off. Before I leave, come and give your Master a hug."

A hug?

Lin Xu was a bit surprised, not understanding what his Master was up to. In TV dramas, only people with terminal illnesses act like this... Could it be that Master also...

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His nose tingled. Just as he was hesitating about whether to inform Mr. Han and Mrs. Han to get a check-up for their master, Uncle Gao opened his arms for a hug and slipped a piece of paper into Lin Xu's pocket.

"Contact Lucy for me and tell her I miss her a lot. Remember to say it in English; she doesn't understand Chinese. I've put her mobile number in your pocket."

Lin Xu: "..."

It doesn't look like a terminal illness.

People with terminal illnesses definitely wouldn't be this flippant.

But wait a minute... hadn't he quit all that?

Why is he still bothering Lucy?

He asked, "How should I let Aunt Lucy know it's you?"

"Once you mention Robin, she'll know it's me."

Robin?

Which alias is this again?

Just as Uncle Gao finished speaking, a car horn sounded not far away. He straightened his clothes before saying to Lin Xu and Xie Baomin, "Take care, both of you. I'll let you know once I'm settled in Yangcheng."

Then, he walked away in a carefree manner towards the exit of the venue.

Lin Xu and Xie Baomin watched the old sea king's departing figure, wanting to say something but at a loss for words.

A good while later, Xie Baomin remarked with a sigh, "Master sure has a good waist."

Lin Xu pulled out the piece of paper from his pocket and saw a mobile number starting with 139 written on it.

It's too busy right now. He'll try to contact this Aunt Lucy once things settle down.

And it has to be in English, which will be a bit of a challenge.

Ever since he passed the CET-4 exam in his junior year, his English had rapidly deteriorated to the point where he only recognized gaming terms. Picking it up now, especially spoken English, was somewhat troublesome.

But for his master, no matter how difficult, the message had to be delivered!

「Outside the venue.」

Uncle Gao opened the door to his BMW 760.

As soon as he sat down, Luo Shan, who was next to him, brandished a slip of paper. "Handsome, who owns this mobile number starting with 138? I just tried calling it, and a woman speaking English

answered. I had my secretary communicate with her, and she kept asking where I'd hidden Robin. Who is Robin?"

Gao Peisheng: "..."

He really shouldn't have gotten involved with these wealthy old women!

They have too many tricks up their sleeves!

He looked at Luo Shan and asked, "Then what about the piece of paper in my pocket?"

"It's my mobile number. I haven't added your little disciple on WeChat yet. I'll add him now; that way, we won't have trouble finding your disciples if something comes up."

「Inside the venue.」

Lin Xu had just found Dundun, who was being held in Mrs. Han's arms, when the MC urged him onto the stage to give his speech.

With no other choice, he had to postpone the prize draw yet again.

Standing on stage, he thanked all the guests, family, and friends one by one, giving special thanks to his love, Shen Baobao. A certain beauty sitting in the audience, eating dried fish, almost cried at his words.

Stinky Xu Bao, always knowing how to cheer me up, Shen Baobao thought.

"Where did this dried fish come from? It's quite tasty," Chen Yan said.

Chen Yan had already consumed two steamed pancakes and three bowls of millet porridge and was belching from being overly full. However, smelling the aromatic dried fish in her cousin's hand, she couldn't resist tearing off a piece to taste.

"Xu Bao prepared it as a snack for Dundun," Shen Baobao explained. "I saw Chef Dai and the others eating it, so I grabbed some too. You know what, it's really not bad, almost as good as that beef jerky."

"Beef jerky?"

"Chef Zhuang made some beef jerky for Dundun yesterday. I ate it all last night while binge-watching... Today I planned to have them make some more, and some of this fish jerky too."

Chen Yan, looking at her cousin's eating habits, finally understood why Dundun wasn't very affectionate towards her.

She even steals the cat's food, tsk tsk. Even Snow White's stepmother wouldn't stoop that low, would she?

No wonder Dundun isn't close to me, his grandaunt, either. He must have been negatively influenced by my silly cousin.

Shortly after eleven in the morning, the celebration officially came to an end.

The restaurant staff led all the guests to the private dining rooms on the third floor.

Seating arrangements had already been made. Once the guests were seated, the dishes began to arrive. All sorts of exquisite food, not usually sold to the public, were served to them today.

All the upstairs private dining rooms were full.

Lin Xu went from room to room, greeting the guests. Then, in the largest room, he found Dundun being held in his mother-in-law Han Shuzhen's arms.

The little guy had been passed around by the elders for a while and was looking a bit weary now.

"Mom, give Dundun to me," Lin Xu said. "I'll get him something to eat. He hasn't eaten all morning and must be starving."

"Sure, sure, go ahead!" Han Shuzhen replied. "I was wondering why my grandson looked a bit skinny. It turns out he's hungry."

Han Shuzhen handed Dundun over to Lin Xu and then started chatting with Chen Meijuan about going to a spa. With nothing planned for the afternoon, she intended to take Chen Meijuan to experience a high-end Beijing spa.

Meanwhile, Shen Guofu, hearing that Lin Hongqi also enjoyed playing pool, planned to invite Tan Yajun, who had also come bearing a gift, to play a couple of rounds at the villa. He wanted to let Yinzhou's Brother Lin experience the prowess of Yanjing's Ding Junhui and South City's O'Sullivan.

Carrying Dundun to the second floor, Lin Xu told a kitchen hand, "Bring me some grilled fish fillets. Dundun's been eating steamed and boiled meat every day, so let's give him a taste of something different today."

But the kitchen hand quickly came back empty-handed. "There's none left. It seems Chef Dai and the boss's wife took them all to eat."

Lin Xu: ????????

With all this delicious food around, why would they compete with a cat for its meal?

Just as he was feeling frustrated, Shen Jiayue came over with a small bag. "Xu Bao, you've got to try this grilled fish fillet! It's so tasty I was afraid someone would snatch it away, so I packed it all up... Eh? Why is Dundun showing his claws? He looks so majestic!"

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Dundun flopped into Lin Xu's arms.

To heck with it, this cat is tired...

"Those are Dundun's snacks. If you want some, I can make them especially for you."

Lin Xu grabbed a handful of fish slices and carried Dundun down to the lobby.

He placed the little fellow on the service counter, then took out its small eating bowl, tore the fish slices into strips, and put them inside.

The previously lethargic chubby kitty suddenly scrambled up, wiggled its plump little butt over to sniff, and then began to gobble down the food.

"Is that enough? I still have more here."

Stepmother Shen stood by, watching Dundun devour the food as if starved, and felt somewhat embarrassed.

Lin Xu said, "When I'm free, I'll bake you some more—sweet and savory, spicy, Cumin, barbecue, and tomato flavors..."

