

## Culinary 611

Chapter 611: Grandma's Best Specialty - Nourishing Stomach Congee with Greens! A High-end Dish for the Mid-Autumn Festival Reunion! \_3

"Uncle Sun was being so generous. He saw I wanted some dough sticks and insisted on packing this huge bag without a word. You guys tell me, isn't this frustrating? How are we supposed to eat all of this..."

Han Shuzhen knew her husband would definitely not buy just a few, but she hadn't expected him to bring back such a large bag.

She asked with a faint smile, "Was it really Uncle Sun who gave these to you?"

"Yes, he didn't even take any money for them and even told me to wait and take some sweet cakes and vegetable pastries, but I didn't take those."

Han Shuzhen knew her husband all too well.

She asked, "He didn't take money, so did he take anything else?"

Shen Guofu's face flushed, feeling as if his trick had been exposed. He smiled awkwardly and said, "Uncle Sun was so polite, I took a cigar from the car for him..."

Tsk, so the case is solved.

Han Shuzhen glanced helplessly at her husband. A cigar from the car cost four figures, more than enough to buy an electric scooter. No wonder those dough sticks were free.

If we were to be particular, he'd actually owe us money. But you can't really quibble with Uncle Sun. Back when Yueyue was in elementary and middle school, the family was struggling, and Uncle Sun often gave her vegetable pastries and sweet cakes. We're old neighbors; even if he couldn't help in other ways, giving the kids a little something to eat was no problem. Now, forget about just one cigar; even if he'd given a whole box, Han Shuzhen wouldn't have said a word. But this many dough sticks... All those pre-holiday low-fat meals were for nothing.

"I'll just have a taste, a small piece. I definitely won't eat too much."

Shen Guofu made his promise as he carried the food into the kitchen. The moment he stepped inside, he pinched a dough stick from the bag, stuffing it into his mouth while murmuring, "Lin Xu, quickly try this! These dough sticks are fried so crispy and fragrant. I ate two on the way here and still couldn't get enough. The flavor is truly top-notch..."

Lin Xu said with a smile, "You should eat less of these deep-fried foods."

When the shredded mustard greens were first added to the pot, their high water content caused them to absorb all the oil, and they even stuck to the pot slightly. However, as they continued to cook and the moisture evaporated, oil began to seep out at the bottom.

At this point, Lin Xu added the onion slivers and continued to stir-fry. He made sure to fry them until the surface of the mustard greens was glistening with oil and the oil at the bottom of the pot had turned clear. Only when the oil became clear did it signify that a large amount of moisture had evaporated and the mustard greens were thoroughly cooked.

He added two small spoonfuls of sugar to balance the saltiness and a dash of Soy Sauce to make the mustard greens more appetizing. He stir-fried everything until the sugar dissolved and the Soy Sauce was evenly incorporated. Only then were the mustard greens ready to be served.

"Mmm, that smells really good!"

Shen Guofu finished the dough stick in his hand and picked up another. He also used his chopsticks to pick up a few strands of the mustard greens and put them into his mouth, praising Lin Xu's culinary skills profusely. "Delicious, delicious! These stir-fried mustard greens are truly tasty... When this stuff is cooked right, it makes you eat even more steamed buns than Chili Oil does."

Lin Xu cleaned the wok, then washed and smashed a cucumber. He cut a few more dough sticks that were still crispy on the outside, mixed them with Garlic Paste, Chili Oil, and other seasonings, and finally tossed in a handful of Grandma Shen's fried peanuts. With that, this cucumber and dough stick dish, perfect for accompanying drinks or meals, was ready.

By this time, the congee was also ready.

Grandma Shen added the greens, stirred a few times, then turned off the heat and removed the pot from the stove. The congee was very hot and cooled down slowly; the residual heat was enough to cook the greens through while allowing their fresh flavor to meld into the congee.

Once everything was ready, the whole family sat around the stone table under the Chinese parasol tree to begin their breakfast.

"Mom, it was this dish that upset my stomach! You have to avenge me!" Yueyue exclaimed.

Han Shuzhen gave her daughter a helpless look. What nonsense are you spouting during the festival? Luckily, we're here. If your maternal grandmother and grandfather heard that, they'd scold me again for not knowing how to raise a child.

She inwardly grumbled at her daughter, then picked up a piece of the dough stick salad to taste.

Eh... this actually tastes really good. Usually, eating dough sticks or fried pancakes with a clove of garlic is already delicious. Now, with the dough sticks coated in a garlic-flavored dressing, the taste is even more pronounced, and the garlic also cuts through the greasiness of the dough sticks. Plus, the fluffy and soft dough sticks paired with the crisp cucumber create a wonderful contrast in both texture and flavor. Finishing it off with a crispy fried peanut... no wonder my daughter ate too much. This is simply delicious.

Lin Xu picked up a steamed bun and, imitating Shen Guofu, broke it open in the middle. He stuffed some glossy, oily mustard green slivers inside and took a large bite. It was incredibly satisfying.

After finishing the bun, he used a spoon to scoop some of the fresh and delicious vegetable congee into his mouth. A warm sensation slid from his mouth all the way down to his stomach.

Comforting! This feeling is just so comforting.

"Grandma, this vegetable congee you made is truly exceptional, so delicious. I'll have to learn how to make it from you later."

Lin Xu had initially thought that vegetable congee, however good, couldn't possibly compare to the taste of century egg and lean pork congee. But after tasting it, he realized he was mistaken. This simple vegetable congee was flawless in both flavor and texture.

He used his Eye of Discrimination to check, and the system's rating was actually Perfect Level.

This was almost unbelievable.

Grandma Shen said with a cheerful laugh, "There's nothing much to learn, really. Just soak the rice and then simmer it slowly in a clay pot. As long as it cooks long enough, the congee will naturally taste good."

The old lady had been making congee her whole life and didn't think there was much to learn. She'd been making it this way for decades and had always eaten it this way—congee, pickled vegetables, paired with cornbread buns or mantou. Wasn't that a very ordinary breakfast?

Shen Guofu held his porridge bowl and took a large slurp. Mmm, still the taste of his childhood.

He finished the steamed bun in his hand in two or three bites, then looked at Lin Xu and said, "Lin Xu, we have many guests coming today, even some relatives who rarely visit would come over. Later, you'll have to prepare a grand dish to impress everyone, preferably one they've never even heard of."

The relatives from the Han Family side were all highly educated—the kind where even those with bachelor's degrees barely had a voice in family matters. Because of this, several relatives often picked on Shen Guofu for his high school education, considering him uncultured.

The grudge-holding Shen Guofu planned to have his son-in-law prepare an obscure dish to retaliate, to see who was truly the uncultured one.

A grand dish? And it has to be unheard of?

Suddenly, the image of a particular dish flashed through Lin Xu's mind.

In that case, I'll make that high-end, obscure Sichuan dish that many people can't even pronounce correctly!

Chapter 612: A High-End Sichuan Dish With Both Aesthetic and Flavor - Snowflake Chicken Nao!

Eating the delicious breakfast, Shen Baobao completely forgot about her stomach discomfort.

She held a fried dough roll, enjoying it immensely with pickles and a dish of cucumber mixed with fried dough sticks. Occasionally, she would take a big slurp of the delicious vegetable porridge, displaying her straightforward and unpretentious Yanjing girl demeanor to the fullest.

"Xu Bao, what was the name of the dish you said you were going to make again?"

"Snowflake Chicken Nao."

"Nao? As in the 'nao' from 'nao teng' (making a fuss)?"

Lin Xu initially thought his Baobao was just joking to liven up the atmosphere. But seeing the curiosity on his father-in-law's and mother-in-law's faces, he wrote down the character:

"It means 'mud.' The dish involves preparing the chicken to a mud-like consistency that resembles snowflakes."

