

Culinary 681

Chapter 681: Grandpa Gao's Request! Making Spicy Chicken! Shen Baobao: From now on, call me Director Shen!

"Driver, pull over!" Chen Yan instructed the bus driver to stop at the side of the road.

Once the bus was stationary, she disembarked and strode towards Elder Gao, who was wearing a Mongolian robe and standing not far away.

She had never imagined that bringing the company's employees and streamers for team building would lead to meeting this State Banquet master. Then again, Elder Gao was also a contracted streamer with the company. Just last night, he had aimed his live stream camera at the starry sky, sharing stories of his youth with everyone. Could this be the very place he was talking about last night?

Seeing Chen Yan, Elder Gao also seemed a little surprised. He had just woken up and was preparing to stretch before setting off to find a place for Mongolian milk tea and shaomai. He hadn't expected to run into someone from Beijing.

He glanced at the bus. WOW, Yue Liyue, Wu Kexin, Panda... all familiar faces. If these people are here, what about my little apprentice? He couldn't have come too, could he?

Chen Yan said with a smile, "We're on a holiday trip, taking the company's staff out for a break during the National Day. We thought there wouldn't be many people here, but we happened to bump into you."

"Lin Xu, he..."

"My brother-in-law couldn't make it," Chen Yan explained. "Many out-of-town netizens are visiting the restaurant during the holiday to 'check in,' and he promised to make roasted chicken for everyone, so he stayed behind."

A warm smile immediately appeared on Elder Gao's face. "Years ago, when I passed through Yinzhou on the train, the platforms were full of vendors selling Dao Kou roasted chicken. When the train started moving, the whole carriage would fill with the aroma of roasted chicken. I never thought that Lin Xu, a

Yinzhou native, would also be making roasted chicken. It's a pity I'm not in Beijing. Otherwise, I would definitely have to taste my apprentice's work."

While they were talking, Luo Shan, dressed in a Mongolian robe similar to Elder Gao's, also stepped down from the RV.

Chen Yan didn't know Luo Shan. She was just about to call for Die Lianhua when Elder Gao said, "This is your Aunt Luo."

"Hello, Aunt Luo."

Elder Gao then introduced Chen Yan to Luo Shan, "This is Yueyue's cousin. She's also a major client of Lin Ji's Food, the CEO of Joyful Media, and, well, my behind-the-scenes boss."

Upon hearing this, Luo Shan hurried over to greet her and warmly invited Chen Yan to chat in the RV.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Luo," Chen Yan said. "We flew into Hailar last night and hired a car to get here this morning. We need to hurry to the campsite ahead and get settled. Where are you two heading next?"

Elder Gao glanced at Luo Shan, then said, "Why don't we join you? Let's stay here one more day. I just love the scenery around here. From the Northeast to this place, every step reveals a new view."

When they first flew to the Northeast, the plan was to tour the region for half a month. Then, they'd drive the RV through Inner Mongolia to see the poplar forests before heading to Kanas to admire the beautiful autumn foliage there. However, things didn't go as planned. They'd been touring the Northeast until now and still felt they hadn't seen enough. The Northeast Region offered so much food and scenery; there was still so much he wanted to eat and see. It's true what they say: you don't know how vast the world is until you venture out.

Back when he worked at the Fishing Platform, he'd thought he had mastered all cooking techniques. But in the Northeast, he tasted various delicacies that couldn't be found anywhere else. On his journey, Elder Gao gained a new understanding and appreciation of Northeastern cuisine. He also grew increasingly fond of the Northeasterners, who all seemed to share Zhao Benshan's sense of humor.

"Xiaoshuai, if you want to stay another day, then let's stay," Luo Shan said. "Coincidentally, these RVs need to be refueled and their water topped up."

Several RVs? Chen Yan was somewhat surprised. She originally thought it was a caravan organized by RV enthusiasts, but from Aunt Luo's words, could it be that all three RVs were hers?

Seeing the look of confusion on Chen Yan's face, Elder Gao explained, "Those two RVs are where the drivers and assistants rest."

TSK TSK TSK, it must be nice to be rich. For the first time, Chen Baiwan found herself yearning for an even wealthier lifestyle. Never mind the two smaller RVs; just this large one, fully equipped, could easily be exchanged for a house within Beijing's Fifth Ring Road. She really had to work hard to earn money. Only by working hard could one achieve such a wonderful life.

Elder Gao looked at Chen Yan and asked, "Do you have any activities planned for the company's team building tonight?"

"Yes, Elder Gao. Tonight, we're having a bonfire party and a whole roast lamb... Oh, actually, would you be willing to handle the roast lamb? Let our company's employees also experience the artistry of a State Banquet master."

"Alright, no problem. I've been itching to flex my skills a bit anyway."

Just as Chen Yan was about to head back to the bus, Elder Gao suddenly called out to her, "Xiaoyan, we'll probably head towards Chifeng tomorrow morning. Before we leave, there's something I'd like to ask of you. Try to get up early tomorrow, alright?"

Ask me for a favor? Chen Yan wondered. He isn't going to ask me to pass a note, is he? I heard that on the opening day, Elder Gao asked my brother-in-law to pass a note, but it somehow got switched with Aunt Luo's phone number. My poor brother-in-law had practiced what he was going to say for half a day, all for nothing. But since it's Elder Gao asking, I can't refuse, even if it's a pile of notes, let alone just one.

Thinking this, Chen Yan said, "Alright, Elder Gao. I'll get up early tomorrow and make sure not to mess things up."

Back on the bus, everyone started asking at once, "Boss Chen, who was that person?"

"He's our special guest for this team-building event, and also Lin Xu's master, Gao Peisheng—Elder Gao."

She didn't mention his alias, Gao Xiaoshuai. Even though Elder Gao's various 'vests' had been exposed one after another within their circle, to the outside world, he was still the revered State Banquet master. His status couldn't be diminished.

Hearing that he was Lin Xu's master, everyone instantly understood who he was.

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Chen Yan continued, "Elder Gao said he's planning to show off his skills tonight. You all just wait and see—you'll be eating roast whole lamb personally made by a State Banquet master!"

Cheers immediately filled the vehicle.

On a double seat behind, the slimmed-down Panda looked out of the car window at the behemoth RV and muttered softly, I really didn't expect that the once silver-haired young boy would end up in the hands of a wealthy woman like this.

Next to him, Wu Kexin glanced over. "Are you jealous? Wishing a rich woman would provide for you too?"

Panda shook his head quickly. "Not... I'm not jealous at all." He dared not speak recklessly. Otherwise, he'd face the consequences.

Wu Kexin laid her head on his shoulder. "I'll work hard to make money and try to let you experience what it feels like to be a kept man."

A look of joy appeared on Panda's face, then he said, "Great... HISS... not great!"

He lifted his shirt and saw the tender flesh around his waist had been pinched red. "I already said not great, so why are you still pinching me?"

"Consider it a taste of married life," Wu Kexin said. "This way, you'll know how I'll fight back if you bully me after we're married."

Panda, who had been wincing, was completely mesmerized by the words "after marriage." He lifted his shirt a bit more. "Why don't you... pinch me a couple more times?"

"What? Are you a masochist or something?"

"No, I'm just afraid this is all a dream..."

"

「Back in the restaurant.」

The oil in the pot was already hot. Lin Xu took the chickens, which had been drained of excess water, and placed them into the hot oil one by one to fry.

The oil for this step needed to be slightly hotter to thoroughly dry and crisp the chicken skin. This way, when the chicken was later placed in the marinade, its surface would develop a "tiger skin" pattern, and the skin itself would be less prone to breaking during the stewing process.

However, before adding the chicken, it was crucial to ensure all surface moisture was removed. Especially the cavity; any remaining water there could cause the hot oil to splatter violently.