As he was speaking, Shen Baobao rushed over. "Stop, stop! I'm drooling just thinking about it! Thank you, Xu Bao! I really want to pin you down on the bed and kiss you fiercely."

While the young couple was being affectionate, Dundun looked at them with dissatisfaction.

What am I eating today, cat food or dog food?

After Dundun had eaten and drunk its fill, Lin Xu petted its head and silently chanted in his mind, "Lottery!"

After a series of actions, the system prompt quickly sounded in his mind, "Congratulations to the host for obtaining Perfect Level dishes—Sichuan-style Saliva Chicken, Salted Fish Eggplant Stew, Milk Yellow Mooncake."

Oh? Is this because the Mid-Autumn Festival is approaching? Why did I even get a Milk Yellow Mooncake? But this is good; I won't have to worry about what gifts to bring relatives for the Mid-Autumn Festival.

After the lottery finished, Dundun licked its paw and then crawled into the little house on the service counter, falling into a deep sleep.

Right, after a busy morning, the little kitty can finally take a break.

Heading back upstairs, Lin Xu curiously asked Shen Baobao, "Why aren't you eating upstairs? Weren't you looking forward to this meal for a long time?"

"I have no appetite without you."

Is it because you ate too much fish jerky? Lin Xu thought.

He then said, "If you don't have an appetite, I'll make you an appetizing dish. It'll also be a chance for the elders to taste my cooking."

Now that he had acquired the technique for Sweet and Sour Pork, there was no need to hide it. Taking advantage of the large gathering today, he could make it and let Old Madam Shen taste the dish from their Northeast homeland, to see if it matched the one in her memory.

Since his master had gone to the Northeast today, it was only right and proper to make a Northeast dish.

"What dish are you planning to make, Xu Bao?"

"Sweet and Sour Pork!"

"That's great, that's great! I love this kind of sweet and sour dish. Hurry up and make it. I'll wait at the door to keep Yan Bao from snatching it."

Lin Xu was speechless.

My sister-in-law is probably either battling the roasted suckling pig or wrestling with the lamb leg right now; she wouldn't have time to care about what new dishes are being made in the kitchen.

He entered the kitchen and asked Wei Qian, "Do you have any potato starch that's been soaked?"

"We do. The restaurant now prepares some before every meal. This is just in case we suddenly need to make batter-coated dishes, as it would be too late to prepare it then. Judging by your question, are you planning to make a new dish?"

Lin Xu said smilingly, "It's not really a new dish, just making some Sweet and Sour Pork."

Sweet and Sour Pork required potato starch, and specifically, potato starch that had been thoroughly soaked. After the potato starch was soaked in water and allowed to settle, the excess clear water on top was poured out. What remained was the best starch slurry for Sweet and Sour Pork.

Lin Xu went to the cold storage and brought back some pork tenderloin. Since he was introducing a new dish, he would definitely serve a portion to each private room for everyone to try.

A standard plate of Sweet and Sour Pork requires eighteen slices of meat. These slices also need to be sufficiently large, and making one portion uses about a pound of tenderloin. The amount of meat used showed how the boldness and generosity of Northerners were ingrained in their very being.

Swiftly removing the silverskin from the tenderloin, Lin Xu laid it flat on the cutting board and cut it against the grain into six to seven-millimeter-thick slices. The pork for Sweet and Sour Pork must be thick enough to achieve a crispy exterior and tender interior. If the slices were too thin, they would easily overcook during frying and become dry and hard.

"What seasonings are needed for Sweet and Sour Pork? Do we use orange juice and tomato sauce?" Wei Qian asked curiously, leaning over.

Lin Xu replied with a smile, "No need. I'm using the traditional method—just White Vinegar and sugar, with no orange juice or tomato sauce."

There are several schools of thought when it comes to Sweet and Sour Pork. The Binjiang cuisine of Heilongjiang is considered the most authentic. It uses only White Vinegar and sugar, without adding anything for color. The resulting Sweet and Sour Pork has a predominantly sour and sweet natural flavor. In the Liao Ning region, cooks are more innovative and like to add orange juice or tomato sauce. Sweet and Sour Pork made with orange juice is known as "Yellow Sauce Sweet and Sour Pork," while the version with tomato sauce is often referred to as "Red Sauce Sweet and Sour Pork."

In Chifeng, a city in Inner Mongolia near the Northeast Region, Soy Sauce is used. This produces a salty Sweet and Sour Pork, quite different from the sweet and sour variety found in the Northeast Region. It's said that in the Yanbian area, there's a method that uses neither Scallion and Ginger; it's just pure meat slices coated in a sweet and sour sauce.

Beyond these major variations, there are also some localized practices, such as adding fruit or canned goods, all of which are evolutions of the traditional Sweet and Sour Pork recipe.

Lin Xu could understand this kind of evolution. After all, each region has its own tastes. In the Central Plains, they even make Oil Braised Large Shrimp with tomato sauce regularly. Could you say their way of eating is wrong?

After cutting all the meat, Lin Xu placed the slices in a bowl and rinsed them with clear water. This step helped wash away any blood and also made the meat more tender.

After rinsing, he removed the meat slices, squeezed out the excess water with his hands, and began seasoning. With the larger amount of meat today, Lin Xu added three small spoons of salt, two small spoons of pepper powder, and a touch of Light Soy Sauce for extra base flavor. He mixed everything well before covering it with plastic wrap to marinate.

Authentic Sweet and Sour Pork is tangy at first, sweet when chewed, and a slight saltiness is tasted only at the end. The dish uses little salt; apart from marinating the meat, no more salt is added in other steps.

Therefore, the meat slices should be marinated for as long as possible to allow the salt to penetrate deeply.

While the meat was marinating, Lin Xu prepared some julienned ginger, scallions, and carrots, as well as some cilantro stems. These aromatics would be added to the wok with the fried pork slices later when coating them with sauce. In addition to these ingredients, he also sliced some garlic to be stir-fried for fragrance when making the sweet and sour sauce.

While Lin Xu was busy in the kitchen preparing Sweet and Sour Pork, downstairs at the service desk, staff from the finance department of Shen Group approached, greeting Dou Wenjing, who was checking the accounts. "Hello, Ms. Dou," one of them said with a smile. "Mr. Shen sent us to add funds to the membership card. From now on, Shen Group's business dinners will be held at Lin Ji. We'll be counting on your excellent service!"

When Dou Wenjing left Shen Group, many people were surprised, and some were even secretly pleased by her misfortune. However, they hadn't expected her to become the general manager at Mr. Shen's son-in-law's restaurant. This made those who had previously gloated feel a pang of regret.

If only we had known, we would have tried harder to make a good impression on Mr. Shen.