Upon hearing this, Shen Guofu immediately slammed the table.

"Let's make this one! Today, I'd like to see if my brothers-in-law dare to mock me again. Shuzhen, don't you dare tip them off. I'm determined to get them back today."

He came from a poor background, and graduating from high school was quite an achievement in those days.

But compared to the Han Family, where everyone was a senior doctor, the gap was rather large. It was only normal for him to be looked down upon.

Over the years, Old Shen had always harbored a grudge.

Now, the chance for payback had finally arrived.

He didn't believe those doctors in white coats could correctly pronounce the name of the dish. He especially doubted they could correctly pronounce the character "Nao"—most likely, they would mispronounce it, just as he himself had initially.

Hmph, hmph. When the time comes, I'll throw those words 'uncultured' right back at them.

After the meal, Shen Guofu drove, taking Grandma Shen, Han Shuzhen, and Dundun back to the West Fourth Ring Villa to entertain relatives.

Meanwhile, Lin Xu and Shen Baobao headed back to the restaurant.

First, they prepared the mooncakes for the day. Then, they gathered the ingredients for Snowflake Chicken Nao—chicken breast, stock, and Jinhua Ham—and drove to the West Fourth Ring Villa to prepare lunch.

Snowflake Chicken Nao needed to be garnished with ham, specifically the richer-flavored Jinhua Ham, to ensure the dish was fragrant and delicious.

If they used Xuanwei Ham or another type, it would be somewhat lacking.

Since only a small amount of ham was needed, just sprinkling some finely chopped ham on the dish after plating was sufficient. Lighter-tasting hams like Xuanwei Ham would lose their saltiness and fragrance when chopped so finely.

Only the more intensely flavored Jinhua Ham, which was thoroughly cured and deeply fermented, was up to the job.

Sprinkling it on the cooked Snowflake Chicken Nao not only added fragrance and color, but the ham's unique savory umami flavor also enriched the otherwise mild dish, making it more delectable.

In Sichuan cuisine, these finely chopped ham bits, when used as a topping, were often referred to as a "ham mantle" or "ham covering."

In the past, when resources were scarce and ingredients limited, Jinhua Ham was synonymous with high-end ingredients. Chefs would sprinkle finely chopped ham on dishes as a garnish, much like modern chefs use black truffles.

In fact, some chefs, in pursuit of a sense of luxury, even sprinkled black truffles on Snowflake Chicken Nao.

Although this indeed elevated the dish's perceived luxury, such a practice was incorrect.

Because Snowflake Chicken Nao is inherently mild in flavor, it needs a sprinkle of savory ham to add layers to its taste profile, making it even more captivating.

Black truffles, possessing umami but lacking saltiness, wouldn't stimulate the appetite in the same way and were thus purely a waste of ingredients in this context.

Upon arriving at the Shen Family villa, the relatives had not yet arrived. Lin Xu carried the ingredients into the kitchen, while Shen Baobao went upstairs to change into her chef's uniform.

Ehehe! It was finally time for Chef Shen to take the stage again!

With relatives present today, it was naturally a time to showcase her culinary skills.

Although she and Chen Yan had even obtained health certificates to break into the culinary world, they wouldn't dare mess around in the Lin Ji's Food kitchen. After all, it was a place of business, not suitable for playing around.

But at home, it was a different story.

Tying up her lustrous black hair, she donned a pristine white chef's uniform, complete with a tall toque blanche nearly a foot high. She then cheerfully greeted the pretty chef in the mirror:

"Hello, Chef Shen!"

After making sure her attire was impeccable, Chef Shen stepped into the kitchen wearing her canvas shoes.

At the kitchen entrance, she didn't rush to start working. Instead, she first took a lovely selfie with the pots and pans in the background and posted it to her social media feed:

"This Mid-Autumn Festival, Executive Chef Shen Jiayue of Lin Ji's Food wishes everyone a happy family reunion and a joyful Mooncake Festival! Today, I'll be presenting an uncommon and delicious dish to my family. Stay tuned!"

Once Xu Bao makes that... what was it, Snowflake Chicken Nao... I'll seize the chance to snap a picture and post it to my feed.

Hehe, the dishes my Xu Bao cooks... well, if you round things up, it's practically like I cooked them myself! Perfectly logical, right?

After posting the update, this young lady tucked her phone into her pocket and, looking at Lin Xu, asked:

"Xu Bao, I'm here! Is there anything I can help with?"

Lin Xu looked at her attire curiously and asked:

"First, tell me what you're planning to make. Then I can figure out how to coordinate."

"I was thinking of steaming an egg custard for each family member, but using individual steaming cups... wouldn't that be quite wasteful?"

If there were fewer dishes, making an individual egg custard for everyone would be easy.

But with so many dishes today, everyone would at most take a couple of bites of the custard. If she made too much, it would indeed be a waste. Chef Shen was a bit troubled by this.

Lin Xu adjusted the girl's chef hat and said with a smile:

"You could make steamed eggs in orange shells. The portions would be small, they're delicious, visually appealing, and it would definitely surprise the relatives."

Steamed eggs in orange shells?

Shen Baobao's eyes lit up.

Thank you, Xu Bao, for giving me a new idea for the egg custard!

Meanwhile, Chen Yan, who had secretly indulged in a pile of takeout last night, had just woken up to find it was already past nine o'clock.

Chapter 613: A high-end Sichuan dish with both looks and taste - Snowflake Chicken Nao! \_2

It's all Yueyue's fault for her lack of public decency, spreading poison in the middle of the night, causing me to eat so much last night... I'll settle the score with her when we meet up later!

She didn't immediately get out of bed; instead, she reached out and grabbed her mobile phone from the nightstand.

Since she had already woken up late, she might as well play on her phone for a bit before getting up.

After all, Lin Ji's Food had already finished serving breakfast by this point. Her uncle's family hadn't finished making lunch yet. Rather than getting up at an awkward time, it was better to lie in bed a little longer.

She opened WeChat, first looking through various Mid-Autumn Festival greetings and replying to the important ones. Then, she opened Moments to see if there was anything new.

Then she saw Shen Baobao's selfie.

She actually has the nerve to call herself the executive chef? That's so shameless! I'm the executive chef of Lin Ji's Food, okay?

This status update infuriated Chen Yan so much that she couldn't lie down any longer. She immediately rolled out of bed and found a relatively plain outfit to wear.

Hmm, many relatives would be around today. It wasn't suitable to wear clothes that were too flashy or distinctive. Otherwise, I'd easily become the center of attention, and a simple family gathering could turn into a matchmaking convention.

Plus, the elders were relatively conservative. In their eyes, crop tops weren't fashionable but made one look like an Elder of the Beggar Gang.

For these freeloading occasions, it's best to be as low-key as possible.

A pair of wide-leg jeans, a black T-shirt to prevent soup splashes, and a baseball cap she wore because she was too lazy to do her hair. Wasn't this the look of a casual-cool girl?

She checked herself in the mirror, confirmed there were no issues, then, forgoing her usual high heels, she slipped into a pair of black Converse sneakers.

After getting dressed, she was just about to leave when Shen Baobao called.

Hmph, just as I expected, you impostor executive chef can't handle it.

She had just answered when Shen Baobao's loud voice came through the phone, "Yan Bao, where are you? Hurry over and help me out!"

Chen Yan snickered. She really can't manage without me, can she? She leisurely asked, "Help with what, exactly?"

"Making steamed orange eggs. Lin Xu just taught me. I'm planning to make one for each relative, but it's a lot of work, so you need to come over and be my assistant."