Thanks to the maltose coating, the chicken skin quickly fried to a reddish-golden brown.

"When I was an apprentice, the chicken could be removed from the pot once it reached this stage," Xu Xinhua remarked, seeing that the boss showed no intention of removing the chicken yet.

Everyone truly has their own methods, he mused. Some cooks briefly fry their roast chicken to tighten the skin before removing it, while others prefer to fry it a bit longer before stewing.

Everyone's culinary understanding and desired texture for roast chicken differ, leading to noticeable variations in the frying stage.

After frying for a while longer, once the chicken skin had transformed from golden yellow to a deep reddish hue, Lin Xu used a slotted spoon to lift the chickens out of the oil one by one.

The fried chickens were set aside to drain the oil before he started the next batch.

The freshly fried chicken couldn't be added to the pot immediately, as the skin would easily become soft and lose its crispness. It needed to cool slightly before being placed in the pot for stewing.

The previously prepared marinade also needed the heat turned off to let it settle, and its temperature had to be slightly lowered to prevent the hot liquid from damaging the chicken skin upon immersion.

Once all the chickens were fried, Lin Xu stretched his shoulders and then slowly began to place the first batch of fried chicken into the marinade.

The most cost-effective method for making roast chicken involves using a large stockpot. A bamboo grate is placed at the bottom to prevent sticking. Then, the fried chicken is neatly arranged in circles inside before the marinade is poured in. This method maximizes space utilization, and the stockpot's design helps concentrate heat, thus saving energy.

However, Lin Xu didn't opt for this method. Today was, after all, experimental, and large stockpots weren't as convenient as a jacketed kettle.

A jacketed kettle heats evenly all around, ensuring a consistent temperature throughout the pot. A stockpot, on the other hand, is heated from the bottom, leading to varying temperatures from the bottom up.

These differences in cooking vessels result in variations in the quality of the roast chicken.

After all the chickens were placed into the marinade, Lin Xu added a basin of the marinade previously used for Tiger Skin Chicken Feet and half a basin of the marinade from stewed duck products.

Marinated dishes are inseparable from a good old marinade, and the timing of its addition is crucial.

The best approach is to pour it over the top once all other ingredients are in place. This allows the flavors of the old marinade to gradually seep down into the items being stewed.

Simultaneously, it forms an insulating layer on the surface of the marinade, helping to maintain a more constant temperature.

After pouring in the old marinade, Lin Xu added a large ladleful of liquor. With that, it was all set!

He turned up the heat to bring the marinade to a rolling boil and cooked it vigorously for fifteen minutes. This allowed the boiling marinade to thoroughly cook the chicken, draw out any blood and impurities from the meat, and let the gamey odors dissipate with the evaporating alcohol.

Next, he reduced the heat to its lowest setting, maintaining a gentle simmer where the marinade was just lightly bubbling.

This "lightly bubbling" state, or gentle simmer, meant only an occasional small bubble would rise to the surface, while a layer of oil floated on top of the marinade.

It's said that one should not cover the pot when making marinated meat. In fact, this layer of oil serves as the best lid.

This oil layer helps retain heat, regulate temperature, and also makes the meat more tender and succulent.

If the meat were boiled vigorously, even the highest quality cut would turn out tough after stewing.

"Maintain this level of heat for stewing," Lin Xu instructed. "Turn off the heat after two hours, then let it soak for at least three more hours. That's how this roast chicken will be perfectly done."

This embodies the principle of "three parts stewing, seven parts soaking." The stewing time can be relatively short, but the soaking period should be as long as possible to allow the marinade's flavors to fully penetrate the chicken.

A well-made roast chicken is described as one that "falls apart with a shake." This refers to chicken prepared by stewing over low heat and then soaking for several hours.

Only roast chicken prepared this way can achieve that perfect tenderness where the meat is fall-off-the-bone tender and the bones themselves are soft.

Once the chicken was stewing, Lin Xu checked the time. It was already past nine in the morning, so he hurried upstairs to prepare the Spicy Chicken.

Spicy Chicken is a popular chicken dish in the Northwest Region, as famous as Big Plate Chicken, and different regions have their own variations.

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Unlike roast chicken made from tender roosters, Spicy Chicken requires laying hens that are around a year old.

Though this type of chicken meat might seem dry and tough, and theoretically unsuited for this preparation method, the clever people of the Northwest have found a way to make it delightfully crunchy and firm, with a refreshingly numb and spicy flavor.

Regular tender chicken, on the other hand, could not produce this texture.

Early this morning, when Lao Huang delivered vegetables, he also specifically brought a few spent hens. Che Zai then weighed them, chopped off the toenails from the chicken feet, removed the trachea and lymph tissue from the chicken necks, meticulously cleaned the downy feathers from their bodies, and also cleared out inedible parts like the lungs from their abdominal cavities.

After cleaning them, he placed a large basin under the tap, put the chickens in it, and turned on the water. Once the basin was full, he adjusted the tap to its lowest setting, just enough for the water to trickle into the basin in a thin, steady stream.

This technique saved water while also keeping the water in the basin constantly fresh.

Any blood seeping from the chicken meat was immediately washed away by the flowing water.

By now, these chickens had been soaking for several hours. Lin Xu took them out of the basin; their skin and flesh had become completely pale and tender, much cleaner than when they were first bought.

"This chicken looks really beautiful. Boss, is this how restaurants make their Spicy Chicken so white? Theirs seems even whiter than this chicken," Che Zai asked curiously.

He hadn't worked with Spicy Chicken in his previous restaurant, so he was somewhat unfamiliar with this dish.

Before Lin Xu could answer, Ma Zhiqiang said, "Bullshit! Those restaurants only wash their vegetables once; they'd never rinse them with so much water. They usually soak the chicken in formalin, and naturally, the chicken becomes white and tender."

Upon hearing "formalin," Che Zai's face showed an indescribable expression. "Bro, you might as well have lied. Just the other night, Niu Chuan and I were eating Spicy Chicken downstairs from the dorm. He even held up his arm to compare—the chicken skin was much whiter and more tender than his arm."

Lin Xu trailed off. You guys really have too much free time.

He set up the stockpot, placed the chickens inside, and added water until the pot was half full.

Since there were many chickens to cook today, a bit more water was needed, as the final sauce for the chicken would be made using this original chicken broth.

After adding water, he turned on the heat.

While waiting for the water to boil, he couldn't stay idle; he had to prepare the spices for boiling the chicken.

The spices included star anise, white cardamom, Angelica dahurica, bay leaves, a small piece of cinnamon, and finally, a large handful of Sichuan peppercorns. After rinsing them with water, they were placed in a bowl with scallion segments and ginger slices, completing the aromatics for boiling the chicken.

After the water boiled, he skimmed off the foam, added the cleaned spices into the pot, then put in two spoonfuls of salt and simmered it over medium-low heat for one hour.

These older hens were quite resilient to prolonged boiling.

If it were a regular three-yellow chicken or a tender young chicken, an hour of boiling would likely cook them so thoroughly that even the bones would be soft.

Just as the chicken started boiling, Shen Baobao, who had gone back for a nap, came over.

Lin Xu took the sugar-roasted chestnuts, which he had buried in pebbles the previous night, placed them into a bamboo basket, and handed it to the girl for her to peel and eat.

"It's amazing they're still warm after a whole night! These pebbles are magical."

Shen Jiayue peeled a chestnut, popped it into her mouth, and mumbled, "Sister Yan met Master in the Hulun Grassland. He and Aunt Luo just traveled from the Three Eastern Provinces to Inner Mongolia. At this rate, they'll arrive in the Northwest just in time for heavy snowfall to close off the mountains."

"It's a trip; there's no need to rush. If it were me, it would probably take even longer."