Seeing her former colleagues, Dou Wenjing greeted them with a smile and then asked, "How much would you like to add?"

"Five million!"

Mr. Shen truly spares no effort in supporting his son-in-law's business... Just as Dou Wenjing was about to call Song Tiantian to handle the transaction, Yuan Fei from the Audit Bureau also approached.

"Can we make a large deposit now?" he asked. "Tianpeng Audit Firm would like to deposit five hundred thousand. And while we're at it, we'd like to extend our corporate dining contract until next year."

His lead was followed by a swarm of representatives from other cooperative and well-connected enterprises, all coming forward to add funds to their accounts.

Upstairs, while julienned ginger, Lin Xu watched his System Points continuously rise in the display and nearly cut his hand.

Holy shit! he thought. Before I even finished this one piece of ginger, my System Points have soared to seven or eight million! If it's like this every day, forget buying a regular house; acquiring a courtyard house within the Second Ring Road wouldn't be just a dream!

After finishing the ginger, he remembered he hadn't redeemed the special item yet. He entered the system, ready to exchange for the useful Eye of Discrimination, and also to see what special item the next refresh would bring.

Chapter 525: The Crunchy Sweet and Sour Pork, Totally Not Enough to Eat!

"Would you like to spend 1,888,888 points to exchange for the special item 'Eye of Discrimination'?"

After pressing the exchange button for the Eye of Discrimination, the system's prompt immediately sounded in Lin Xu's mind.

"Yes!"

Once the exchange was confirmed, the System Points were automatically deducted.

Then, the prompt sounded again:

"Exchange successful. Congratulations to the host for obtaining the special item 'Eye of Discrimination', which can accurately determine the quality of ingredients and the Level of dishes."

He had finally exchanged for the Eye of Discrimination.

Lin Xu felt a cool sensation in his eyes. Qin Wei had just finished making a dish of hand-torn cabbage, and Lin Xu focused his attention to use the Eye of Discrimination. A line of text soon appeared before him:

"A dish made with cabbage, sliced pork belly, chunks of dried chili, chopped scallions, minced ginger, minced garlic, table salt, Rice Vinegar, Light Soy Sauce, vegetable oil, and lard, Level: Superior."

TSK, this Skill is really nice. From now on, just by standing at the kitchen door and watching everyone's dishes one by one, it'll be crystal clear who slacked off during the cooking process.

He then looked at other chefs' dishes, and their levels were all above Excellent Level.

This meant that everyone's cooking skills were good, and they had all put their hearts into the cooking without cutting corners.

The Eye of Discrimination is really handy. Lin Xu decided to take advantage of his abundant points to exchange for another special item while on this winning streak. The sooner you buy it, the sooner you enjoy it, right?

However, after opening the special item column, a prompt popped up on the page:

[This page will refresh after 167:58:35. Pay 3,000,000 points for an immediate refresh.]

What the...? Is it trying to learn all the bad habits of domestic game companies? Why introduce an immediate refresh of all things? This setting is just freaking brilliant—brilliantly infuriating! 167 hours... that's one week. Guess I'll check back in a week then. Although I have points now, I don't want to spend them on an immediate refresh. With so many points, wouldn't it be better to exchange them for Basic Techniques?

Putting aside those thoughts, he continued to cut scallion threads and carrot shreds.

In the dish Sweet and Sour Pork, shredded Scallion and Ginger, and carrots are used for garnish. Not much is needed, but they must be cut finely enough.

This way, when added to the wok, they will cook through the instant they are heated.

The flavor of the Scallion and Ginger shreds will also seep into the meat.

As for cilantro stems, they are used to add aroma and reduce greasiness. Adding them gives the meat a fresh cilantro flavor and effectively lessens the oiliness of the pork slices.

Once these garnishes were ready, Lin Xu took a small bowl and began to mix the sauce for the Sweet and Sour Pork.

Two large spoonfuls of White Vinegar, two large spoonfuls of White Sugar, half a ladleful of Rice Vinegar, a tiny bit of Flavoring, a little sesame oil, and finally, a touch of Dark Soy Sauce to give the sweet and sour sauce a slight color.

White Vinegar sharpens the sourness, while Rice Vinegar enhances the fragrance. Only by mixing them can the desired enticingly sour and aromatic effect be achieved.

As for Dark Soy Sauce, it's purely for coloring.

With Dark Soy Sauce, the Sweet and Sour Pork achieves a richer golden hue, making the dish look more attractive.

Normally in a restaurant kitchen, the ratio of sugar to vinegar is one-to-one. However, with more meat today, the sauce needs to simmer a bit longer.

Therefore, more vinegar is needed to compensate for the evaporation during the extended cooking time.

If cooking this on a home stove, the ratio of sugar to vinegar should be at least 1:1.5. Otherwise, by the time the sweet and sour sauce is ready, the vinegar will have mostly evaporated, leaving only a sugary syrup in the wok.

A dish made with such a sauce wouldn't be Sweet and Sour Pork anymore; it should be called candied pork loin or sugar-glazed pork loin.

He stirred the sauce in the bowl, ensuring the White Sugar dissolved as much as possible.

Then, he set up the wok with oil, preparing to deep-fry the pork slices.

"Boss, are you using peanut oil or salad oil?"

"Soybean Oil!"

Since I'm making a Northeast dish, it's natural to use Soybean Oil, which people from the Northeast commonly consume. Only then will the Sweet and Sour Pork be truly authentic.

As the oil heated up, Lin Xu brought over the soaked potato starch.

When making Sweet and Sour Pork, one cannot use common cornstarch or sweet potato starch; instead, potato starch, commonly found in the Northeast, must be used.

Only this way will the Sweet and Sour Pork turn out crispy and delicious, with a more beautiful and tempting color when fried.

After pouring off the excess water from the surface, the white starch inside felt as hard as a brick when patted. However, it could still be dug into by hand and even flowed slowly when the container was tilted.

He poured this starch into the bowl with the marinated meat and drizzled in half a spoonful of cooking oil.

This step was essential for making the pork slices crispy and could not be skipped.

After adding the oil, he first mixed the semi-liquid starch by hand to incorporate the oil. Then, he combined it thoroughly with the pork slices, ensuring every piece of pork loin was evenly coated with the white starch.

When the oil was about seventy percent hot, he started adding the pork slices to the wok.

There was a technique to adding them too: one couldn't just toss the slices in. Instead, holding a corner of a slice, he would dredge it through the starch batter in the bowl a few times, ensuring both sides were evenly coated.

The purpose of this was to fully stretch out the meat slices, making them appear larger and more impressive when fried.

It also helped to spread the starch batter evenly, resulting in uniformly fried pork slices without any large clumps of batter sticking together.