What? Steamed orange eggs?

Chen Yan hadn't expected her cousin to secretly learn a new dish.

The old saying goes, "To learn well, you have to 'sleep' with your master." It seems to be true. Otherwise, how could her cousin, who's so much less clever than I am, have learned how to make steamed orange eggs? It must be her brother-in-law who gave her private cooking lessons. Too bad my partner isn't a chef; otherwise, I'd definitely compete with her to see who the real top cooking beauty at home is!

"Wait for me, I'll be right there!"

Hmph, once I learn to make steamed orange eggs, I'll announce who the executive chef of Lin Ji's Food is. My cousin's skills are still a bit lacking. Too bad I'm single. If I also had a chef to boost my cooking, I could definitely leave my cousin's culinary skills two streets behind!

Arriving downstairs, she drove her sports car at breakneck speed towards the West Fourth Ring.

「At this moment, in the Shen Family's villa kitchen, Shen Baobao was scrubbing the freshly picked oranges, while Lin Xu was seriously pounding Chicken Breast on the cutting board with the back of a knife.」

With an ordinary wooden chopping board, you'd have to place a piece of Pork Skin underneath before pounding. Otherwise, wood splinters might get mixed in. But the chopping block at her father-in-law's house was made of superior material that didn't shed splinters, sparing Lin Xu the trouble of using Pork Skin.

Currently, Aunt Liu, along with two maids, was busily assisting as per Lin Xu's instructions. They soaked what needed soaking, cut ingredients as required, and blanched others—everyone was bustling with activity.

"Xu, I'm done over here. Is there anything else you need me to do?" Aunt Liu had received professional culinary training, and her cooking skills were considerable; otherwise, the Shen Family wouldn't have hired her as their full-time cook.

Lin Xu said, "Auntie, could you please beat ten egg whites for me until they're foamy?"

One Chicken Breast was just enough for one serving of Snowflake Chicken Nao, and each serving required five egg whites. There were many people today, and this dish was eaten with a spoon, so one serving wouldn't be enough. Therefore, Lin Xu decided to prepare two servings.

This dish had two ways to use egg whites. One method was to mix the egg whites directly into the Chicken Meatball without whipping them. This resulted in a dish with a Fish Roe-like appearance, featuring many small, broken granules. However, if the egg whites were whipped first, the dish would resemble clouds, making it visually more appealing.

Upon hearing this, Aunt Liu took a small bowl and went to beat the egg whites.

Lin Xu carefully transferred the pounded Chicken Meatball into a bowl. He then added a small spoonful of salt and a small spoonful of White Pepper powder. After mixing it evenly, he added the stock he had brought from the restaurant. Adding stock enhances the dish's texture and enriches its aroma. If stock wasn't available, Scallion and Ginger water could be used as a substitute, though it would be comparatively blander.

He gradually mixed the stock into the Chicken Meatball, working it into a white paste.

By the time he was done, Aunt Liu had already whipped the egg whites into a foam using an egg beater.

His master often said, "Never reject the convenience technology offers," a lesson Lin Xu always remembered. While technology couldn't replace tasks like pounding the Chicken Meatball, beating egg whites was a different story. If Chinese cuisine rigidly adhered only to manual techniques, it would never progress.

He poured some prepared pea starch into the stirred Chicken Meatball, mixing thoroughly until the paste and starch were fully combined. Then, he poured this mixture into the whipped egg whites.

The whipped egg whites were full of fine bubbles, white and delicate, somewhat resembling cream.

Chapter 614: A High-End Sichuan Cuisine with Both Looks and Taste—Snowflake Chicken Nao!

The meat paste was poured in and stirred until evenly mixed, allowing the two types of paste to fuse.

With the addition of egg white, the small amount of meat paste at the bottom of the bowl significantly increased in volume. This was why a single chicken breast could make an entire dish; the volume added by whipped egg white was truly considerable. Without egg white, at least two chicken breasts would be needed for one dish.

Once the meat paste was ready, Lin Xu boiled the prepared ham in plain water. Boiling it this way allowed the fermented aroma in the ham to dissipate and also extracted excess salt, making the ham more fragrant and delicious.

Just as the ham began to boil, Chen Yan, dressed like a supermarket promoter, walked into the kitchen. "Looks like everything's prepared. Wait a moment. I'll go upstairs to change. Then, Chef Chen will lead you all in completing today's hospitality task."

She marched upstairs like a teenager in her 'rebellious phase.'

While rinsing oranges, Shen Baobao pouted. "Calling herself a head chef when she can't even make Orange Steamed Eggs? 'Lousy chef' is more like it."

After grumbling, she asked Lin Xu, "Xu Bao, where should I cut it open again? I've forgotten!"

Lin Xu walked over, picked up an orange, and pointed to its upper third, saying, "About here. After cutting it open, use a spoon to scoop out the pulp. Add some sugar to the pulp to make juice, then mix the egg wash and orange juice in a 1-to-1.5 ratio. Pour the mixture back into the orange rind and steam for a few minutes."

The method for Orange Steamed Egg was relatively simple. Of course, it could be made more complicated, such as by meticulously peeling out segments of orange flesh and adding them to the egg mixture for a better texture. But considering Shen Baobao's and his sister-in-law's cooking skills, he wisely refrained from making that suggestion.

Sometime later, he removed the boiled ham and set it aside to cool. Once cool, he first sliced the lean part into one-millimeter thick slices, then julienned them. Finally, he diced the julienne strips into small pieces, slightly larger than sesame seeds. This step required cutting, not chopping; the finer the cut, the better the result.

By eleven in the morning, with all the ingredients prepped, Lin Xu set a wok on the stove and began to cook.

To prevent any dark flecks from appearing in subsequent dishes cooked in the wok, Lin Xu decided to prepare the Snowflake Chicken Nao first. In Chinese cuisine, dishes made with meat paste like this one are more challenging than ordinary dishes because the paste can easily scorch and stick to the bottom of the wok when heated. Moreover, with continuous heat from the stove, any paste stuck to the bottom would eventually burn, creating black specks that would mix into the dish, ruining its appearance and

imbuing it with a burnt taste. Such dishes were best prepared on a professional restaurant stove, which had strong flames and heated up quickly, minimizing the chances of sticking.

To prevent sticking, Lin Xu heated the wok on the stove until it was red-hot before adding a spoonful of salad oil to season it. After this initial oiling, he poured out the oil, reheated the wok, and repeated the process. He did this three times in total. Finally, Lin Xu poured out the oil from the wok and added a large spoonful of gleaming white lard. To achieve a rich egg-like aroma and a snow-white color for the Snowflake Chicken Nao, lard was essential. It was a colorless fat with a rich mouthfeel that could elevate the quality of the dish.

Soon, the lard in the wok melted. Once the oil was hot, he poured half of the prepared meat paste into the wok. Household stoves had weaker flames, making it easy for food to stick and scorch, so it was crucial to cook in batches.

As soon as the meat paste hit the hot wok, Lin Xu began to constantly push it across the bottom with a spoon. This technique dislodged the paste that had set upon contact with the hot oil, making room for the unset portion. If he were using a professional restaurant stove, the meat paste would have set by now. But at this moment, it was still half-solid and half-liquid; it would take a little longer for the paste to solidify completely.

"Wow, is this the Snowflake Chicken Nao? It looks so beautiful!" Shen Baobao leaned over for a look and immediately fell in love with its snowy white color.

Lin Xu stirred rapidly in the wok with a spoon. Before long, the seemingly plentiful oil was completely absorbed by the meat paste, and there were slight signs of sticking at the bottom of the wok. Fortunately, by this time, all the meat paste had firmed up. He stir-fried the lumpy meat paste a few times, then pressed it gently with the back of the spoon to ensure no part of it was still raw before transferring it to a plate.

