

Culinary 771

Chapter 771: President Chen's Future... Mother-in-law! Fancy Ways to Eat Grouper! _3

Everyone walked into the restaurant together. Chen Yan clattered up the stairs, ready to find trouble with Shen Baobao.

Meanwhile, Geng Lishan leisurely made his way to the reception desk, played with Dundun for a while, and then took his wine upstairs.

In the kitchen.

The Ham had already been cooked.

The Star Grouper had also been slaughtered.

Xie Baomin was holding a kitchen knife, ready to dress the Star Grouper.

First, he cut from behind the gills, simultaneously removing the fish's pectoral fins. After the sides were cut, he chopped off the head.

"When cutting off the fish head, you must keep the pectoral fins, as this part will be used for decoration later. It can't be damaged; otherwise, it will affect the dish's presentation," he said.

Lin Xu nodded, taking note.

Once the fish head was cut off, the rest of the fish body was much easier to handle.

He sliced along the fish's backbone, filleting the meat from both sides, also removing the rib bones, and finally chopping off the Fish Tail, trimming it into a "V" shape to enhance the presentation.

"The fish's backbone and ribs are of no use. We might as well make a fish bone soup with them later; it'll taste great," he said.

After that, Xie Baomin sliced the two pieces of Fish into slightly thicker slices, put them all in a small basin, added a small handful of ginger slices, a pinch of white sugar, a touch of Light Soy Sauce, mixed everything well, and then added some peanut oil for fragrance.

After the Fish was marinated, he took the fish head, made a cut from the gills, and sliced open the pectoral fins, one on the left and one on the right, each side bearing a fin, making them look like wings.

After cutting, he casually broke off the fish teeth and placed it on a long serving dish.

The fish head was placed at the very front, with the two pectoral fins laid next to the head.

The Fish Tail was then placed at the other side of the dish.

Once arranged, it was placed into the steaming cabinet to cook.

"Fish heads take longer to cook, so they need to be steamed for three minutes ahead of the Fish to ensure even doneness. Otherwise, the head could be undercooked, potentially resulting in stomach problems," he explained.

After putting it into the steaming cabinet, Xie Baomin began preparing the other ingredients.

He sliced the Ham into thin pieces, then diagonally sliced the mushrooms into pieces of roughly the same size as the Ham. Finally, he diagonally cut the peeled luffa into thick slices, trimming the sides to create perfect squares.

This would make it easier to arrange the fish slices and other ingredients on top.

Once everything was cut, the fish head was also steamed perfectly.

Xie Baomin took the plate out, first arranging the luffa slices neatly in the dish. Then, taking the marinated fish slices in his hand, he layered a slice of Ham on top, followed by a mushroom slice.

He then placed another piece of Fish on top and continued this process, carefully arranging them on top of the luffa slices in the dish.

The fish slices and ingredients could be neatly arranged in two rows in the dish. It was then placed into the steaming cabinet and cooked on high heat for seven minutes.

While waiting, Xie Baomin blanched some choy sum and also cut some extremely fine strips of Scallion and Ginger, as well as Red pepper strips for color contrast.

There's a little trick to cutting fine Red pepper strips: first, slice the pepper into pieces, then slice these pieces in half lengthwise to thin them out. When you cut them again, you'll have hair-thin Red pepper strips.

Once these preparations were completed, the fish in the steamer was also nearly done.

When he took it out, a rich, fresh aroma filled the air.

"Wow, it smells so fresh!" Lin Xu exclaimed, inhaling deeply. He appreciated the fresh scent. No wonder Star Grouper is always so costly; there's indeed a reason for its price, he thought.

Xie Baomin said with a smile, "This isn't enough. There's still a step to enhance the aroma."

Having said that, he arranged the blanched choy sum on both sides of the Fish.

After placing them, the visual appeal of the dish immediately improved significantly.

Next, he arranged the sliced Scallion and Ginger on top. He then heated some peanut oil and poured it over them, instantly releasing the fragrance of the Scallion and Ginger, as well as the Red pepper strips.

Finally, he drizzled a bit of Steamed Fish Sauce over it.

This fancy Qilin Grouper was now ready.

"Senior brother, will the fish taste better cooked this way?" Lin Xu asked.