After both sides were evenly coated, he slowly lowered the meat slice into the hot oil.

He didn't just toss it in. Instead, he held the slice, allowing its lower half to fry for a moment before releasing it completely. This effectively prevented the meat from curling up as it entered the oil.

We folks from the Northeast don't fuss about much when eating, but the presentation has to be lavish. If the fried meat looks shrunken and unsightly, it's an eyesore, and it's embarrassing to serve.

Chapter 526: The Crunchy Sweet and Sour Pork, Totally Not Enough to Eat! \_2

Every piece of meat had to be fully stretched out. When picked up with chopsticks, it was almost as big as a palm. Only then would it be impressive and presentable. The meat was added to the pot slice by slice, without haste. Once the slices in the pot were set, they were immediately scooped out with a strainer, without hesitation.

Off to the side, Che, who had planned to help, asked, "Boss, isn't this meat under-fried? Is setting its shape enough? Do we need to fry it again later?"

Off to the side, having just finished making a batch of Fried Pork, Wei Qian glanced over and commented admiringly, "The traditional method for this dish is just to set the shape, then achieve thorough cooking by frying it again. This makes the batter crispy and delicious... Pay attention, Che, chefs in regular restaurants aren't as meticulous as our boss. His skills are unparalleled!"

Building One cooked a lot of pork. Foreign dignitaries liked dishes with a sweet and sour flavor, so Building One's signature Sweet and Sour Pork was quite famous. Wei Qian had often assisted the old chefs of Building One and knew the dish required multiple re-fries—three times was not too many, five was not too few. Short repeated frying effectively locked in the moisture within the meat slices, and the batter on the outside became crisper with each fry, not easily going soft even when cool.

"Yueyue, where's your brother-in-law? Uncle said it's almost time for the toasts, asking him to come upstairs to the private room."

While waiting at the kitchen door, Shen Baobao received a message from Chen Yan. She quickly typed back, "Xu is in the kitchen making Sweet and Sour Pork. We'll head back once he's done." After sending the message, she realized she shouldn't have mentioned the name of the dish, as it might attract more people waiting at the kitchen door for food. Just as she was about to retract the message, Chen Yan's reply came, "Sweet and Sour Pork? Wait, I'll come downstairs to meet you."

Meet us? You're here for the Sweet and Sour Pork, aren't you? Shen Jiayue pursed her lips, annoyed with her own carelessness. But it was okay. If only Yan Bao were coming, there should still be enough for me.

「In the upstairs private room.」

Seeing Chen Yan getting ready to leave, the nearly full Geng Lele and Zeng Xiaoqi also followed, wanting to step outside for some fresh air. As they left the private room, Lu Lu, from next door, planned to visit the kitchen to find Zhu Yong. If he wasn't busy, she would ask him to make some Pumpkin Soup. Then they bumped into Wu Kexin, who had come out to take a phone call, and the secretary, Mr. Zou, who was planning to find Dou Wenjing for a chat.

When the large group made their grand entrance to the second floor, Shen Jiayue's eyes widened in disbelief. That silly Yan Bao, did she use a megaphone to announce it to everyone one by one upstairs? With so many people, forget the Sweet and Sour Pork; even a whole pig cooked Sweet and Sour style wouldn't be enough for them to eat!

「In the kitchen, Lin Xu had finally finished frying half a basin of meat.」

He turned the stove to its highest setting, letting the oil temperature rise back up to over 70 percent, then poured the fried meat slices back into the pot, re-frying them for ten seconds before scooping them out. After this round of re-frying, the surface of the batter had slightly changed color. Yet this wasn't enough; it had to be fried several more times until the batter was golden and the meat exposed beneath was date-red. Only then would it be perfect.

He continued the re-frying process. Each session was brief, just ten seconds or so before removing the slices, then increasing the oil temperature back to above 70 percent heat before continuing to fry. When he scooped the meat slices into the bowl, the clicking noises they made against each other indicated that the meat slices were perfectly fried and ready to be seasoned using the base sauce method.

The so-called "base sauce" method refers to preparing the sauce first and then adding the ingredients to it. This contrasts with the "Stirring Sauce" method, where the sauce is added when the dish is almost cooked.

He moved the frying pan to one side and replaced it with a slightly larger wok on the stove. If it were any other dish, he would have simply poured out the oil from the pan, leaving just enough to fry the Scallion and Ginger aromatics, but not for Sweet and Sour Pork. This dish required a clean pan. This was to prevent starch sediment from the oil pan causing black spots on the Sweet and Sour Pork, which would affect its presentation. So the best approach was to use a fresh pan with new oil to completely avoid any possibility of black spots.

A new ladle of soybean oil was added to the pan. While it heated, sliced Scallion, Ginger, and coriander stems were sprinkled over the fried meat slices. Once the oil was hot, garlic slices were added to release their aroma. Then, the pre-mixed sweet and sour sauce was poured in, and the heat was turned up high to bring it to a boil. As soon as it was poured into the pan, the distinct aroma of vinegar immediately wafted up.

With a spoon, he stirred the sauce in the pan over high heat, reducing it until tiny bubbles appeared, indicating that the sugar had dissolved completely and the vinegar had aromatized. The fried meat slices were then added, and they were rapidly tossed with a spatula, ensuring the sauce evenly coated each piece. The touch of Dark Soy Sauce added to the seasoning gave the sauce a golden hue; now coating the meat slices, it made them appear golden and luminous. After stirring everything evenly, he removed the wok from the heat.

He couldn't linger; otherwise, the vinegar's distinct aroma would completely evaporate, and the dish would lose its soul. Carrying the hot wok, he quickly moved away from the stove where several plates

were already set up nearby. Lin Xu scooped the tangy-scented meat slices from the wok into the plates, hurrying the servers as he finished each one.

The essence of Sweet and Sour Pork was that upon being served, the tartness of the White Vinegar would still burst forth, intriguing the diners gathered around the table with its rich aroma even before they took a bite. When eaten, the tanginess would actually be milder, but the crispness and sweetness of the meat slices left a lasting impression. After finishing the meat slices, a slight saltiness would emerge, mitigating the greasy feel from the sweet and sour flavors and prompting an irresistible desire for another slice.

"Wow, this batch really wasn't small; each table in the upstairs private rooms got a plate, and there was still some left over. Later, we in the kitchen should also taste the boss's cooking..."

Chapter 527: The Crunchy Sweet and Sour Pork, Totally Not Enough! \_3

Wei Qian was speaking when a chattering noise came from the doorway:

"Wow, this Sweet and Sour Pork is so delicious!"

"Exactly, it's wonderfully crispy and flaky!"

"I always thought Sweet and Sour Pork was the same as sweet and sour pork loin until today, when I realized they are hugely different."