The meat paste appeared in fluffy, white clumps, similar to scrambled eggs, but its snow-white color made it look even more tempting.

Lin Xu grabbed a handful of minced ham and sprinkled it on top. The white morsels of chicken and dark red minced ham created a striking contrast, giving the dish a very sophisticated appearance.

Lin Xu handed the dish to Shen Guofu, who was waiting outside, saying, "Dad, this dish is ready. You can let everyone have a taste."

"Alright, alright! We've been waiting for this." Plate in hand, Old Shen hurried to the living room where the relatives were gathered. He had been waiting all morning for this moment.

Returning to the kitchen, Lin Xu saw that Chen Yan and Shen Baobao had stopped their prep work. He asked curiously, "What happened?"

"Several oranges were cut badly, so we're a bit short. We're going out to buy a few more."

"Then go ahead. I'll start steaming these for you."

Upon hearing this, the sisters didn't even bother changing their clothes, excitedly hopped into the X1, and drove to a nearby large supermarket to buy oranges.

When they arrived at the supermarket, Chen Yan was parking when she spotted a pancake stall in a nearby alley. It would still be a while before their meal at home, and she hadn't eaten breakfast. With this in mind, she said to Shen Baobao, "You go in and buy them; just pick large ones. I'm going to buy a pancake to tide me over."

"Okay, let's meet back at the car later."

After they split up, Chen Yan, still in her chef's uniform and hat, quickly made her way to the pancake stall. Only as she got closer did she notice that the pancake vendor was tall and well-built, probably in his twenties. He wore a fashionable Bluetooth earpiece, and his head bobbed slightly, as if he were listening to music.

He's not bad looking, and his stall is quite clean. Maybe he's like my brother-in-law, a master of both looks and cooking.

But he seems to lack business sense. So many people are passing by out on the main street, yet he sets up in an alley. Does he have something against making money?

Good thing I have a keen eye; otherwise, he might not have made a single sale all morning.

Thinking this, she walked up to the stall and said to the tall owner, "Give me one pancake, add two eggs, and plenty of crispy bits."

With that, she took out her phone to pay.

The pancake vendor seemed a bit hesitant but still ladled a scoop of mixed-grain batter onto the hot plate. Then, rotating the hot plate, he used a spreader to flatten the batter. But as he spread it, he was clearly distracted, constantly looking around, and not applying enough pressure. The batter spread unevenly, some of it even oozing off the edge of the hot plate.

Chen Yan frowned. He looks the part, but his technique is worse than my cousin's! What a waste of his good looks.

She pursed her lips in dissatisfaction.

The stall owner also noticed something was wrong and smiled apologetically, saying, "Sorry, I just set up. My bad. I'll make you a new one."

He then scraped the misshapen pancake off with a spatula and started over. Although the vendor was very serious this time, his poor skills meant he still couldn't control the pressure well, and the pancake was ruined again.

Chen Yan looked at him, conflicted. Seriously, man, if you can't cook, you don't have to run a stall. No need to force yourself like this.

She was just about to ask for her money back when an idea from an internet meme popped into her head. She asked softly, "Comrade, are you undercover or something?"

Chapter 615: Chen Yan: Have you heard of Lin Ji's Food? I am the Executive Chef there!

The young man's hand trembled slightly.

The pancake, which he had almost spread into a perfect circle with the spatula, was ruined again by the sudden change in pressure.

Oh no! The third one got spoiled too.

Chen Yan grew even more certain of her guess.

Anyone daring to run a pancake stall in Beijing had to be skilled. If you couldn't spread the batter within seconds during peak hours, you risked losing customers in the queue.

With the young man's level of skill, he would starve if he really tried to run a stall.

She asked softly, "Are you on official duty here? Are there bad guys in the alley? Official duty is more important; the pancake doesn't matter."

Chen Yan, ever the model citizen ready to cooperate with the police, said this while glancing around, afraid of interfering with the young man's operation.

However, the more she spoke, the more helpless the young man looked.

This expression made Chen Yan very curious.

What's going on?

With the cooperation of a beautiful and intelligent citizen like me, shouldn't this undercover cop be happy?

He seems to be a bit angry, though.

Could it be... A spy?

As an enthusiastic Chaoyang resident, Chen Yan's vigilance instantly peaked.

She quietly chanted a slogan that only mainlanders would understand:

"Palace jade dew wine!"

The young man gave a wry smile, just about to signal the pretty female chef with his eyes to stop talking when a cold voice came through his earpiece:

"Agent 045 Ren Jie, your cover has been blown by a civilian, and this disguise assessment is declared a failure. You have failed three times in a row, and you are not suitable for joining the Yanjing City Criminal Investigation Team's Special Operations Group. Pack up and return to the Haidian sub-division for duty."

Ren Jie let out a long sigh.

He excelled in all other subjects, but he had failed the disguise assessment three times.

Why is he so unlucky?

"Palace jade dew wine! What's the next line?"

Seeing that Ren Jie remained silent, Chen Yan immediately stepped back.

If you don't speak up, I'll call the police right away; that's how aware we Chaoyang people are!

"A hundred and eighty coins a cup... I'm a police officer, currently undergoing a disguise assessment. If you had come just ten minutes later, I would have passed, but now..."

Ren Jie helplessly began to pack up his pancake stall.

Who could have imagined that anyone would come to buy pancakes in such an inconspicuous alley?

Alas! Man's plans cannot match those of Heaven!

Seeing his disappointed face, Chen Yan realized she might have done something wrong.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know it was an assessment; I thought it was a drug bust or something... I would've kept my mouth shut if I knew. Can you still redo the assessment?"

"It's not your fault; I'm just not good at disguises... Show me your payment code, and I'll refund you."

If he couldn't pass the assessment, then so be it; he would continue to stay in the Haidian sub-division.

Since he had already failed, Ren Jie didn't dwell on it any longer.

At the age of 22, he retired from the Guard Team and was admitted to the capital's Police Academy, preparing to be a detective.

But his family and friends weren't optimistic. His face was too handsome and his stature too tall, making him unsuitable for a police officer, especially a detective where an ordinary appearance was an advantage.

The more ordinary the appearance, the less attention one drew, allowing an officer to catch criminals when their guard was down.

A handsome face naturally attracts attention and is not suitable for undercover arrest operations.

Last year, he graduated from the police academy with excellent grades and successfully joined the Haidian Criminal Investigation sub-division. After nearly a year of familiarizing himself with the role, he finally adapted to police work.

This year, the Criminal Investigation Team planned to establish a special operations group, calling for outstanding talents from various sub-divisions for centralized training. Ren Jie had no problem with the previous subjects, but he failed the disguise assessments several times.

For his first disguise assessment, he posed as a street performer singing in a subway passage.

His singing was mediocre, but his handsome face, excellent physique from his Guard Team background, and overall presence drew a crowd eager to take pictures with him.

This attracted the attention of the subway police, and thus his cover was blown.

The second time, he was shining shoes on a pedestrian overpass. To prevent his face from attracting attention, he had dirtied himself and even wore a wig.

But before he had even served his first customer, he saw a middle-aged man using counterfeit money to scam an old man selling chestnuts at a nearby stall. He intervened with the Big Grapple Technique, and his carefully prepared disguise was exposed once again.

This time, he switched to a secluded spot to sell pancakes, which should not have caused any problems, but the appearance of this beautiful female chef shattered his hopes of joining the Criminal Investigation Team.

"I'm really sorry. How about I treat you to a meal?"