Xie Baomin said, "Grouper is already very tender and flavorful by itself. Even without doing all this, the taste wouldn't be much different. As for why it's presented this way, it's purely for the sake of a higher price."

This was the core technique of all high-end restaurants now—plating.

Exquisite plating doesn't necessarily make the dish tastier, but it definitely commands a higher price.

I originally planned to put this dish on the restaurant's menu, Lin Xu thought. But after hearing this, maybe it's better to stick to the method for Steamed Sea Bass to prepare Grouper instead. It's a simple method, and customers won't feel short-changed—the best of both worlds.

After preparing the Fish, Xie Baomin said, "Bring it out for everyone to try. It's just in time for dinner. I just had lunch, so I won't take a bite now. I'll have a taste tonight when we drink."

Lin Xu was speechless. So he even had a meal before 'borrowing' these two fish, he thought. Isn't he afraid they'll all team up and beat him?

Out in the dining area, a pair of cousins were bickering over ginger candies.

Upon seeing Lin Xu walk over with a plate in hand, Manager Chen stood up to take a look, then said to Shen Baobao, "Look, isn't this Grouper? And here you were telling me it's a common dish."

Shen Baobao crammed the remaining ginger candies into her mouth and mumbled, "We eat it often at home, so how is it not a common meal? Wow, this fish tastes so fresh! Xu Bao, bring me a bowl of rice! I need to do some justice to this fish."

Lin Xu smiled helplessly. "It'll be out in a moment. Besides this fish, today we also have dry-fried chicken cubes. You can eat first. I need to go in and prepare the ingredients and dishes for tonight."

Tonight's banquet for Liu Zhengyu was lavish, featuring Drunken Crab, braised horse mackerel, pot-steamed pigeon, and other labor-intensive dishes.

Many dishes required advance preparation, so he needed to stay by the stove to prevent any accidents.

「Meanwhile, in a small city along the Southeast Coast.」

Dressed in casual clothes, Ren Jie sat in a small restaurant with Sui Fusheng, enjoying the locally famous Oyster Pancake.

"Captain, it's been a week. Why has the target suddenly vanished? Couldn't they have fled again?"

Just as Sui Fusheng was about to speak, his phone rang. After answering, he said to Ren Jie, "News from the undercover agent with the snakehead. A fishing boat is leaving from the Fishing Port Pier at eleven tonight. It might be smuggling people out. We must be ready..."

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"Phew... fish prepared this way is so delicious."

At the booth seat by the kitchen doorway, Shen Jiayue held her bowl of rice. Following Lin Xu's instructions, she picked up a piece of mushroom, ham, and fish all at once and brought it to her mouth.

The fish was tender, the ham savory, and the mushrooms richly aromatic. The flavors and textures of the three ingredients blended perfectly, enhanced by the subtle saltiness of the Steamed Fish Sauce and the fragrance of peanut oil.

It was simply perfect!

The only regret was that it was a bit too hot straight from the steamer, so she had to blow on it a couple of times before eating.

With the delicious fish, she quickly ate a couple of mouthfuls of rice. Utterly satisfying.

"This has to be the work of the head chef from the Fishing Platform's State Banquet. The culinary skill is truly excellent. Thankfully, I didn't go home for dinner today, or I would have missed out on such a tasty delicacy."

Chen Yan's face was full of relief. She took a bite of the delicious, fragrant chicken, then a piece of spicy and appetizing dry-fried chicken, and finally a spoonful of the Jade Soup, which was said to be both beautifying and slimming.

Blissful! In cold weather, this is exactly how one should eat.

"Now that you're moving, what are you planning to do with the apartment complex out back? Are you going to sell it to recoup capital or rent it out for income?"

While enjoying the delicious meal, Chen Yan suddenly remembered the apartment they had transferred the ownership of a few days ago and asked curiously.

If they intended to sell it, she could certainly spread the word. Never mind that the residential complex behind looked a little run-down; the apartments there were still in high demand because it was in the Haidian Secondary School district. Haidian Secondary School is one of the top five schools in Beijing. Countless parents would do anything to send their children there.

Shen Baobao took a large gulp of her Jade Soup and then said, "Lin Xu said it was Master's apartment, so we can't sell it. We don't plan on renting it out either. If it got ruined, it would just make us upset looking at it."