"Yeah, sweet and sour pork loin is flaky, but Sweet and Sour Pork is crisp. There's definitely a difference."

"Come on, let me grab another piece. I just can't resist crispy dishes."

"I'll have another piece too, it's so delicious! Next time Lin films a show, he has to make this dish. If he doesn't, I'll cry just to show him!"

"Xiaoqi, how many dishes have you saved for the next show?"

"Doesn't matter, next time it's definitely Sweet and Sour Pork!"

While everyone was chattering, Lin Xu walked out of the kitchen, wiping his hands. Word was that the first batch of Sweet and Sour Pork had been snatched at the door.

He wanted to see which bandit had hijacked the dish, but when he stepped outside, he found that nearly all the young women from upstairs were there, including Dou Wenjing and Shu Yun.

Tch, what is this? Are all of Liang Mountain's heroes gathered here?

"Save one plate for yourselves and send the rest upstairs quickly. It won't taste good if it sits too long. Wei Qian, bring out that plate saved in the kitchen; I'll make another batch later."

Meeting such a gang of Liang Mountain bandits, Lin Xu was helpless.

"Xu Bao, the Sweet and Sour Pork you made is too delicious! Here, let me reward you with a piece."

Rewarding me with my own dish? Isn't that just like shearing wool from a sheep to knit it a sweater?

But despite his grumbling, when Shen Baobao pinched a piece of meat and offered it, Lin Xu obediently opened his mouth.

CRUNCH.

The tangy aroma and crispiness that filled his mouth also made his heart flutter involuntarily.

This deep-fried crispiness was simply irresistible. No wonder everyone loves fried foods. They are indeed comforting to eat.

Although it was deep-fried several times, the tenderloin inside was still succulent.

This stark contrast in textures was a reason everyone exclaimed how delicious it was. Moreover, because the tenderloin inside was soft, it made the batter on the outside feel even crispier.

The contrast in textures and the strong sour and sweet flavors.

No wonder girls loved it; even boys couldn't resist it at all.

It's no wonder Northeasterners regarded Sweet and Sour Pork as a taste of home.

This dish truly had a unique flavor.

In the upstairs private room, Shen Guofu wasn't waiting for his son-in-law, who was preparing to make a toast. Instead, he was greeted by golden, shiny Sweet and Sour Pork emitting a rich, tangy scent. The aroma alone made Grandma Shen reminisce about her Northeastern hometown.

"Oh, this Sweet and Sour Pork is so authentic."

"This flavor is really good. Guofu, grab me a small piece to try. I don't know if my teeth can handle it."

Immediately, Han Shuzhen picked a large piece and placed it in Grandma Shen's bowl, saying, "Eat, Mom. If you can't chew it, I'll eat it." After she finished, she remembered her own mother was there too and hurriedly picked a piece for Grandma Han.

Grandma Shen picked up the Sweet and Sour Pork in her bowl and took a bite. The crispy, tangy flavor made her feel as if she were back by the river, preparing for New Year's.

She remembered the times before she was married when her family could only afford Sweet and Sour Pork at New Year's.

The dish, costly in sugar and oil, was too extravagant for everyday meals.

The Sweet and Sour Pork she ate back then was just as crunchy and tangy as this, evoking the same feelings she had the first time she met her children's father.

"This meat is really good; my grandson-in-law is so considerate!"

Seeing the elderly lady's nostalgic expression, Chen Meijuan quickly said, "Tomorrow, I'll have Lin Xu make a few more for you. As long as you like it, cooking is no big deal. When the time comes, it'll just be for you; Yueyue can't even taste it."

Grandma Shen immediately burst out laughing, "That won't do! If you don't let my granddaughter eat, my grandson-in-law will go on strike!"

After the atmosphere relaxed, everyone picked up their chopsticks to taste the food.

As for Shen Guofu, he planned to have Lin Xu make another portion after the guests left. He wanted to enjoy a plate all by himself. This type of sweet and sour delicacy had to be held in his arms and eaten by hand to be truly satisfying.

Meanwhile, Han Shuzhen decided to reschedule her afternoon spa. Such delicious Sweet and Sour Pork had to be fully enjoyed first.

Chen Meijuan, on the other hand, wanted to learn how to make this dish so that she wouldn't have to trouble her son in the future.

As for the other relatives, one question occupied their minds:

"Why only one serving per table? It would be so much better if everyone had their own!"

At the kitchen door, the "thug diners" had finished two whole plates of Sweet and Sour Pork and were now looking eagerly towards the kitchen, planning to hijack another serving.

Then Lin Xu came out with half a portion and handed it to Shu Yun, "If you all are still hungry later, I'll cook more. Don't fight over this little bit. This is for Tiantian. A Northeast girl struggling in Beijing must miss home a lot. Director Shu, please take it to her."

"Got it, Boss!"

Shu Yun felt fortunate to have such a good boss.

A few pieces of Sweet and Sour Pork might not seem like much, but the boss remembered that Tiantian from the Northeast hadn't eaten and specifically asked her to go downstairs to deliver it. That was really heartwarming.

Carrying the plate downstairs, Song Tiantian had just seen off a group of customers.

"Tiantian, the boss made Sweet and Sour Pork and specifically had me bring it over for you. Here, go eat it inside at the service counter."

Song Tiantian stared blankly at the Sweet and Sour Pork on the plate. "The boss is really good to me... Director Shu, when you get a chance, ask the boss if there is anyone he wants to beat up. I'll help him vent."

Shu Yun chuckled. "You shouldn't think about fighting every day, girl. Aren't you afraid Wei Qian will lose weight and fall into someone else's arms?"

"I'm not afraid!"

"Oh? You're that generous?"

"Whoever's arms he falls into, I'll just beat them up. Let's see who can take it."

Shu Yun was speechless. Is it really that simple and straightforward?

「Upstairs.」

Lin Xu, having finished the Sweet and Sour Pork with the group of "thug diners," returned to the private room, ready to propose a toast to the guests.

There was no trace of Sweet and Sour Pork left on the table; only a few strands of Scallion and Ginger remained at the bottom of the plate.

Shen Guofu was visibly longing for more. Upon seeing his son-in-law come in, he initially wanted to directly ask for Sweet and Sour Pork. But considering the presence of his mother-in-law, grandmother, wife, elder sister, daughter, niece, and other women, speaking rashly meant that even if his son-in-law cooked Sweet and Sour Pork, it wouldn't be his turn to eat.

So he tactfully asked, "Lin Xu, what do you plan to do after dinner later?"

Hmm, I can't be direct, but a hint should be okay. We're so familiar, and our tacit understanding keeps getting better. He'll definitely grasp what I, Old Shen, mean.