Chen Yan felt quite guilty inside. If only she had known, she would have gone into the supermarket to buy bread or even some imported snacks from her uncle's house, which would have been better than this.

She had ruined someone's carefully prepared assessment just because she felt peckish, so she wanted to make it up to him.

Treat me to a meal?

Ren Jie looked at Chen Yan's fingers, painted with red nail polish, and asked curiously, "Can you really cook?"

This question made Chef Chen Yan quite indignant.

"Of course I can! I've even been in the kitchen of the Fishing Platform several times. Heard of Lin Ji's Food?"

Ren Jie took off his earpiece. While efficiently packing up the stall, he said, "I've heard of it. The food there is supposedly very good, just expensive. Our captain wanted to buy mooncakes from there but couldn't get any even after trying for several days. Are you a chef at Lin Ji's?"

Chen Yan cleared her throat and said earnestly, "Let me introduce myself. My name is Chen Yan, and I'm the Executive Chef at Lin Ji's Food."

To prove she wasn't lying, Chef Chen even showed the Lin Ji's logo embroidery on the collar, cuffs, and left breast of her chef uniform.

Ha! Thankfully, this uniform was genuinely from the restaurant; otherwise, there would have been no way to explain it.

Chapter 616: Chen Yan: Have you heard of Lin Ji's Food? I am the Executive Chef there!

Executive Chef?

Ren Jie found it hard to believe. In my mind, executive chefs are typically middle-aged people. How could a young, beautiful woman hold such a position?

But indeed, she was dressed in Lin Ji's chef uniform, complete with the tall chef's hat. Perhaps it's true, he thought.

But why on earth would Lin Ji's executive chef come to my modest stand to buy pancakes? In Yanjing, isn't there an unwritten rule that "the cleaner the food stall, the less experienced the vendor's hands" when it comes to pancake stalls? While others intentionally avoid new, clean stalls, you, of all people, find the one vendor in Beijing who is the worst at making pancakes and directly expose your identity... I guess this is fate.

Ren Jie murmured to himself for a while, then suddenly remembered a rumor he had heard online and asked curiously, "Chef Chen, everyone says the employee meals at Lin Ji that aren't sold to the public are the tastiest. Is that true or false?"

Once the subject was brought up, Chen Yan immediately opened up, "Of course it's true. I make quite a few of the employee meals myself—sometimes to test new dishes, sometimes as extra meals for the staff. Want to try some? Come to the restaurant on your day off. I'll cook for you personally so you can experience the craftsmanship of an executive chef!"

Hmm, I'll have my brother-in-law help make a couple of dishes then, she thought. Since I've told a lie, I have no choice but to keep it going. It has to be said, being called Chef Chen feels really good, she mused.

She had intended to give Ren Jie a membership card. However, she then remembered the only one she had in her bag: the 00001 membership card, holding almost nine hundred thousand in cash. She decided against it.

Such a high amount could lead to a bribery charge. I've already ruined his assessment; I can't ruin his career as well, she reasoned.

"Just mention my name at the front desk when you go, and I'll treat you to a meal to make up for today's loss," she said.

Ren Jie smiled and replied, "No need for a meal. Your mooncakes are so hard to get; can I buy a couple of boxes through you? My team leader is over thirty and still single. He finally got engaged, but his

fiancée wants Lin Ji's mooncakes. He's tried several times without success, and it's threatening to cause trouble. It'd be great if you could help me get two boxes."

When I first joined the Haidian squad, it was the squad leader who familiarized me with everything, helping me quickly adapt to police life. This time, when the brigade was recruiting across all of Beijing, it was also the squad leader who encouraged me to apply. Even though I wasn't selected, I can't forget his kindness. Since today is Teachers' Day, it's the perfect time to help this captain, who's both a mentor and a friend, solve his mooncake predicament.

Buy mooncakes? Chen Yan hadn't expected this kind of request.

She took out her phone and called Shen Baobao.

"Yueyue, do you have any mooncakes in your car?"

"Yeah, Xu Bao and I planned to visit our old teacher at Finance University after lunch, so the car is loaded with several boxes of mooncakes. What's up, Yan Bao?"

"I'll need a few boxes later."

"Okay, I'm just paying now. I'll be right out."

After hanging up, Chen Yan said, "What a coincidence! My assistant has a few boxes of mooncakes in her car. I can get them for you now. Just wait here; I'll go get them."

"That would be great. Thanks a lot, Chef Chen."

Ha! He called me Chef Chen again! This feels great, Chen Yan thought. I'll have everyone at the company call me that from now on. It's much more pleasant to the ear than 'Manager Chen'!

When Chen Yan returned to her car, Shen Baobao had also come over, carrying a bag of oranges.

"Yan Bao, what do you need the mooncakes for?" she asked.

"I just messed up a detective's undercover assessment, so I'm compensating him. You wait here; I'll deliver them and come right back."

"Why don't I just drive over?"

"No way! I told him I was Lin Ji's executive chef. What if you carelessly blurt it out and expose me?"

Shen Baobao scoffed internally. Hmph, a counterfeit is always afraid of being exposed by the real thing. Does she know why the new store doesn't have an executive chef position? It's because they're preparing it for me!

She opened the trunk and pointed to the mooncakes inside. "Here, six boxes in total. How many do you need?"

Chen Yan looked and simply grabbed all six boxes.

"You can get more when you go back; we've prepared a ton for relatives at home anyway. If that's not enough, just take my parents' portion. It'd be better for them to eat fewer sweets, anyway."

After saying that, holding three boxes of mooncakes in each hand, she walked briskly towards the nearby mouth of the alley.

By this time, Ren Jie had already packed up his pancake stall and was waiting for his colleagues from the assessment team to pick him up.

Seeing Chen Yan actually return with several boxes of mooncakes, he was overjoyed. "Thank you so much, Chef Chen! How much do I owe you? I'll transfer it to you. What's your WeChat? I'll add you."

I didn't expect to not only get the mooncakes but to get six boxes all at once! A true executive chef indeed, Ren Jie thought.

Chen Yan handed them over to him with a smile and said, "Since you didn't want me to treat you to a meal, let these boxes of mooncakes be my compensation. I have other things to do, so I'll head back now."

It's almost noon. I need to get these oranges home quickly to make steamed eggs, she thought.

She gave a casual wave and then left the mouth of the alley.

Back at the shopping center entrance, Shen Baobao had already started the car. Chen Yan opened the door, got in, and they drove off towards a nearby villa complex.

Just as their BMW X1 drove off, a pickup truck with temporary plates pulled up to the mouth of the alley.

Two young plainclothes police officers got out of the vehicle and joked with Ren Jie, "Didn't you practice making pancakes before? How come you choked when you saw a pretty woman? The leadership at the station was quite disappointed. When you return to the Haidian squad, don't forget to keep practicing. Aim to be our comrade-in-arms again next year."

"Maybe the griddle was too hot..."

Ren Jie glanced in the direction the BMW X1 had disappeared. This Chef Chen, dressed so plainly, must just be an ordinary employee. When I get a day off, I'll go to Lin Ji's Food, find her, and pay her for the mooncakes, he thought.

Chapter 617: Chen Yan: Have you heard of Lin Ji's Food? I am the Executive Chef there!

Those six boxes of mooncakes, even at Lin Ji's prices, would cost at least 2,000. If you bought them from scalpers, it would be more than 3,000. That's so much money; how could we let someone else front it?

The group lifted the pancake cart onto the pickup truck, secured it with ropes, then started the vehicle and left the alleyway.

In the BMW, Shen Baobao asked while driving, "That police officer was quite tall and handsome. You're not being so helpful just because you're smitten, are you?"