"So what will you do? Just leave it empty and neglected?"

"Not exactly. Yuanyuan is coming to Beijing soon; she can live there. Also, Director Zeng seems not too satisfied with the TV station's dormitories. If she's willing, she can move over here too and keep Yuanyuan company."

The two-bedroom apartment, though it might get a bit warm on the top floor, was great for drying things. Especially on sunny days, you could take all the quilts and bedding to the rooftop to dry. For someone who loved airing out their bedding, it was incredibly tempting.

"Being so close to the shop, you can come for a meal anytime. Never mind Zeng Xiaoxiong; I'd want to move in myself."

Chen Yan had heard about Chen Yuanyuan before. Originally, she had wanted to commiserate with her cousin-in-law's cousin over their shared single status.

But now...

Chen Yan subconsciously tugged at her trouser leg.

HAHA, I'm about to say goodbye to being single! Although it's not like with Director Yan and Professor Cui, where nothing has been openly acknowledged, I'm not that pretentious. I would never drag things out for twenty years. When Cousin Chen Yuanyuan comes over, I can also offer my blessings as someone who's been through it. I'm actually quite looking forward to it.

"When is your brother-in-law's cousin coming? I'll go to the station to pick her up then."

Shen Baobao looked at Yan Bao with surprise. "You? You don't even know her. Why would she get into your car if you went to pick her up?"

"Just share her WeChat with both of us; that'll work. We both have the surname Chen, and we're both your respective cousins. It feels like fate! I can't wait to chat with her."

"Tch, you're just looking to show off your boyfriend, right? Let me tell you, Yuanyuan isn't as pretentious as you. She's very straightforward and might find someone soon after she arrives in Beijing. Then we'll see what you've got to brag about."

Chen Yan was at a loss for words.

To become the first cousin to find a partner, it seems I need to hurry up. The next time that young police officer comes to Beijing on a business trip, I'll have a good chat with him. I'll confess everything: I'm not a chef, just an ordinary young woman with an annual income of five million yuan, three properties to my name, and a face I'd generously rate 98 out of 100.

「Before long, Shen Guofu came upstairs carrying two bottles of Wuliangye.」

Seeing his daughter and niece finishing their meal, he asked curiously, "Where's Lin Xu?"

"He's busy in the kitchen," Shen Baobao replied. "He said you can't leave the stove unattended."

"Make sure you two don't finish off the fish. Save some for him," Shen Guofu said.

The two cousins exchanged glances. After Shen Guofu went to chat with Geng Lishan by the window, Shen Baobao muttered, "Sometimes I really wonder if I was switched at birth with Lin Xu. My parents are super good to him..."

"Are you silly?" Chen Yan replied. "If Uncle and Auntie are good to your brother-in-law, then he'll be good to you. If they looked down on him, do you think he'd be nice to you?"

「In the kitchen, Lin Xu, who was standing guard by the stove, was also busy.」

He took the small glass jars used for serving snacks in the shop, filled them with the cooled ginger candy, and sealed them. Once filled and sealed, a jar of this winter essential, a stomach-warming snack, was ready.

Lin Xu placed a seal sticker next to each lid, then arranged the jars on a pushcart and wheeled them outside.

"Do you two have anything to do later?"

"No, what's up, Lin Xu?" Shen Baobao asked. "Need us to do something?"

"Yeah, brother-in-law," Chen Yan added. "If there's anything, just say it. Don't be shy."

Lin Xu said, "Use a delivery app to send this ginger candy to our relatives. Let everyone have a taste and help promote it a bit. Also, keep about twenty jars for Brother Qiang and other regulars of the shop."

It was rush hour, and most roads in Beijing were jammed. If he tried to drive and deliver them house by house, it would take until midnight. Comparatively, using a delivery service made more sense.

The reason for this large-scale distribution was Lin Xu's plan to make ginger candy a key product in the future.

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So now we need to start warming up with a promotional push.

He even made arrangements with Dou Wenjing to shoot a video tomorrow.

Tomorrow, I'll make another big pot, film the cooking process, and after editing, update it to my personal feed. The popularity of the candied ginger slices will skyrocket immediately.

With the hype comes natural demand, and we won't have to worry about sales in the shop.