The Three Eastern Provinces cover over a million square kilometers, boasting several mountain ranges and major rivers. How could one tour it all so quickly?

Shen Baobao popped a chestnut into Lin Xu's mouth. "After we get married, can we travel around in an RV like that?"

"Sure... as long as we get our home situation stabilized first."

"Mhm, don't worry, Xu Bao. I'll work hard to earn money too."

How could a family rely on just one person to earn money? Even though I, Shen Jiayue, might receive a massive inheritance in the future, I can't lose my fighting spirit!

"Xu Bao, I saw online and in the group chat that people are urging you to make more videos of Dundun. Since you're so busy, I've decided to take on this responsibility."

You?

Lin Xu was about to suggest she stick to eating snacks but didn't want to dampen her enthusiasm. He asked, "How do you plan to shoot it?"

"I only took a short nap when I got back. Then, I assembled my very own production team."

Team...? Lin Xu instinctively thought of his sister-in-law.

But his sister-in-law was likely frolicking wildly on the Hulun Grassland, thousands of miles from Beijing, and couldn't possibly join Shen Baobao's team.

His curiosity was piqued. "Who's on your team?"

Shen Baobao cleared her throat and pointed to herself first. "I'll be the general director. From now on, remember to call me Director Shen."

Has she already gotten over her craze for being an executive chef this fast? Lin Xu nodded cooperatively. "Alright, Director Shen."

"Our team is fully staffed. Screenwriting and creative aspects will be handled by our little genius, Geng Lele. Videography, editing, and post-production will be enthusiastically handled by Director Zeng. Sister Jing will provide props and locations, and Shu Yun will act as Dundun's agent, responsible for his emotional well-being and other matters."

This... The Fat Loss Squad and the Goofball Squad, led by Geng Lele and Shen Baobao, collaborating for the first time? Who knew, this combination might actually cook up a little surprise. Even though his Baobao was just there to make up the numbers, Lele's intellect and Zeng Xiaoqi, the go-getter, were genuinely skilled.

Lin Xu said, "Since our Director Shen is so confident, I wish you smooth shooting. Once you wrap up, I'll cook a feast for you."

"That's exactly what I wanted to hear! Sister Xiaoqi had nowhere to go, and the TV station's cafeteria was closed too. When I told her my plan, she supported it wholeheartedly."

Is she just looking for an excuse to freeload some meals from the shop?

Lin Xu didn't expose Director Zeng's little scheme and instead offered many words of encouragement and wishes for their success.

When he returned to the kitchen, he chuckled lightly. Not sure what kind of video this motley crew can produce. But no matter what they come up with, it's unlikely to push Lin Ji's Food to the top of the trending list. Let them have their fun!

Downstairs at the service counter, Dundun, who had been napping, lifted an eyelid to glance upstairs, then rolled over and continued his deep slumber...

Chapter 684: Wow, isn't this Spicy Chicken too delicious? Director Shen's first crew meeting!

In the kitchen, Zhu Yong watched Lin Xu enter and asked curiously, "I've seen some chefs simmer the seasoning sauce when making Spicy Chicken. Don't we need to do that now?"

Lin Xu lifted the pot lid and said with a smile, "We have to wait until the chicken is cooked because the seasoning sauce needs the original stock... Oh, Zhu Yong, a cold front is likely coming in a few days. You should make some Lotus Root stewed with Pork Ribs. Everyone can eat and sip the soup to their heart's content."

"Sure, no problem."

For someone from Hubei, making Lotus Root stewed with Pork Ribs was as simple as drinking water.

The chicken in the pot was still simmering gently.

Actually, to improve the color, one could add a couple of smashed gardenia fruits or Curcuma powder, but I feel it's unnecessary for our own enjoyment. Using gardenia fruit to color the broth seems like a lack of confidence in the ingredients.

Good ingredients don't need any superfluous additions.

After checking on the chicken in the pot, Lin Xu went downstairs to the braised foods section to check on the stewed chicken slowly cooking in the jacketed pot.

The aroma of the braising liquid is already apparent. However, because this is a fresh batch of stock, the flavor of the spices is still a bit sharp.

With the next batch, the flavor of the braising stock will mellow, and the fresh stock will transform into a rich, aged stock.

「Ten o'clock in the morning.」

Lin Xu once again lifted the lid of the pot cooking the old hen, and a rich, savory aroma wafted out. After the steam dissipated, he saw a layer of yellow chicken fat floating in the pot. This layer of yellow chicken fat was a hallmark of a well-cooked old hen. He took a chopstick and poked it into the thickest part of the chicken thigh. Seeing no blood seep out confirmed the chicken was thoroughly cooked and ready to be taken out.

Using a slotted spoon, he carefully lifted the chicken out. Without pausing, he immediately placed it into a basin of ice water. This was done to make the chicken skin crispier and the meat firmer. The chicken shouldn't soak in the ice water for too long, or its savory flavor would be diluted. A quick plunge was enough before taking it out, draining any water from its cavity onto a tray, and then processing the next one. After all the chickens were removed and briefly cooled in ice water, they were taken to the cold storage to cool naturally.

Restaurants typically prepare shredded chicken this way: cooking the chickens all at once and storing them in the refrigerator. When an order comes in, a chicken is taken out for processing. The whole chicken is shredded and mixed with onion slivers, cilantro segments, and green onion strips. Then, it's drizzled with the spicy and numbing seasoning sauce and tossed. Just like that, a delightfully spicy and tingling Spicy Chicken is officially complete.

Now that the chicken was cooked, it was time to make the spicy and numbing seasoning sauce.

For Spicy Chicken, the seasoning sauce is the soul of the dish—the key to transforming an old hen from something ordinary into a treasure.

Since it's the soul, the method naturally becomes intricate and particular. For instance, it required three kinds of specialty oils—chicken oil, Seasoning Oil, and Sichuan peppercorn oil. Additionally, it called for more than two types of chilies and three types of Sichuan peppercorns. The process also involved simmering and frying these chilies and Sichuan peppercorns.

In short, this seasoning sauce is quite a hassle to prepare.

Luckily, Lin Ji's Food has a well-stocked supply of all three required Seasoning Oils. Otherwise, I would have had to start from scratch, beginning with rendering chicken oil.

He gathered the necessary Seasoning Oils and added some rapeseed oil, commonly used in the Northwest Region. Then he took some dried string chilies and King Chili. String chilies are aromatic but not very spicy. To make the dish more satisfyingly hot, he needed to add some King Chili to increase the heat.

As for the three types of Sichuan peppercorns needed in the seasoning sauce, they included red Sichuan peppercorns, Sichuan peppercorns, and fresh Sichuan peppercorns. Fresh Sichuan peppercorns contributed a vibrant, clean, numbing flavor that made the dish more refreshing. However, using only fresh Sichuan peppercorns wouldn't provide a lasting numbing aftertaste. Therefore, it was necessary to add two types of dried Sichuan peppercorns to deepen the numbing sensation, creating that feeling of your tongue dancing from the intensity.

With everything ready, Lin Xu set up a wok, filled it with water, and added the dried chilies and dried Sichuan peppercorns, bringing it to a boil over high heat for five minutes. This boiling process removed any harshness from the dried chilies and Sichuan peppercorns, leaving behind only their pure aroma. Moreover, this pre-cooking step made them less likely to burn when simmering the seasoning sauce later.

Once boiled, he removed them from the water, drained them, and then cut the softened dried chilies into segments. Dried chilies shouldn't be cut before boiling, or their spicy flavor would leach into the water. Cutting them after boiling ensures the flavor is retained within the chilies.

With the cutting complete, he began the process.

This is the most critical step in making Spicy Chicken.

He added a large spoonful of chicken oil to the wok, followed by half a spoonful of Seasoning Oil and half a spoonful of rapeseed oil. The combination of these three oils provided not only savoriness and fragrance from the oils themselves but also the aromatic notes of ingredients like Scallion and Ginger, effectively concentrating all the delightful scents.