"Not at all! I didn't even add his WeChat... But now that you mention it, he really was handsome. No wonder I can never find anyone I like; all the good ones have been recruited by the state."

「Back at the villa.」

The two of them were soon bustling about.

Meanwhile, in the living room, the Snowflake Chicken Nao had been eaten, leaving only scraps on the plate. A group of relatives was trying to guess the name of the dish, but they couldn't figure it out.

Shen Guofu wrote down one of the characters from the dish's name on a piece of paper. "The name of this dish has four characters," he hinted, pointing to what he'd written. "This is one of them. Do you recognize it?"

Haha, the trap was set, just waiting for this group of senior doctors to jump in.

However, just as he showed the character, his brother-in-law, Han Shuyu, said, "I remember now! It's Snowflake Chicken Nao. I had it a couple of years ago on a trip to Rong City at a high-end Sichuan private restaurant. Their presentation was fancier, but it wasn't as delicious as Lin Xu's."

Shen Guofu, who had been waiting all morning for this, was dumbfounded.

He actually said the name correctly? Does studying for a few extra years really make that much of a difference?

Han Shuyu continued, "I remember that character vividly because I mispronounced it back then, and the waiter specifically corrected me."

That made Shen Guofu feel a bit better.

I thought you, a specialist in cardiac surgery, had also mastered the Chinese language.

He picked up the plate, scraped the remaining bits from the slightly cooled bottom with a spoon, and popped it into his mouth. Even cold, the dish was still delicious, with a perfect melt-in-your-mouth texture. The only flaw was that being a bit cold caused the lard in it to congeal slightly.

But for Old Shen, he loved that rich, greasy taste of lard. Only that gave him the satisfying feeling of eating hearty meat.

Han Shuyu asked curiously, "Where's Yueyue? With so many relatives around, why isn't she out here greeting her cousins?"

Shen Guofu replied, "She's busy cooking in the kitchen. Lately, that girl and my niece have gotten hooked on cooking. They've been pestering Lin Xu to learn how to cook every day. Today, they seem to be making orange steamed eggs. Remember to compliment them when you try it."

Old Shen was a typical doting father. Before even tasting his daughter's cooking, he began reminding the relatives not to forget to give praise.

As for the taste... My daughter cooked it herself! How can you even care about the taste? What difference does it make if it's a little better or worse? Just praise her, that's all!

In the kitchen, Lin Xu was cutting the lactone tofu. "Why are you back so late?" he asked. "If you were any later, these orange steamed eggs couldn't have been served with everything else."

Shen Baobao started to explain, "Yan Bao had a romantic encounter and even got six boxes of mooncakes out of it— Hey! My clothes are wet! You sneaky Yan Bao, are you embarrassed or something?"

As Shen Baobao was speaking, Chen Yan splashed her with water from the sink.

Their sisterly bond proved to be made of plastic once again.

Lin Xu finished dicing the lactone tofu and placed the small pieces on a plate. Next, he took out a box of Crab Yellow Sauce he'd gotten from Fishing Platform, crushed two steamed salted egg yolks, and began to prepare Crab Yellow Tofu.

Making this dish with only crab yellow would leave the flavor a bit bland. So, adding two salted egg yolks enhances the complex aroma and creates a richer, smoother texture.

Regular southern tofu would typically be fine for this dish, but Old Mrs. Shen preferred her tofu cooked exceptionally soft and tender. So, Lin Xu switched to lactone tofu, which is soft enough to be eaten with a spoon.

Once all the ingredients were ready, he brought a pot of water to a boil, adding a small spoonful of salt. Then, he blanched the lactone tofu to remove any beany taste, which also made its texture more tender and its flavor more intense. Once the water returned to a boil, he immediately removed the tofu.

He heated the wok, swirled it to coat the surface with oil, then added a mixture of vegetable oil and lard. Once the oil mixture was hot, he stir-fried minced scallion and ginger until fragrant. Next, he added the crushed egg yolks, stir-frying until they foamed. Then, he added the crab yellow. Once fragrant, he gently mixed in the blanched tofu and added a splash of water to simmer. This step required low heat to allow the flavors of the crab yellow and egg yolks to slowly permeate the tofu.

When the liquid had mostly reduced, he thickened the sauce with a cornstarch slurry, adding it in three separate batches, similar to making Mapo Tofu. This technique makes the tofu incredibly smooth, soft, and delicious.

Finally, just before serving, he drizzled a little Crab Oil (made from crab shells) over the dish, releasing an immediate burst of fresh crab aroma and flavor.

When Shen Baobao carried the Crab Yellow Tofu into the dining room, the aroma captivated all the relatives who were chatting in the living room while waiting for lunch.

"Wow, what makes this dish smell so incredibly fresh?"

"It smells so tempting! Lin Xu's cooking skills are truly unmatched."

"We get to enjoy Lin Xu's delicious food again for lunch!"

"..."

In the dining room, just as Shen Baobao set down the large bowl of tofu, Chen Yan snapped a photo with her phone and immediately posted it to her social media feed:

"Yours truly, Chen Yan, humble Executive Chef of Lin Ji's Food, presents a delicious Crab Yellow Tofu on this Mid-Autumn Festival. Wishing everyone a happy family reunion!"

Right after posting, she noticed Shen Baobao had already posted about a dish on her own social media feed, also claiming to be the executive chef—it was the Snowflake Chicken Nao they had made earlier when they went to buy oranges.

Zeng Xiaoqi, always one to stir the pot, commented on both of their posts, "This is a classic case of the real versus fake Monkey King!"

Dou Wenjing retorted, "Not really, because neither of them is the real one."

Chen Yan sneered.

Little Dou, are you trying to make the boss cut our bonus?

She was about to tell Dou Wenjing to mind her own business when she suddenly remembered being called 'Chef Chen' by the policeman.

I didn't accept the money. That young fellow isn't going to go directly to Lin Ji to pay it back, is he?

At this thought, Chen Yan immediately tapped on Shu Yun's profile picture and typed out a message: "Urgent SOS, Boss Shu! Could I ask you for a huge favor..."

Chapter 618: Blanch the beef and then mix it with a cold sauce, you have no idea how delicious it is!

"If anyone comes to the store looking for Chef Chen, just say she's busy in the kitchen and notify me right away. But definitely don't tell them we don't have a head chef position, okay?"

Shu Yun, who was greeting customers in the store, was somewhat surprised when she saw this message. Didn't Chef Chen go to the Boss Lady's house for the Mid-Autumn Festival reunion dinner? Why does it sound like she's been boasting to outsiders and now needs someone to play along?

She tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear and replied, "Got it. I'll remember that."

Although I'm no Commander Chu of the 358th Brigade, since Chef Chen needs help, I have to step in. After all, she's Lin Ji's Food's VIP customer #00001 and a big spender.

Chen Yan was overjoyed when she saw the message. "You're a true sis! May your cup size never shrink!"

A few days ago, while making mooncakes, she had secretly sworn by Shu Yun's cup size. Now that she needed Shu Yun, she had suddenly become a "may your cup size never shrink" kind of good sister again.

Chef Chen replied with a sly expression, then returned to the kitchen to continue performing her duties as the executive chef. However, her duties as head chef were quite simple...

"Brother-in-law, can this be served now?"

"Brother-in-law, are the orange steamed eggs in the steamer about done?"

"Brother-in-law, should I stir-fry all of this beef later or just half of it?"

"..."

Shen Baobao, who was tenderizing a beef tenderloin with the back of a knife, couldn't help but curl her lips. "PFFT, and you call yourself a head chef? Even a leashed Dundun would be more competent than you; at least he knows not to bark out orders indiscriminately."