However, just as Shen Guofu was racking his brain for a hint, Shen Baobao, by his side, said, "Make me some roasted dried fish later! I ate Dundun's dried fish today, so Xu Bao plans to make me some new ones. There's salty and sweet flavor, spicy flavor, Cumin flavor, barbecue flavor, Tomato flavor... Dad, which flavor do you want?"

Roasted dried fish? How am I supposed to hint about Sweet and Sour Pork with that?

Shen Guofu pondered for a long moment and suggestively asked, "Is there a Sweet and Sour Pork flavor for the dried fish?"

Chapter 528: Shen Guofu: This fish fillet looks undercooked, I need to disinfect it with Wuliangye!

It seems Father-in-law didn't quite satisfy his craving for Sweet and Sour Pork.

Lin Xu muttered to himself, planning to make another batch after seeing the guests off so the staff and his family could all indulge, achieving 'Sweet and Sour Pork freedom.'

As for Shen Baobao, she was currently fantasizing about her fish fillets and had even started a debate with Geng Lele and Chen Yan about their taste.

When it was about time, Lin Xu stood up and followed his dad, Lin Hongqi, and his father-in-law, Shen Guofu, to toast the guests.

"President Liu, thank you for attending the opening ceremony. I'll drink this one; you drink as you please."

"Uncle Tan, thank you for your continued support. I'll drink this one; you drink as you please."

"Director Liao, thank you for your care at the Fishing Platform. I'll drink this one; you drink as you please."

"..."

Lin Xu, as if possessed by the god of wine, drank left and right with the guests, occasionally even downing two cups at once, much to their admiration:

"Little Xu is truly a straightforward person."

"Stop drinking, kid. What would we do if you got drunk? You have such a big restaurant to manage."

"It's the thought that counts; no need to drink so much."

"I can't just watch you drink. Uncle will drink this one with you."

"..."

After completing a round of toasts and leaving the private room, Shu Yun, who was in charge of pouring Lin Xu's drinks, said with a smile,

"Great acting, Boss."

Lin Xu replied,

"Impressive technique, Manager Shu!"

Before the toasting began, Shu Yun had found two empty bottles and filled them with Sprite. The reason Lin Xu couldn't stop drinking was simply that the small cups of Sprite weren't satisfying enough.

Several times, he almost snatched the Wuliangye bottle from Shu Yun's hands to chug it directly.

After this exchange of commercial flattery, they pushed open the door to the next private room, and then it was another round of thanks and toasts. Lin Xu, again as if possessed by the god of wine, gulped down Sprite from the Wuliangye bottle, showing no signs of drunkenness at all.

Coming out of the private room, Shu Yun handed the empty Wuliangye bottle to a waiter at the door and casually took another one from a different waiter standing by.

Twisting off the cap, she first sniffed it to make sure it was Sprite and not actual Wuliangye.

Otherwise, if the boss got drunk, there wouldn't be any sweet and tangy Sweet and Sour Pork to eat later that afternoon.

After a full round of toasting, Lin Xu had drunk nearly three bottles of Sprite. However, Lin Hongqi and Shen Guofu, who were with him, found drinking Sprite unsatisfying. Halfway through, they switched to real Wuliangye, and each ended up drinking more than half a jin.

Well, it wasn't often they had a chance to drink to their heart's content. Today, having finally secured an opportunity for 'sanctioned drinking,' they certainly weren't going to miss it.

「Back in the private room」

Han Shuzhen hurriedly said, "Quick, eat some food. Drinking too much on an empty stomach will hurt you."

Lin Xu smiled wryly and waved his hand. He was about to speak but let out a loud burp first. "I've drunk three bottles of Sprite. I'm so full I can't eat a thing right now."

"Three bottles?"

Upon hearing this, Shen Baobao immediately pouted. "If I'd known, I would've gone with you to help you finish one bottle!"

She just wanted to drink Sprite, didn't she? Last time people drank red wine and she drank Coke; this time they're drinking liquor and she wants Sprite. Is this how she plans to 'train' her alcohol tolerance?

Since Lin Xu couldn't eat or drink anything more, he decided to head to the back kitchen to make Fish Jerky. He couldn't let everyone keep sneaking Dundun's food. He needed to separate what was meant for people from what was for the cat.

"You all continue eating," Lin Xu said. "I'm going to the kitchen to make Fish Jerky. I'll also see what else can be roasted in the oven and try to make a few different things."

Upon hearing this, Shen Baobao immediately raised both hands in agreement. "I've been craving Fish Jerky for ages! Make sure to make plenty!"

She had originally intended to keep most of it for herself. However, as soon as she finished speaking, Chen Yan, who was beside her filming a 'devour-a-pig-in-three-bites' video with a roasted suckling pig's head, immediately chimed in, "Yes, yes, make lots! I was just wondering what snacks to have tonight. Thanks for your hard work, brother-in-law."

Shen Baobao looked helplessly at her cousin, who was bursting with the desire to film. "Yan Bao, listen to your little cousin for once. Stop filming these kinds of videos. The more you film, the harder it will be for you to find a boyfriend."

Chen Yan paused, then asked, taken aback, "Why? Isn't this supposed to make me look humorous and witty?"

"No, it just makes you look goofy... Goofiness only attracts other goofy people; it doesn't attract the opposite sex..."

Chen Yan: "!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Why didn't you tell me earlier?

「Arriving in the kitchen」

Lin Xu said to the attendant, "Have someone send over some crucian carp. They don't need to be too big, but they must be fresh."

The Mackerel in the cold storage was reserved for Dundun. Since he was making this for Shen Baobao, there was no need to use Mackerel; other types of fish would also work.

While the attendant went to call the seafood supplier, Lin Xu went downstairs. From the fish tank, he scooped out several Grass Carp, each weighing over ten jin.

Using only crucian carp would make the taste too monotonous, and people would quickly tire of it. Relatively speaking, it's better to have more variety.

For instance, with these large Grass Carp, if he filleted the fish to make Fish Jerky—similar to how pork jerky is made—wouldn't that be much better than them stealing Dundun's unseasoned, tasteless dried fish?

Back upstairs, he deftly slaughtered and cleaned the fish.

He kept the Fish Scales to make spicy Fish Scales or Fish Scale Jelly. The fish guts would be braised in sauce for dinner tonight. The fish head and bones would be simmered with tofu to make fish head tofu soup. As for the Fish Skin, it would be turned into Pickled Pepper Fish Skin.

Soon, every part of the several fish had been clearly designated for a purpose.

Setting aside the scraps like the Fish Skin, bones, and guts, Lin Xu prepared to process the fish meat first.

He used a kitchen knife to cut the fish meat into small chunks. Then, he used an Iron Mace, the kind used for pounding beef balls, to mash it into a paste.