When the oil reached medium-low heat, he added the boiled dried Sichuan peppercorns and simmered them on low heat.

This step requires patience, to slowly coax the numbing aroma of the Sichuan peppercorns into the oil. That way, the sauce will be numbing but not bitter, just fragrant and delicious.

At first, the oil boiled vigorously due to the moisture content in the Sichuan peppercorns. After simmering for a while and the vigorous bubbling subsided, he added the prepared fresh Sichuan peppercorns to introduce a clean, bright note to the numbing flavor. Once the fresh Sichuan peppercorns had released most of their moisture and turned fragrant, he added the cut chili segments and continued to simmer.

Each time new spices were added, the oil would bubble intensely. This vigorous reaction not only helped to more effectively release the aromas from the ingredients but also allowed any harsh, acrid notes from the Sichuan peppercorns and chilies to evaporate, resulting in smoother, more rounded spicy and numbing flavors.

"Damn, this aroma! Even if you just mixed it with some shredded radish, it would taste amazing, wouldn't it?"

The combination of chicken oil, Seasoning Oil, and rapeseed oil, simmered together with three types of Sichuan peppercorns and two types of chili, created an aroma that reached an entirely new level of mouthwatering intensity.

Chapter 685: Wow, isn't this Spicy Chicken way too delicious? Director Shen's first production meeting!

Wei Qian leaned in to take a look, his enthusiasm for pork giving way for the first time to anticipation for the chicken.

Even just making the Seasoning Oil was so complex. How could the resulting Spicy Chicken taste anything but amazing?

When the chili had simmered until its surface was somewhat crispy, Lin Xu scooped chicken broth from a pot nearby, adding four spoonfuls of the yellow-fat-laced broth to the simmering seasoning.

When the chicken broth was added, the aroma in the pot climbed to a new level.

He brought the sauce to a boil, then added a small spoonful of salt for seasoning.

The chicken broth already contained salt, so not much more was needed. After adding salt, he added some pepper powder to enhance the sauce's flavor.

In commercial approaches, this step would also include Chicken Powder, chicken juice, and Flavoring to enhance umami.

But today, as it was just for themselves, he decided to skip these ingredients.

Lin Xu sprinkled in some white sugar to enhance the flavor.

After simmering for a bit to mix the seasonings uniformly, he added a small spoonful of Sichuan peppercorn oil to further enrich the numbing and oily mouthfeel.

Then, he poured the sauce into a basin to start cooling.

As soon as he poured it out, Zhuang Yizhou and the others gathered around:

"A basin of sauce, half of it oil, no wonder Spicy Chicken isn't cheap."

"That fragrance is truly tantalizing. I can't help but want a bite right now."

"Boss, you'd better put plenty of belt noodles today, even if there's no chicken. Just mixing this sauce with noodles would have me down two big bowls."

The sauce being too hot would affect the texture of the Spicy Chicken, so Lin Xu planned to cool it in the cold storage, as oil cools down too slowly naturally.

However, the sauce shouldn't be completely cooled. It needed to be warm. Otherwise, the chicken fat would solidify, giving it a pasty texture.

He picked up the basin of sauce and said,

"The high price outside doesn't have much to do with the Seasoning Oil, right? Master Ma, you're more experienced. How do restaurants usually make Spicy Chicken?"

In the distance, busy with prep, Ma Zhiqiang replied:

"Chili essence, Sichuan peppercorn essence, chicken flavor additives, flavor enhancers... a whole bunch of stuff. It's like a chemistry experiment."

Lin Xu, turning to the few top chefs who hadn't worked in regular restaurants, said with a smile,

"The endgame of cooking is chemical engineering, also a way for regular restaurants to cut costs."

Once the Seasoning Oil was ready, Lin Xu started preparing the sides for the Spicy Chicken.

This was quite simple: onions, green onions, and cilantro stems.

He sliced the purple onions, cut the green onions into strips, and chopped the cilantro stems into segments.

When lunchtime arrived, Lin Xu took the thoroughly chilled chicken from the cold storage and began to tear it into strips by hand.

With the chilling, the chicken flesh had firmed up again, and the skin became much chewier. He started by tearing the Chicken Thigh, followed by the Chicken Breast, stripping all the meat from the carcass and setting the bones and carcass aside.

Later, they could be added to a stew to enhance its flavor.

He placed the torn chicken in a basin, then added the prepared onions, green onions, and cilantro stems.

He ladled some of the oil from the sauce over it, mixed it well with the chicken to ensure the meat was well coated in oil for a better texture.

Then, with a spoon, he scooped a large spoonful of sauce, straining it through a sieve into the basin.

When scooping sauce, he reached to the bottom to scoop it up to ensure he got the broth—scooping directly from the top would just pick up oil, making it too greasy.

Having mixed the chicken with the sides, he garnished with a few of the dried chilies from the sauce for a better presentation—the Spicy Chicken was ready.

"Lunchtime!"

At Lin Xu's call, all the chefs in the kitchen, who had been tantalized by the aroma for half the day, showed excited expressions on their faces.

At the front of the service counter downstairs, Shu Yun tagged Zeng Xiaoqi and the newly added Geng Lele in the group:

"Lunch is starting. Hurry up, you two. Today, the boss made Spicy Chicken, and if you're late, you might miss out."

Still in bed, playing on her phone and reluctant to get up, Zeng Xiaoqi suddenly sat up:

"Why are we having lunch at this hour? It's only just past ten!"

Shu Yun replied with resignation,

"That's basically how it is in catering; meal times are really irregular."

"I'm coming right now. Just make sure to save some for me!"

Geng Lele arrived quickly. She had been nearby queuing for Shengjian Buns but dropped that plan upon seeing the message, scanned a shared bike, and reached the store's doorstep.

Her fondness for food almost matched her thirst for knowledge.

After Shu Yun sent the message, the staff from upstairs delivered that day's lunch.

A basin of Spicy Chicken, a basin of belt noodles seasoned with the Spicy Chicken's broth, and two side dishes to complement the meal.

"If we run out of noodles, there's plenty more in the kitchen. Just ask for more."

The waitstaff gathered around and started their meal.

Taking a clean bowl, they scooped up almost half a bowl of noodles and topped it off with some chicken.

Taking a bite of chicken, the delicious, numbing, and spicy flavor, along with its firm and chewy texture, immediately whet their appetites. The smooth and springy noodles, once dressed in the Spicy Chicken's sauce, also ascended a notch in flavor.

Even without the chicken, these noodles were incredibly satisfying to eat.

"This is so delicious!"

"The boss's skills are incredible. It's just a pity that as it gets colder, we probably won't have new dishes this year."

"Then we'll just wait for next year; there are plenty of other delicious things anyway."

"Right, just now, I heard the boss asked Chef Zhu to make Lotus Root stew with Pork Ribs in a couple of days. As someone from Hubei, I'm really looking forward to tasting my hometown cuisine here."

"Me too, me too, eating Pork Ribs and drinking soup at the same time, oh my, what a feeling."

"..."

Listening to the chattering of the waitstaff, Shu Yun scooped up a bowl of noodles, topped it with some Spicy Chicken, and headed upstairs while eating. She needed to confirm the filming schedule with the owner's wife.

Chapter 686: Wow, isn't this Spicy Chicken way too delicious? Director Shen's first production meeting!

If it were just for a day or two, I'd bring Dundun along for fun, but any longer wouldn't work. As the store manager, I can't neglect my duties.

When she went upstairs, she saw Director Shen vying with the special scriptwriter Geng Lele over chicken meat.

"These chicken feet are cooked perfectly. Yue, you should have some."