Dundun, who was being held in Grandma Han's arms in the living room, suddenly opened his eyes. That blasted woman! Talking bad about me behind my back again, huh? The one to take care of Great Aunt has been dispatched. I won't have to be bullied by that dimwit great aunt anymore. But this stepmother... sigh, this cat is also at his wit's end!

For a moment, the little cat's eyes were filled with a world-weary look.

"What are you doing here, Yueyue?" Chen Yan asked, approaching curiously when she saw her cousin pounding beef tenderloin with the back of a kitchen knife. No way, has she learned a new dish?

"I saw Lin Xu pounding chicken breasts, and it looked quite fun, so I spontaneously took this piece of beef to practice. Do you want to try it? It's quite stress-relieving."

Just as Chen Yan was about to take the knife and give it a try, Lin Xu walked over, took the beef tenderloin, and put it into the fridge. "Stop playing, it's time to eat!"

Hearing that it was time to eat, the two sisters straightened their chef's uniforms and hats and went out to tell everyone to take their seats. Meanwhile, Lin Xu manned the wok, stir-frying the prepared ingredients one by one. Today's menu mainly featured stir-fries, steamed dishes, and stews; not many in variety, but quite generous in quantity.

Once everyone was seated, Chen Yan and Shen Baobao brought out portions of freshly made orange steamed eggs. This type of dessert should logically be eaten after the meal. But Chef Shen and Chef Chen, too eager to hear praise, couldn't wait that long, so they adjusted the serving order.

Old Mrs. Shen said with a smile, "My granddaughters made this together; I must eat more."

Back in the day, she only ever cooked for these two girls, never imagining that one day she'd taste their cooking. No matter the flavor of this steamed egg, I'll have to heap praises on it later. And throw in some extra commendation too.

The orange steamed eggs were presented on a plate, each thoughtfully covered with a little lid made from orange peel. Removing the lid, the scent of orange mingled with egg wafted out. Just from the aroma, it was already quite impressive. Especially since no one had held out much hope and had merely thought Shen Baobao and Chen Yan were just fooling around in the kitchen.

Using a small spoon to scoop out a piece of the steamed egg from inside the orange, its tender yellow color and jiggly texture indicated its high quality. Many people can make steamed eggs. But to steam eggs to the consistency of pudding, that truly takes some skill.

The relatives became intrigued; this presentation alone surpassed the orange steamed eggs found in ordinary restaurants. It wasn't that the cooking skill was exceptionally advanced; it was mainly that typical restaurants making this dessert would try to save on ingredients as much as possible—for example, by reducing the number of eggs, adding starch water, or replacing fresh orange juice with concentrate. By cutting costs, the flavor was also compromised.

So, smelling this authentic, high-quality orange steamed egg, the relatives unanimously picked up their spoons and began to taste. The pudding-like steamed egg exuded a rich egg fragrance and the unique sweet-tartness of orange juice. Scooping a spoonful into their mouths, the tender and smooth texture was surprisingly delightful.

"Oh my, this tastes wonderful!"

"Indeed, the texture is so delicate, and there are no air pockets. It's fragrant and silky smooth, truly a great mouthfeel."

"That's right, the sweetness isn't overpowering; instead, the egg and orange fragrances are both beautifully enhanced. Our Yueyue has really become so capable, to make such a perfect dessert!"

"Yan Bao is great too! I thought she was just messing around in the kitchen, but her skills are amazing."

"Next time we have guests for afternoon tea, we can just ask Yan Bao and Yueyue to make something."

"..."

Listening to everyone's compliments, a proud smile spread across Shen Baobao's face. HEE HEE, I finally won everyone's praise with my cooking skills. But it wasn't just my effort alone; Yan Bao also contributed one percent. Mhm, even as an assistant, she deserves to be on the list of contributors!

Just as she was reveling in her triumph, Aunt Shen Guofang asked, "Yueyue, why is the texture of this steamed egg so smooth and tender? And how come there are no air pockets? When I occasionally make steamed egg custard at home, it's never this delicious."

Chapter 619: Blanch the beef and then mix it with a cold sauce, you have no idea how delicious it is! \_2

This...

Shen Baobao was stunned on the spot.

I have no idea either? We had gone out to buy oranges while the dish was steaming; Lin Xu had done all of this.

She looked toward her older cousin, Chen Yan. Even Chen Yan, who had just proclaimed herself the head chef, looked clueless. Clearly, this surpassed both of their culinary knowledge.

I can't panic, I can't panic. Recall the knowledge Lin Xu shared. To make steamed eggs silky, they need to be strained... That's right, straining the egg mixture through a fine-mesh sieve can make the egg custard smoother and also filter out the air bubbles. As for the lack of honeycomb-like holes, isn't it supposed to be steamed on low heat?

Shen Baobao's mind raced, and then she said to Shen Guofang, "Strain the egg mixture through a fine-mesh sieve to make it smooth, and for the air holes, steam it on low heat."

Yes, whether this is the right way or not, right now it's crucial to act as if it's the correct method—with confidence. If yours doesn't taste good, then sorry, it's your own fault, not because of my instructions.

Just at that moment, Lin Xu came in holding a dish of Mapo Tofu. After hearing Shen Baobao's words, he said, "You're right. Egg custard should be steamed on low heat to effectively avoid air bubbles."

With the chef's endorsement, all the female relatives present quietly took note, planning to try this method when they got home. If we can make it, we can show off our cooking skills to our friends!

Shen Guofu saw Lin Xu come in and quickly took the bowl of Mapo Tofu from him, saying, "Lin Xu, are you done? If you're done, come and sit down to eat. Everyone's waiting for you."

Lin Xu said, "Just the corn custard left. It'll only take a few minutes. Everyone, please start eating; don't wait for me. I'll come over once I'm done."

Returning to the kitchen, he didn't start cooking right away but instead called his mother, Chen Meijuan. Usually, during festivals, he would be with his parents, but being away this year necessitated a call to avoid his mom's nagging about "forgetting his mother after getting a wife."

The call connected, and it sounded lively on the other end. "Son, just as I thought! It's already noon, and you hadn't called yet. We're eating right now. Your uncle made several tables full of dishes. Have you eaten yet?"

"About to eat. Tell Dad to drink less."

"Don't worry, no drinking today. The city tourism bureau gave our scenic spot an award for excellence. Your dad has to drive there this afternoon to pick it up..."

Mother and son casually talked about recent events and asked after his grandmothers and other relatives.

Just as the call was about to end and he was ready to cook, a fair and delicate hand suddenly reached out and took the phone. "Mom, happy holidays! Lin Xu and I miss you so much!"

Hearing her daughter-in-law's words, Chen Meijuan, on the other end of the phone, nearly lost her composure. During the holiday, her son wasn't with her. Even over the phone, she could only express her concern indirectly. That heartfelt "I miss you so much!" immediately brought tears to her eyes.

"Mom misses you too... Yueyue, is your stomach still bothering you? Do you need to go to the hospital for a check-up?"

"No need, no need, I'm all better now. It must be because I haven't had Mom's delicious food for so long, so my stomach threw a little tantrum."

These words instantly brought a smile to Chen Meijuan's face. My precious daughter-in-law really knows how to talk! When we meet next time, I'll definitely make a lot of delicious food for her, so her stomach won't have any more tantrums.

After a few more words, the call ended. Shen Baobao waved the phone in front of Lin Xu. "Making sneaky calls home without me, that's naughty. Unless you give me ten kisses, I won't—"

Before she could finish, Lin Xu leaned in and kissed her.

The young couple shared a sweet kiss in the kitchen before starting to make the corn custard.

After it was ready, they returned to the dining room, and the Shen Family's lunch officially began.