For this type of delicacy, just like when making Fish Balls or meat balls, one could take a shortcut and simply put it into a food processor to blend. If one felt the texture from the food processor wasn't good enough, they could also chop it finely, as one would for minced meat filling.

Chapter 529: Shen Guofu: This fish slice looks undercooked, I need to use Wuliangye to disinfect it! \_2

But the best method is still to smash it.

Use an Iron Mace to smash the fish into a mince. This allows the umami substances within the fish to fully release, making the Fish Jerky delicious, savory, and thus tastier. Besides making Fish Jerky, this Fish Mince can also be used to make Fish Balls, Fish Soup, and other delicacies.

"Boss, are you planning to make Fish Balls?" Zhu Yong asked curiously, seeing Lin Xu handling the fish and approaching him.

"I'm planning to make some Fish Jerky. Isn't Building 15 known for fish dishes? Is this how Fish Balls are made?"

"Yes. In addition to smashing, you can also choose to scrape the Fish Mince."

Scrape?

Upon hearing this word, Lin Xu immediately understood.

It's just like making Chicken Meatball—using a kitchen knife to continuously scrape the flesh. The resulting mince is fluffy and soft, arguably yielding better results than smashing. But there's too much fish prepared today. If I choose to scrape, it wouldn't be finished even by nightfall. Smashing is more straightforward and simple.

Fish flesh is tender, far less tough than beef or pork, and a piece can be loosened with just a few strikes.

By the time the seafood stall owner brought the small crucian carp, dozens of pounds of fish had already been turned into Fish Mince by Lin Xu using the Mad Demon Mace Skill. He didn't have the Skill for making beef or pork balls, nor did he understand the technique for smashing fish. But what he had was strength. Plus, having just drunk three bottles of Sprite, he needed some exercise, so he went all out and smashed with vigor.

And sure enough, after this bout of exertion, the stuffed and bloated feeling from drinking the Sprite was greatly relieved.

Life really is about exercise!

"Boss, the crucian carp are here. How should I prepare them?" the assistant asked, entering the kitchen carrying a bag full of crucian carp.

Lin Xu thought about the Fish Jerky he had eaten before and instructed him, "Remove the scales, make an incision along the back to open the fish up, then clean out the innards, and remove the head."

If making salted fish or large dried fish, the fish head would naturally be kept. After all, even if not eaten directly, it could be used to stew soup or make something else. But for these snack-sized Fish Jerky, the head part doesn't have much flesh—it's all bones, and it's easy to hit your teeth on them when eating, so it's better to remove it. This also makes roasting more convenient.

The assistant acknowledged and went to the sink to clean the fish.

Meanwhile, Lin Xu scraped all the smashed Fish Mince into a bowl. He added Scallion and Ginger water, Light Soy Sauce, salt, sugar, pepper powder, Five-Spice Powder, oyster sauce, and other seasonings. After stirring the seasonings evenly, he began the half-hour process of kneading and pounding, working the Fish Mince until it became fully sticky and gelatinized.

After finishing these steps, he portioned the Fish Mince into small bowls and began to create different flavors. The seasonings just added were the basic ones; to obtain different flavors of jerky, a second round of seasoning was necessary.

For example, a spicy flavor required cooked and ground dried chili and Sichuan peppercorns; a fragrant spicy flavor needed soybean powder and dried chili; cumin flavor needed more Cumin Powder; and tomato flavor needed Tomato sauce.

Only by doing this would the resulting jerky present different tastes. They would then be even more delicious and diverse.

After mixing all the flavored seasonings into the Fish Mince, Lin Xu covered the bowls with plastic wrap and had a few idle kitchen assistants take them to the cold storage to marinate.

To make this kind of jerky, the meat must be thoroughly marinated before roasting. Only then would the jerky taste good. If roasted right after adding seasonings, the resulting jerky would lack flavor, and both texture and taste would suffer greatly.

"The Fish Jerky looks good. Tomorrow, I'll make some too."

The entire process of making Fish Jerky is very similar to making Fish Balls. As a chef from Building 15, Zhu Yong was already well-acquainted with this method. Seeing Lin Xu do this, he also planned to make some to try.

He'd give some to Lu Lu to eat before \*she\* (his 'boss lady' Lu Lu) could unleash her 'venom' on him, then see how that violent brute would still dare to beat him up.

While he was musing, he received a WeChat message:

"I want Sweet and Sour Pork for dinner tonight. Don't forget to make it, or I'll let you experience the Upper Hook I've been practicing recently."

Zhu Yong: "..."

Here we go again. Always so fierce. If I didn't genuinely love you, I'd definitely let you feel the fury in the Zhu family bloodline!

「In the private room upstairs.」

Geng Lele looked at Lu Lu's chat screen and asked curiously, "Lu sis, why do you always treat Yong bro like this? Last time Qian bro said that Yong bro shudders every time he sees your messages. Don't scare him into getting sick, okay?"

Lu Lu took a sip of her Sour Plum Soup and then said with a smile, "Every time I see Weeping Willow so meek and submissive when I bully him, I just want to grab his face and kiss him hard. This is the first time in my life I've met a man who indulges me and treats me so well. I'm terrified he'll stop liking me one day, so I can't help but be a bit harsh with him."

"Tsk tsk tsk, that sounds just like a romance novel."

Geng Lele couldn't understand these kinds of emotional entanglements. In her opinion, such trivial matters weren't even as interesting as a calculus problem. But seeing the happy look on Lu Lu's face, she raised her drink and said, "I just hope Yong bro isn't attending your wedding in a wheelchair..."

"How could that be? I'm actually very gentle."

Geng Lele: "..."

Sis, do you have some kind of misunderstanding about the word 'gentle'? In our circle, your intimidation factor surpasses even Big Sis Tiantian's, you know? Gentle... More like the ruthless 'gentleness' of autumn winds sweeping away fallen leaves, right?

「In the kitchen.」

After Lin Xu finished with the Fish Jerky, the assistant and two kitchen helpers had also finished cleaning the crucian carp. Each crucian carp was split open from the back, its belly thoroughly cleaned out, and its head removed. Viewed from above, splayed open like that, each fish resembled a butterfly with its wings spread.

Chapter 530: Shen Guofu: This fish slice looks undercooked, I need to use Wuliangye to disinfect it! \_3

After cleaning the fish, Lin Xu began marinating it.

The marinade primarily included essential Scallion and Ginger water and flavorful Sichuan peppercorn water, along with salt, white sugar, Light Soy Sauce, oyster sauce, pepper powder, and some halved Thai chilies. Once all the ingredients were combined, he mixed them evenly, covered the bowl with plastic wrap, and set it aside to marinate.