"Not me. Nibbling on chicken feet is such a time-waster. By the time I finish, you'll have eaten all the meat," she replied.

Having been around Geng Lele for a while, everyone had more or less gotten used to her sly little schemes, like not eating the snacks she brought before a meal or drinking the beverages she bought. Additionally, during meals, it was also necessary to promptly reject her seemingly kind offers to dish out food. Because if you weren't careful, you might end up with something difficult to eat, like chicken feet, and would then have to watch as she devoured all the tasty morsels herself.

Shu Yun carried her bowl and sat in a corner of the booth. "Boss," she asked, "how long do you reckon we'll need to shoot for?"

Director Shen swallowed a bite of chicken. "I'm not quite sure myself," she responded, "as our film crew is still in its early stages with much to organize. How about this? After we eat, let's have a meeting to discuss the shooting content and... ah, the meat on the chicken drumsticks is indeed delicious."

As she was speaking, her attention drifted back to the chicken in the bowl.

So the boss hadn't actually come up with any shooting content or creative ideas? It was just an impulsive desire to film something related to Dundun...

No wonder people in the film industry always complain that the director is the most useless person on set. I've certainly seen proof of that today.

Meanwhile, Shen Baobao was still marveling at the deliciousness of the Spicy Chicken.

It was so fragrant, fresh, numbing, and spicy; this chicken was simply scrumptious. It had to be eaten with green onions—that's when the Spicy Chicken truly shone. With the numbing and spicy sauce, the sharpness of the green onions and onions receded. This made the overall taste somewhat sweet, which wonderfully brought out the chicken's freshness. This combination was truly remarkable.

"Onions are called piyazi in the Northwest and are an indispensable ingredient in everyday life. Whether it's for Big Plate Chicken, Spicy Chicken, or even roasting a whole sheep or naan, piyazi is essential," Geng Lele explained while she ate.

Lin Xu asked curiously, "You guys aren't in agriculture, are you? Do you learn this stuff in class?"

"We didn't learn it. There's someone from the Northwest in our class who keeps bragging about how delicious their regional cuisine is, despising Beijing for being a culinary wasteland. My ears are practically calloused from hearing it."

Shen Baobao immediately became interested. "Why didn't you bring him to our restaurant to try our food?" she asked.

"He thinks it's too expensive..."

That was an impasse, then.

Lin Xu picked up a piece of chicken and chewed thoughtfully, while also calculating the braising time for the chicken downstairs. He planned to check on it after the meal. Once it was almost done, he'd turn off the heat and let it soak until the afternoon. This way, the chicken would be thoroughly flavored, and even the breast meat would be juicy and delicious.

As everyone was eating, Zeng Xiaoqi arrived. She wore a baseball cap, large sunglasses on her nose, and a scarf tied around her neck. You'd think a big star had just walked in.

Shu Yun asked curiously, "What's with the getup? Were you being chased by an admirer trying to confess their love?"

Geng Lele chuckled. "That outfit screams 'I didn't wash my hair.' I wore a baseball cap all day the last time I had terrible bedhead. I totally get it."

Zeng Xiaoqi didn't mind. Picking up a clean pair of chopsticks, she put a piece of chicken into her mouth, her eyes full of relief. "Thank goodness I didn't wash and dry my hair before coming over!" she exclaimed. "Otherwise, I would have definitely missed out on this delicious treat."

The chicken was chewy and refreshing, with a spicy, savory fragrance.

Compared to such delicious food, what's the big deal about delaying a hair wash by a day? Life is all about making choices.

After eating a few bites of chicken, she took out her phone and messaged Dou Wenjing in the group chat, urging her to hurry: "This Spicy Chicken is super delicious, better than first love! Not to be missed!"

Dou Wenjing hadn't replied yet when Chen Yan sent a message in the group: "If you're going to eat, just eat! Why do you have to post it in the chat? You're making me so jealous that I just spent a fortune getting the campsite chef to make me some Spicy Chicken. Now I'm just sitting here waiting for it."

TSK, TSK, TSK. To think there was still someone in the group who couldn't get any.

Seeing Chen Yan's message, everyone quickly posted pictures and videos of the Spicy Chicken to the group, and didn't forget to comment on its taste after posting.

On the Hulun grasslands, Chen Yan, who had just changed into a Mongolian robe and was waiting for her Spicy Chicken, pursed her lips. "I'm really silly, truly," she lamented. "I knew they were shameless, but I didn't expect them to be *this* shameless..."

However, thinking about the roast whole sheep they were going to eat around the campfire that night, Boss Chen got excited again. Hmph! Just wait and see how I'll tempt you all tonight! Mr. Gao's personally roasted whole sheep will definitely make every single one of you cry with envy!

When Dou Wenjing arrived at the restaurant, Lin Xu had already finished the Spicy Chicken and was busy in the kitchen.

"Wow, our film crew is finally all here for the first time! I've decided to have a meeting after the meal so we can thoroughly discuss how to film Dundun to be both smart and cute."

Director Shen's words made everyone serious.

Dou Wenjing asked, "Where will we meet? Here? I see a lot of out-of-town customers eagerly heading this way. The place might be full of customers soon."

Given that, holding the meeting in the restaurant was out of the question. Firstly, it would disturb business. Secondly, this was the film crew's first meeting, so it needed to be as formal as possible. After all, they were a professional crew, there to do important work.

"Let's go to the office then. We have a meeting room there where everyone can speak freely. Also, we need to bring Dundun along, since he's the male lead and should be involved."

After agreeing on the plan, everyone went to the Huixuan Building, led by Dou Wenjing.

The office was on holiday and completely empty.

They gathered in the meeting room, and the women sat at one end of the long conference table, starting a discussion about how to film the episode. To make it seem official, Zeng Xiaoqi even set up a camera in one corner of the room. The company's filming equipment was complete and ready to use.

After setting up the equipment and starting the recording mode, the group of brainstormers huddled together to discuss how to display Dundun's intelligence, cuteness, and mischief.

While they were discussing, a chubby little darling jumped in front of the camera. It first waved its fluffy paws at the lens and then stood upright, slowly walking on its hind legs as if imitating a human.

Dundun was having a blast in front of the camera.

But the film crew members hadn't noticed, still absorbed in their brainstorming and worries. "Blue cats generally give off a dopey vibe. How can we show that Dundun isn't like that? Making videos is so hard..."

Chapter 687: In the end, it was the kitty who took on everything! Roast chicken is ready, the fragrance spreads for miles!

"What exactly should we film?"

Half an hour had passed, but the crew's discussion still hadn't gotten anywhere.

It's not that no one had ideas or creativity—on the contrary, there were too many ideas and too much creativity, and that's why everyone was having choice paralysis.

Plus, everyone was worried that Dundun wouldn't cooperate, so they just kept shooting each other's suggestions down.

Head writer Lele gave her mushroom haircut a little shake:

"Why can't we go with my idea for Dundun coding for Qiang? Qiang is coding late at night, Dundun watches from behind shaking its head, then when Qiang gets sleepy and knocks out on the side, Dundun goes tap-tap-tap and finishes coding... It's simple, creative, and really nails the pain point of programmers having to work overtime..."

Shen Jiayue said:

"But Dundun can't type though..."

As she spoke, Dundun was right where the camera could catch it, seriously tapping away on an old discarded keyboard, just like a tiny programmer.

The sound of the keys interrupted Director Shen's speech, and without even turning her head, she said:

"Ugh, Dundun, stop messing around, we're having a meeting here... The keyboard idea is fine, but how's that any different from my play-the-piano suggestion?"

As soon as "play the piano" was mentioned, Dundun straightened up, leaned back, and closed its eyes a bit.

It lifted its two paws, tapping rhythmically on imaginary keys, its round head bobbing gently with its body. That intoxicated expression—totally the vibe of a music master lost in a piano performance.