Actually, they were supposed to eat at the Shen Family's today and go to the Han Family tomorrow. But everyone was rather busy, and Lin Xu couldn't spend all his time visiting relatives, so they simply decided to have a meal and get-together at his father-in-law's place. It was all family anyway; there was no need for such formalities.

"Come have a drink, Lin Xu." Chen Yuejin held up a glass, wanting to share a drink with his outstanding nephew-in-law.

Lin Xu held up his beverage with a sheepish smile. "Uncle, Yueyue and I need to visit our teacher at school this afternoon, so I really can't drink. Let's use this beverage instead for today. Next time, I'll prepare a big meal and have a proper drink with you."

Upon hearing this, Shen Guofu quickly lifted his glass to smooth things over. "Here, brother-in-law, I'll drink with you. Lin Xu has things to do this afternoon. Let the young man handle his business. I've been looking forward to this meal all day."

Chen Yuejin clinked glasses with Shen Guofu and Lin Xu, feeling a surge of emotion. I wonder if my future son-in-law will be this good. My daughter, Yan Bao, is thirty and still single. When will she ever get married? It's so worrisome!

Just as he was worrying, Chen Yan, who was eating egg custard, asked Lin Xu, "Brother-in-law, do you and Yueyue have any plans after visiting the school?"

"After the school, we're heading back to the store. Why do you ask, Yan Bao?"

Chen Yan glanced at her dad and replied with a smile, "I want to learn how to cook a dish for Dad. He loves coriander, but because so many people dislike it these days, he hasn't been able to indulge as much as he'd like..."

Her words instantly made Chen Yuejin, who had been worrying about his daughter, beam with joy. My, our Chen family's girl is starting to care for her dad! That's really something.

Shen Guofang, beside him, also looked pleased. She had planned to liven things up later and ask the relatives to suggest a possible match for her daughter. But now that her daughter was so considerate... There's no rush. If she can't find someone, I'll take care of her for life.

Chapter 620: Blanch the beef and then mix it with a cold sauce, you have no idea how delicious it is! \_3

The family isn't short of food or drink, so why worry that our daughter will eat us out of house and home?

She likes cilantro?

That's too easy; we could just make a simple cold cilantro salad. But it looks like my sister-in-law plans to make a dish that's truly presentable.

Lin Xu thought for a moment and said, "We can make it now. The beef tenderloin Yueyue just pounded is perfect for a cold dish, and it's not hard to make. How about I just make a cilantro beef salad right now?"

Shen Baobao didn't expect to receive praise from her own Xu Bao for just eating a meal and immediately said, "Yes, yes, I also want to learn."

Cilantro beef salad?

The others were somewhat surprised. They had rarely eaten cold beef dishes, and even then, it was usually marinated beef served cold, not raw. But from Lin Xu's tone, it seemed he could make it immediately, which likely meant it wouldn't be marinated.

How would you even eat that?

For a moment, both cilantro lovers and beef lovers were silent. They were all wondering if the finished dish would even be edible.

The two pretend head chefs, Chen Yan and Shen Jiayue, however, seemed eager to try, "Then let's start, this will be an additional dish!"

Lin Xu didn't refuse. He rose and led the pair of Dragon and Phoenix to the kitchen.

He took the beef tenderloin out of the fridge. First, he cut it apart following the muscle grain, then used the back of his knife to pound it lightly. This loosened the muscle fibers, making the meat absorb flavors more easily and improving its texture. After pounding it, he used a kitchen knife to slice it thinly.

Considering Shen Baobao's and his sister-in-law's negligible Knife Skills, Lin Xu said, "If you do it yourself, you can replace this step with a meat slicer."

The kitchens of wealthy families weren't just spacious; they were also fully equipped with all sorts of appliances, both essential and non-essential. The multi-functional slicer was a prime example. Of course, just because Lin Xu found it unnecessary didn't mean others thought the same. For example, the two aspiring head chefs were very reliant on equipment. Upon hearing they could use a slicer, they exchanged a look and shared a knowing smile.

Wow, we can finally harness the power of technology!

Lin Xu continued to slice the beef while saying, "The slices don't need to be too thin; about two millimeters is good. This thickness allows the beef to cook through while remaining tender. If they're too thin, it's easy to overcook, and if they're too thick, they won't cook through properly."

Blanch? The Dragon and Phoenix duo looked puzzled, their expressions full of curiosity about this technique.

"Blanch it and then make a cold salad? Isn't that... isn't that how you eat hot pot?" Chen Yan felt like she'd discovered a new continent. She realized that the way they often ate hot pot, especially Chaoshan Beef Hot Pot, used almost this exact method.

So, we're putting in all this effort to learn, just to make a hot pot dish?

"Brother-in-law, isn't this dish a bit... too simple?"

Simple? Lin Xu put the sliced beef into a bowl and said with a smile, "Not necessarily. This dish is actually quite particular. If made well, it can definitely be a highlight on the dining table. Plus, once you learn it, you can use the same method for cold dishes with chicken, lamb, and various other meats."

Shen Baobao's eyes lit up, "Doesn't that mean we can turn our favorite hot pot ingredients into cold salad dishes?"

"It's possible, but you should probably skip it for now. It's better for you to eat fewer cold dishes for the time being."

"Oh... got it."

Chen Yan: "..."

Brother-in-law, I get that you care about your cousin's feelings. But could you not do it right in front of me? Are public displays of affection this shameless nowadays?

Lin Xu placed the sliced beef into a bowl, then drizzled some peanut oil over it and mixed it evenly.

"Why add oil?"

"It's to lock in the meat's moisture and also to improve its texture. Raw beef shouldn't come into contact with salt or Cooking Wine during preparation, otherwise, the meat won't be tender."

After saying this, Lin Xu started to prepare the other ingredients. He took two Erjingtiao chili peppers, three millet chilis, and a piece of tender ginger Aunt Liu had prepared for making pickles. He chopped these three ingredients separately, then combined and finely minced them.

Next, he took a small handful of cilantro and a few scallions. He first cut off the roots of the cilantro and scallions, setting them aside to be used when blanching the beef. The cilantro stems and leaves, along with the scallions, were then cut into sections and placed in a small bowl to be added to the dish later.

Once these side ingredients were ready, he began to prepare the sauce. He added half a tablespoon of Light Soy Sauce, one-third of a tablespoon of white sugar, and one-third of a tablespoon of oyster sauce to a bowl, then mixed well with a small spoon until the sugar dissolved.

As he mixed, Lin Xu said to Shen Baobao and Chen Yan, "You can't put salt in this sauce, so you need to use savory condiments as a substitute for table salt to season it. This makes the flavor fresher. Besides Light Soy Sauce and oyster sauce, you can also add a little Fish Sauce to enhance the savory, umami taste."

Once the sugar dissolved, he poured a small amount of Sichuan peppercorn oil and Sesame Oil into the bowl. After mixing it again, the sauce was ready, and he could proceed with cooking the beef.

He added water to a pot and brought it to a rolling boil over high heat. Then, he added a quarter tablespoon of table salt to the boiling water. This is where the base saltiness for the beef is introduced, so it's important to add enough salt. This ensures the beef will be flavorful and delicious.

After adding the salt, he took a large mesh strainer and spread the sliced beef in it as evenly as possible. Then, similar to the technique for making White Jade Lotus Root Strips, he held the large mesh strainer with the beef in his left hand over the pot. With his right hand, he used a ladle to scoop boiling water from the pot and pour it over the beef. This step involves carefully pouring the hot water over the beef. As the water spreads and cascades, it undergoes a slight cooling process, which prevents the intense heat from directly scalding and overcooking the beef.

As the hot water cascaded over the beef, it instantly rinsed away any surface blood.