"Boss, are all of these going into the oven later? Our electric oven is a bit small for all of this."

Lin Xu pointed to the still-lit duck roaster nearby and said, "We'll use that roaster over there. The charcoal inside has to burn out completely anyway, so we might as well make use of it."

The shop had grilling nets and grates. Once the crucian carp was marinated, it could be laid directly on the net and hung in the duck roaster to be cooked with a low fire using a slow roasting method. When it was almost done, he would add some sugarcane dregs for smoking. And just like that, the flavorful smoked grilled crucian carp would be made. Having a couple of these while watching dramas or playing games at night would definitely be more satisfying than ordering takeout.

"To ensure Dundun's food isn't stolen, the boss is really going to great lengths!"

"No wonder the little guy is closest to the boss. When he's around, even Manager Shu doesn't get much attention."

"..."

Wei Qian and Zhuang Yizhou chatted idly. Seeing that Lin Xu was finished, they came over and asked, "Boss, can you make Sweet and Sour Pork now?"

"The meat slices have been cut and marinated, and the starch is already prepared. We're just waiting for you to cook."

Both of them actually knew how to make Sweet and Sour Pork, but they always felt there was a difference compared to the way Lin Xu made it, so as soon as they saw Lin Xu was free, they approached him.

"Sure, let's make another pot. The kitchen staff didn't get to eat any earlier, so let's satisfy our cravings with this batch first."

Lin Xu rolled up his sleeves and made a large basin of Sweet and Sour Pork, allowing the busy chefs in the kitchen to thoroughly indulge their craving for it.

Half an hour later, the guests, full and content, got up to say their farewells.

At the small service counter on the third floor, gift boxes were prepared, one for each customer, containing Seven-colored Horse Hoof Cake and Black Sugar Shaqima, all handmade by Lin Xu.

"I've finally seen Boss Lin's delicious handmade creations! I plan to take pictures and show off a bit in the Lin Ji's Food online community."

"Exactly! We usually just see the boss's wife and the others posting their tantalizing food photos. Now it's our turn to make others drool!"

"It's a shame there aren't other snacks, otherwise, our online friends would be even more envious."

"Just wait and see,' another chimed in. 'I heard from the lady boss herself. For the Mid-Autumn Festival, the store will gradually introduce new gift boxes. So don't forget to buy Lin Ji's gift boxes when visiting friends and family!'"

"It's not that we'd forget; the problem is we can't buy them! There are only about a hundred portions available daily, harder to snag than an appointment with a specialist."

"I really hope Boss Lin expands his business soon. I'm still waiting to buy his gift boxes to take to my in-laws."

"Holy moly, dude, you have a girlfriend?"

"Nah, just planning ahead, you know?"

"..."

Netizens, with their inherent goofiness, are the same everywhere. Everyone took their gift boxes, said goodbye to Lin Xu, and left Lin Ji's Food.

After most of the guests had left, Lin Xu returned to the kitchen. He took out the marinated crucian carp, removed the Thai chilies, and then, with the Fish Skin facing down, placed them one by one on the grilling net. After arranging them, he hung the grilling net on the rack in the duck roaster.

Once all the crucian carp were inside, he mixed Maltose with Honey to make honey water, which he planned to brush on the fish's skin when it dried during roasting to enhance the flavor.

After setting up the carp to roast, he brought over the marinated Fish Jerky.

He took a piece of kitchen oil-absorbing paper and spread a layer of sesame oil on it. Then, he scooped out a spoonful of Fish Jerky and spread it thin. He covered it with another layer of oil-absorbing paper and rolled it out with a rolling pin into a thin slice. Once rolled, he scraped off the excess Fish Jerky along the edge of the paper. Using his hands to support the paper, he placed it on a baking tray. He then peeled off the top layer of oil-absorbing paper and put it into the oven to bake.

Besides using an oven, this type of Fish Jerky could also be roasted slowly over charcoal.

Once the Fish Jerky in the oven dried slightly on the surface, he brushed it with honey water. He then flipped the Fish Jerky, peeled off the oil-absorbing paper underneath, brushed it again with honey water, and sprinkled a layer of White Sesame seeds. He continued to roast it on low heat for three minutes, and the Fish Jerky was done.

The freshly roasted Fish Jerky was quite dry and hard and needed to soften before it could be eaten. To enhance the softening effect, it could also be steamed in a steamer. This would make the Fish Jerky's texture chewier and its fragrance richer.

Unfortunately, before Lin Xu could start steaming, the first batch of three pieces of Fish Jerky had been snatched away by the "Shen Bandit" who had caught wind of it.

"Thank you, Xu Baobao! I really, really love this kind of Fish Jerky!" Shen Baobao held a large piece of Fish Jerky and rolled it up like the people of Shandong roll up pancakes with green onions, then took a big bite. "Wow, this umami flavor is so intense!"

Watching the silly girl's way of eating, Lin Xu couldn't help but say, "Perhaps I should cut it for you, otherwise, others who want a taste won't even know where to start."

He used a knife to cut off the part Shen Baobao had bitten into, letting the girl satisfy her immediate craving. Then, he sliced the rest of the Fish Jerky into small squares, about ten centimeters on each side. After cutting, he put them into a small bamboo basket for Shen Baobao to carry to the elders to taste.

With that done, the crucian carp in the duck roaster were almost ready. The roasted fish were dehydrated and exuded a rich, savory aroma, beckoning for a shot of Liquor to appease the craving.

Lin Xu removed the grilling net from inside. He first brushed the fish with honey water, then flipped them over. He brushed them again with honey water and sprinkled a layer of White Sesame seeds before continuing to roast.

While he was busy, Shen Guofu and Lin Hongqi strolled over. "Xiao Xu, is there any more of that Fish Jerky? Your father and I didn't get to try any before it was all snatched up. We still don't even know what it tastes like!"

As he spoke, he smelled the savory aroma wafting from the duck roaster and couldn't help but sniff appreciatively. "This roasted fish... why does it smell different from that Fish Jerky?"

"These are crucian carp I'm roasting. They're prepared differently from the Fish Jerky."

As he spoke, Lin Xu opened the duck roaster, and an intense, fresh fragrance immediately billowed out. The aroma instantly reignited the nearly satisfied craving for alcohol in Lin Hongqi and Shen Guofu.

When Lin Xu took the grilling net out of the roaster, the two fathers-in-law became even more animated. The crucian carp, roasted to a golden brown and still emitting a tempting aroma, looked incredibly appetizing.

Shen Guofu said earnestly, "I've heard freshwater fish have a lot of parasites, so it's best to sterilize them when eating. How about this, I'll go fetch the half bottle of Wuliangye left upstairs, and we'll disinfect while we eat!"