"Pianos just aren't relatable, it's not like every home has a piano. But a keyboard? Everyone's got one, and keyboard tapping hits right in the feels for office workers..."

The group couldn't agree, and finally decided to just shoot some daily footage of Dundun eating, drinking water, and playing games.

Whether they used these clips later or not was another story, but at least they could keep them for material—just in case they needed to patch up the edit later.

Once that was set, they started discussing locations next.

Exhausted from playing, Dundun lay sprawled on the far end of the conference table, looking completely drained.

Like, I've already put on my best dead-tired performance, and you guys still can't make a decision? I'm begging you, carry me harder!

At the same time, in the Lin Ji's Food social thread—

Out-of-town fans who'd finally made it to Beijing were all posting updates, sharing their excitement at tasting Lin Ji's food:

"Damn! I finally got to eat at Lin Ji's, and the hype is real!"

"Getting up at the crack of dawn and catching the high-speed train was totally worth it! Bro, I'm just gonna hype this food to the moon!"

"Every day I see my Beijing friends posting foodie pics and making me drool, and today it's finally my turn, a country bumpkin! This stewed fish entrails is even better than what they make back home in the Northeast!"

"I'm basically treating Lin Ji as my HQ while I'm in Beijing—having lunch AND dinner here every day."

"Heard Lin Ji's breakfast is also amazing, but sadly it's not open to outsiders, only a lucky few insiders get to try it."

"Ugh, you guys are making me crave it again..."

Besides geeking out about the food, everyone was also making plans to meet up in real life with those online pals they'd been joking around with in the comments before.

For example, the always-active tower crane operator, Liang Mountain, tagged the blind taxi driver in a post:

"Bro, I'm at Lin Ji's! Eating Noodles with Braised Eggplant and Pork Sauce with a platter of braised meats and sweet-and-sour pork. When you getting here? I wanna have a drink with ya."

The reply came fast:

"Just picked up a run to Universal Film City, gonna be a while before I'm back. You go find a place to stay first, I'll hit you up after my shift. The light's about to turn green, later."

During National Day, all of Beijing's tourist spots get totally slammed, and ride-hailing and taxi drivers rake in the cash too.

Liang Mountain's real name is Liang Hanwen, but that name's way too pretentious for the construction site vibe, so he switched it to the much snazzier Liang Mountain.

Liang Hanwen's about twenty-seven or twenty-eight, and his biggest hobby is scrolling on his phone while sitting high up in the tower crane.

One day he randomly came across Lin Ji's Food online, and instantly became a Lin Ji fan.

Now he follows Lin Ji's foodie updates every day, posting his own daily stuff too, and he's befriended regulars under the topic like "Blind Taxi Driver," "Invisible Chicken Wings," "Lost Roasted Whole Sheep," and "Spring Breeze Cannot Blow You."

This trip to Beijing was all about tasting Lin Ji's food and finally meeting those internet friends in real life.

Liang Hanwen shot back a "drive safe" message, and was about to put away his phone when Lu Lu popped up in the comments with a surprised emoji:

"Whoa, you're in Beijing, Good Drought Bro? You still at Lin Ji's? If you are, tell me your table number, I'll get the kitchen to send you some soup."

The online friends who helped pump up Lin Ji's topic heat showed up in person—it totally called for Zhu Yong to whip up some soup.

Liang Hanwen quickly replied:

"Dy-yu (Daiyu) Sis, you're the best! I just ordered soup, but let's eat together tonight. I just took a selfie with Boss Lin, and he said there'll be roast chicken for dinner—it's just finished braising and still soaking in the pot."

Right after replying to Lu Lu, the Beijing buddies started chiming in to welcome him too, and after some back and forth, they decided to simply book a private room upstairs for dinner, eat, and chat together.

As for the bill, it's straight-up AA (split evenly).

We're all just hardworking souls here—everyone knows how tough it is to make a living, and how hard life can be.

No way could they let just one person foot the bill—they had to split it fair and square.

Soon, the local Beijing internet friends all confirmed they'd join in.

Once the headcount was set, they opened a group chat, pooled their money via AA transfers, and then everyone reported what dishes they wanted to eat.

Chapter 688: In the end, it was the kitten who took on everything! The roast chicken is out of the pot, the fragrance wafting for miles! _2

Liang Hanwen tallied up the menu choices, then waved at Xiao Dong, "Do we need to book this private room?"

"Yes, there are still two private rooms available upstairs. How many people are you expecting, and when will you need it?"

"About thirty people, all Lin Ji fans. We've arranged to have dinner together here tonight; we've already set up the group chat... Do you have a private table big enough for us?"

Xiao Dong replied, "Our largest private room can seat thirty-two people. It's a bit of a squeeze, but we can fit thirty-five or thirty-six. It should meet your needs."

Upon hearing there was a suitable private room, Liang Hanwen said, "Then let's book it... Oh, and please note down the dishes we've ordered so we don't have to go over them again tonight. Calculate the total, and I'll pay for it now."

Xiao Dong was a little surprised but quickly noted down the dishes, calculated the total, and proactively offered a discount.

After settling this, she went to the front desk and thoroughly explained the reservation details to Song Tiantian, "I didn't expect the shop's fans to actually want to have a gathering here and even pay upfront. Seeing how straightforward they were, I offered a discount on my own initiative."

"You did the right thing; a discount is indeed warranted." Song Tiantian then went upstairs to report to Lin Xu.

Since so many dedicated fans were coming to eat, had booked the restaurant's largest private room, and paid for their meals in full, it was only right to offer them a few complimentary dishes. However, she couldn't decide exactly what to offer, and with Shu Yun not around, it was best to let the boss make the decision.

Lin Xu, who was at the kitchen door, was somewhat surprised after hearing Song Tiantian's report. He hadn't expected netizens to choose his restaurant for a gathering and immediately book the largest private room.

He took the order slip and said, "I'll think about what extra dishes to add for them. When it's less busy tonight, I'll go to the private room and have a couple of drinks with them. They've come all this way; we can't disappoint them."

Then he lowered his head and started studying their order. This looked like an order for a large group. It had a mix of meat and vegetarian dishes, both hot and cold, and even several dishes of similar types and flavors.

After reviewing it, he instructed a kitchen assistant, "Go buy four lamb racks, and make sure they're fresh."

It was a bit late to roast a whole lamb, and roasting a lamb back would also be challenging. However, grilling lamb racks was definitely doable. Lamb racks don't have a lot of meat, so they're easy to marinate and grill. If they started preparing them now, it wouldn't delay dinner.

Initially, Lin Xu planned to buy two lamb racks, but on second thought, he realized that for over thirty people, it wouldn't even be one rib each, so he added two more.

Tonight, three roasted lamb racks would be sent to the private room, and the remaining one would be a treat for the film crew. After all, this was the first joint effort between the 'Silly Squad' and the 'Slimming Squad,' and they were working hard to promote the restaurant, so they definitely deserved a reward. For them, the best reward was undoubtedly succulent grilled lamb racks.

I wonder if they've come up with a catchy name for the film crew... Lin Xu mused.

The 'Silly Squad' on one side, the 'Slimming Squad' on the other... if you combine them, would it be—the 'Saori Squad'?

In Saint Seiya, a single Saori required the five young heroes to risk their lives to save her. If there were a whole team of Saoris, wouldn't those five just defect immediately?

No, no, that name isn't good.

Let's just call them the 'Fat-Loss Squad.'

People say a name should represent an ideal or an unattainable goal. Well, losing fat is the eternal ache in this group's heart, so it fits the main principle of naming.

Lin Xu let his thoughts wander for a moment before returning to his work in the kitchen.

When the lamb racks arrived, he first used a small knife to score each lamb rack, cutting partway through the meat between the bones but leaving the ends connected to make grilling easier. After preparing the racks, he rinsed them under running water for an hour. Then, he placed them in a marinade made from puréed onions, celery, carrots, cilantro, and other vegetables.

「Huixuan Building.」

After finalizing all aspects of the shoot, Zeng Xiaoqi stood up and turned off the recording camera, "If this video blows up, we should release these behind-the-scenes clips to show everyone the power of brainstorming."

Dou Wenjing exclaimed, "Exactly! We need to show how hard the behind-the-scenes team worked."

Dundun, who had been napping, woke up and hopped off the conference table. Shu Yun quickly scooped the cat into her arms and said, "Since everything's settled, let's go shoot. Let's start by filming Dundun playing with the cat teaser. Then, when it's time for Dundun to eat, we'll steam some fish. That way, we can seamlessly transition to filming the eating scene."

"Okay, okay, let's get going then."

After much discussion, the group decided to go to the West Fourth Ring Villa for shooting. The villa was spacious and filled with toys; in fact, an entire room wasn't enough to hold all of Dundun's toys and supplies.

Old Mr. and Mrs. Shen's habit of buying toys without regard to cost perfectly illustrated what 'grandparental doting' means.

Shen Baobao rubbed Dundun's head, "When we get to the villa, Mommy will personally steam some fish for you, okay?"

The little furball, who had been resting quietly in Shu Yun's arms, immediately struggled upon hearing this.

Completely oblivious to the cat's look of protest in its eyes, a certain stepmother surnamed Shen continued happily, "HAHAHA, look how happy Dundun is! As long as you want to eat, Mommy will cook delicious food for you every day. Aren't you looking forward to it?"

Dundun struggled for a good while, then finally kicked its legs out vigorously.

This kitty... only begs for a swift demise!!!!

Zeng Xiaoqi handed the compact camera, which had just recorded their discussion, to Shen Baobao, "This camera is quite easy to operate. Take it home and see if you can film some more behind-the-scenes footage of Dundun tonight. I'll use the professional camera when we're at your villa later."

Chapter 689: In the end, it was the kitten who took on everything! The roast chicken is out of the pot, fragrant for miles! _3

"Okay, Dundun occasionally plays games at night. I'll shoot a video of it carrying a little blanket in its mouth and picking a cardboard box to sleep in. It's absolutely going to melt your hearts."

Zeng Xiaoqi, in the company's equipment room, took out the equipment they might need: a large tripod, a small tripod, a handheld gimbal, a slider, a fill light, a light stand, and various lenses. She organized them, packed them up, and then the group headed downstairs with the equipment.

Zeng Xiaoqi had originally wanted to try the Steadicam, but realizing that such professional equipment was too heavy for her to handle, she wisely chose the handheld gimbal.

I came to be a photographer, not to lift weights.

The group reached downstairs with the equipment. The larger items were placed in the back seat and trunk of the X1, while the smaller pieces were loaded into the BMW 5 Series. Then, driving the two vehicles, they headed straight to the West Fourth Ring Villa.

Upon arriving at the villa's entrance, Shen Baobao opened the electric garage door, and she and Dou Wenjing drove the cars in, one after the other. They didn't know how long the shoot would take, so it seemed safer to put the cars in the garage. Moreover, with an elevator in the garage, it would be more convenient to move the equipment.

"Wow, this large garage looks really nice," someone exclaimed.

"This is what I'm striving for!" another added.

"Baobao, what about that red sports car you had?" one of them asked Shen Baobao. "The one you were driving when you charmed Lin Xu at the dealership. I even sneaked over and took a few photos back then."

Shu Yun and the others had come to Lin Ji's too late; they hadn't seen Shen Baobao looking so cool and stylish driving a sports car. Seeing a Bentley and a G-Wagon already in the garage, they asked curiously, "You have a sports car too?"

"I didn't drive it much, so I let my dad trade it in," Shen Baobao replied.

Trade it in? they thought.

"You can trade in a sports car?"

"Yes, you can. You just pay some service fees, and they take care of all the paperwork, so you don't have to worry about anything."

Shu Yun, carrying Dundun on one shoulder and slinging the camera bag Zeng Xiaoqi handed her over the other, asked, "What car do you plan to trade it in for?"

"A Continental GT. It's more comfortable to drive than a sports car."

TSK, TSK, TSK. While we're still endlessly debating whether to drive a domestic car or a joint-venture car, the boss lady is already tired of driving sports cars.

Two minutes after getting out of the car, and the boss lady has already intensified my mental strain.

The group took the equipment up in the elevator to the first-floor living room.

In the living room, the grand piano had been moved to a corner. In its original spot stood a huge Cat Castle made of solid wood.

As soon as Dundun arrived, it jumped down from Shu Yun's arms and onto the Cat Castle to sharpen its claws.

"Xiaoqi, do you think this place is okay?" Shen Baobao asked. "If you think it's too open, we can go to the second floor. There's a small living room there. If that doesn't work, we could also go to the basement. Dundun likes playing on the pool table in the basement."

The words "too open" made everyone present pause.

It was rare to hear someone from Beijing complain about their home being too spacious.

As they were talking, Aunt Liu came over. The other housekeepers had gone home for the holidays, leaving her to look after the house. Seeing Shen Baobao, she quickly came over to greet her.

"Aunt Liu, could you bring us some Snacks and tea, please?" Shen Baobao requested.

"Of course, I'll go right away," Aunt Liu replied.

Zeng Xiaoqi, watching Dundun sharpen its claws, hurriedly pulled out her camera, switched to a lens suitable for close-ups, and started filming Dundun.

「Three o'clock in the afternoon.」

Lin Xu arrived at the braised foods department.

The chicken in the pot had been soaking for over three hours and was ready to be removed.

However, before taking it out, he needed to skim off the layer of fat floating on the surface of the braising liquid. This would help the liquid cool faster and also make it easier to see the chicken in the pot.

Even after three hours of cooling, the temperature inside the pot was still above eighty degrees Celsius.

Lin Xu carefully skimmed the oil from the pot into a stainless steel basin using a ladle, scooping up more than half a basinful.

This fat would be saved and added to the braising liquid the next time they made this braised chicken, to continue acting as insulation and maintaining a constant temperature.

Once the fat was skimmed off, the braised chicken in the liquid was fully visible.

To make it easier to remove the chicken, Xu Xinhua and the others had placed a long, rectangular iron basin next to the jacketed pot. A stainless steel rack was set over the basin, ready for cooling the chicken.

Lin Xu, holding a large slotted spoon and a small metal ladle, carefully scooped a braised chicken onto the slotted spoon.

Then, he turned and carefully placed it on the cooling rack.

After more than two hours of braising and over three hours of soaking, the chicken was so tender it seemed boneless. It trembled as it was lifted from the pot, as if any sudden movement might cause it to fall apart.

As the braised chicken was removed from the pot, a rich aroma filled the air, invigorating everyone present.

The fragrance of the braising spices, the chicken itself, and the various ingredients, along with the Pork Bone Broth, all wafted out. These scents mingled together, making it almost irresistible to tear off a Chicken Thigh and taste it.

After several more chickens were lifted out, Lin Xu, so tempted by the aroma that he could barely focus on working, said to Xu Xinhua, "Tear one apart and let's taste it."

Xu Xinhua brought over a plastic bag and carefully placed one of the braised chickens inside. "I've heard," he said, "that with truly delicious braised chicken, you don't even need to tear it. Just put it in a bag and shake it gently, and the meat will completely fall apart."

After saying this, he held the bag by its handles and gave it a gentle shake up and down. Without much effort, the braised chicken inside completely fell apart, even the leg joints separating.

Clearly, this braised chicken was cooked to perfection.

After being shaken apart, the aroma became even richer.

Xu Xinhua placed the plastic bag containing the deboned chicken into a large bowl, folded the top edges of the bag neatly around the rim of the bowl, and then handed it to Lin Xu. "Boss, you try it first," he said. "This braised chicken is incredibly fragrant. Even the master I had my apprenticeship with couldn't make it this aromatic."

Lin Xu didn't hesitate. He picked up a piece of Chicken Thigh and popped it into his mouth. The meat was utterly tender, and the flavor of the braising liquid had thoroughly permeated it.

The saltiness wasn't overpowering; it was savory, tender, and delicious.

He tasted a piece of Chicken Breast next. It was juicy and extremely flavorful.

In the past, when he'd eaten braised chicken, the breast meat always seemed to lack flavor. But this Chicken Breast had fully absorbed the marinade, and its texture was no longer dry and stringy but moist and enriched with a hint of oiliness.

To make braised dishes truly delicious, they really do need to soak. Lin Xu thought.

"You guys go ahead and eat. I'll continue taking out the rest of the chicken," Lin Xu said. "Let's open a window. It's getting a bit stuffy in the prep room with all this chicken coming out of the pot."

Hearing this, a kitchen assistant hurriedly opened a window in the braised foods department.

This window faced the main street. As soon as it was opened, the fragrance of the braised chicken wafted out.

Next door, at the supermarket entrance, Uncle Yu was sitting on a folding stool, video-calling his daughter and grandchild who were on a trip to Shaolin Temple. He was chatting away when a strong aroma made his eyes glaze over slightly.

"Oh my, where is that braised chicken smell coming from? It's heavenly!"

Not far down the alley, Old Sun, who was gathering his fishing gear to head out again, also sniffed the air, his eyes wide with surprise.

"It really does smell incredible! Where is it coming from? Could it be..."

He exchanged a glance with Uncle Yu, and then both of them turned their gaze towards Lin Ji's Food.

Chapter 690: Half the roast chicken sold before it even cooled! Fan favorite dish: Roasted lamb chops!

"I've got something going on over here; let's chat later."

Uncle Yu hurriedly ended the video call. Together with Old Sun, a fisherman who often came back empty-handed, he followed the aroma towards the entrance of Lin Ji's Food.

Upon reaching the entrance, they didn't go in. Instead, drawn by the delicious scent of roast chicken, they continued forward until they reached the corner of Lin Ji's Food's outer wall. There, they discovered the fragrance wafting out from an open window.

Through this open window, the two of them saw many roast chickens arranged inside, all emitting a rich aroma.

The skin on the roast chickens was intact, boasting an appetizing date-red color.

Seeing this color, both men couldn't help but swallow. That was the color of roast chicken from the olden days: fried until red before being simmered in a savory braising liquid.

This was unlike modern methods, where the pursuit of a golden hue led to quickly frying the chicken before braising. Some braised meat shops didn't even fry the chicken, merely blanching the skin in hot water before braising, resulting in an unappetizing color.

The roast chicken was still quite hot, and the kitchen assistants helping out would occasionally get scalded.

In the Braised Products Section's preparation area, Lin Xu was busy. When he suddenly looked up and saw two people standing at the window, he was startled.

"Uncle Yu? Old Sun? What brings you two here...?"

Uncle Yu swallowed again.

"Young Boss Lin, this roast chicken... is it for sale?"

Of course, they're for sale, Lin Xu thought. With this many, if I didn't sell them, they'd go moldy before we could eat them all.

Lin Xu nodded. "Yes, it's for sale. They've just come out of the pot and aren't fully ready yet."

As he spoke, he noticed some roast chickens that Xu Xinhua had just separated and set aside to cool. He picked up a bowl with some pieces and extended it out the window.

"You two are here just in time. Please, help me taste test. I haven't sold roast chicken in Beijing before, so I'm not sure if the seasoning is too light or too strong."

Old Sun, who usually enjoyed fishing, didn't frequent Lin Ji's Food often, so he looked a bit sheepish.

But Uncle Yu was different; he had even been eating breakfast at the restaurant frequently of late. Seeing Lin Xu extend the bowl, he immediately pinched a piece of chicken with skin and popped it into his mouth.

The chicken meat was fragrant and incredibly tender, while the skin was soft with a delightful chewiness.

He tasted it, and before he could even speak, he pinched another piece and stuffed it into his mouth. "Delicious, delicious! This is too good! Can I have two? Old Sun, why aren't you eating? Are you waiting for me to get you chopsticks?"

Hearing Old Yu's praise, Old Sun couldn't resist pinching a piece and putting it in his mouth as well.

After tasting it, he said, "I'll take four. The kids are coming home for dinner tonight. I was thinking of taking the bus to the suburbs to catch a couple of fish, but now I don't need to make that trip."

Uncle Yu remarked, "When was the last time you actually caught anything? You always end up buying a couple from me to take home..."

Old Sun's fishing skills were average. Since he usually fished in small suburban streams, his success was typically three parts fate, seven parts skill, and the remaining ninety parts pure luck.

Occasionally, he would have a huge haul, like the small river fish Lin Xu had once bought from Uncle Yu, which were the fruits of Old Sun's half-day labor.

More often, however, he'd return from the suburbs with peaches or a few cobs of corn. Failing that, he would at least stop by Uncle Yu's to buy a couple of Carp to take home.

He truly lived up to the fisherman's vow: "Never go Air Force!"

Lin Xu asked, "Should I pack them now?"

"Pack them now! For people like us with bad teeth, this kind of incredibly tender roast chicken is the most delicious."

Lin Xu took out several take-out containers used by the Braised Products Department and carefully placed the roast chickens inside. Each container was the perfect size for one roast chicken and had vent holes on the top and sides to allow as much steam as possible to escape, preventing excess moisture from making the chicken skin soggy.

First, he packed the two Uncle Yu wanted, and then Old Sun's four.

Once they were packed, the two elderly men couldn't be bothered to go inside the restaurant to pay.

"Young Boss Lin, just show us the payment QR code on your phone, and we'll scan it directly. Or better yet, put a QR code sticker here. That way, the old neighbors won't have to go inside to buy."

Lin Xu's eyes lit up at the suggestion. Not a bad idea at all.

After collecting payment from the two elderly men via his phone, Lin Xu immediately had someone from the front desk put up the restaurant's payment QR code outside. They also set up a payment announcement device. This way, the Braised Products Department could operate as a separate point of sale.

"Boss, perhaps you should still assign a cashier here," Xu Xinhua suggested. "We can handle making the braised foods, but when it comes to the accounts, we get a bit muddled."

Xu Xinhua didn't want to handle the accounts. Braised meat, after all, weighed differently raw versus cooked, making it easy for discrepancies to arise in the books.

Therefore, to avoid any arguments, the best solution was not to touch the money or manage the accounts.

Lin Xu didn't insist. He had a server stationed there to package orders and collect payments from customers.

But this was only a temporary measure. Later, he would ask Dou Wenjing to find someone to modify this window, turning it into an outward-facing service counter. They would also install a simple stainless-steel worktop inside to make it easier for the cashier. To avoid disrupting daytime operations, the renovation would have to be done at night. It wasn't a big job and could probably be finished in one night at most.

「Meanwhile, Uncle Yu returned to his store.」

As Lin Xu had instructed, he placed one roast chicken in the refrigerator's cold storage compartment. The other, he opened and set right next to the cash register at his convenience store's entrance.

Roast chicken was a dish that could be enjoyed hot or cold. Eaten hot, it was tender and richly aromatic. Eaten cold, it became savory and chewy, making it an even better accompaniment for alcohol.

Uncle Yu had it all planned out. The chicken in the fridge was for him to take home and enjoy with drinks in the evening.

As for the one by the cash register, he planned to carve off a few pieces to enjoy while it was still hot.