"Brother-in-law, what if people start making it themselves and don't buy from our shop?"

Lin Xu said with a smile, "That won't happen. Most people, even if they can make it, are too lazy to do so. They'll still buy the ready-made candied ginger slices. Besides, many people haven't even touched a wok before, so even if they want to make it, they don't have the ability to."

Before long, Zhen Wensheng and Liao Jinming arrived, and Tan Yajun also showed up at the door. The designated drinking companions had all arrived.

After exchanging pleasantries, everyone headed to the private room upstairs. Just as they were about to sit down for tea, Liu Zhengyu walked in with two leaders from the tourism bureau. The dishes began to arrive.

Once everyone was seated, Xie Baomin also took the seat at the door in place of his junior. Today's banquet was important, and since the room needed someone to crack jokes and liven up the atmosphere, Xie Baomin, being the senior, stepped up without hesitation.

With the cold dishes served and Tan Yajun having filled everyone's glasses with wine, a round of polite conversation concluded, and everyone took a sip from their glasses.

Liu Zhengyu said with a smile, "After being out for a while, I've missed Xiao Xu's cooking. I've been thinking about the newly introduced roast chicken in Rong City, and now I can finally taste it."

At the beginning of such an occasion, it's customary not to talk business. Everyone was casually chatting while drinking. After a glass or two, the atmosphere warmed up slightly, and the initial restraint of just entering the private room vanished. Only then did they start to steer the conversation toward serious matters.

When Liu Zhengyu heard that Longqi Mountain was planning to build a Horse Farm, he was somewhat surprised. But recalling the valley spanning thousands of acres inside the Starry Sky Base, he thought that a Horse Farm would be quite fitting there.

"We need to pick a good location and also take precautions against things like flash floods... How much is the budget for the Horse Farm?" he asked, voicing his primary concern.

"No less than five hundred million. The initial investment of fifty million has already been transferred to the account there, and an additional thirty million from Huasheng Group in Shanghai will arrive soon."

Yan Lin had been very pleased by Shen Guofu's earlier initiative in contacting Cui Qingyuan. Since she was also somewhat interested in owning a Horse Farm, she decided to invest thirty million as a trial. If the infrastructure of the Horse Farm looked promising after inspection, she would consider adding more investment.

Hearing about such a large investment piqued the interest of the leaders from the bureau. They indicated that they would send a letter to the local government to ensure cooperation with the construction of the Horse Farm. In addition, the bureau would actively coordinate with the Equestrian Association to grant the Horse Farm the title of a training base. As for other policy supports, they would tilt as much as possible towards the Longqi Mountain Scenic Area.

While everyone was merrily eating and drinking, downstairs in the lobby, Yue Liyue and Panda were accompanying Li Qiang for a drink.

"If your boss really valued you, he wouldn't have parachuted a manager in from above. Instead, he should have promoted you. The fact that he didn't promote you says it all."

Panda, now a boss himself, was very aware of the ins and outs of the situation. As long as wages aren't increased, everything the boss says is moot. Furthermore, don't listen to all the motivational speeches and inspirational talks they give—that's just brainwashing. Sometimes you might get gaslighted by your bosses without realizing it, turning into the company's hardworking and low-complaining workhorse.

Under their persuasion, Li Qiang finally made up his mind to leave his current job.

"When I go to work tomorrow, I'll contact the headhunter who emailed me and some HR managers from a few companies. Whoever offers the best package, I'll switch to working for them."

"That's the way to do it," Panda chimed in. "Go wherever the money is; don't feel embarrassed about it. And don't burn bridges to become enemies. Who knows, your current boss might even offer a high price to get you back later."

The three of them clinked their glasses together, then emptied them in one go.

After discussing the job change, Li Qiang started complaining about the new manager nitpicking again.

Panda advised, "If you are planning to switch jobs, just let these things go. Watch out for them holding back your contract and messing up your plan to leave. I've seen several classmates get screwed over like this."

Yue Liyue originally intended to say the same thing, but suddenly remembering a similar question he saw on social media, looked at Li Qiang with a smile and asked, "What does this department manager of yours look like?"

What does she look like?

Li Qiang didn't understand why Yue Liyue was asking this question. He recalled Qi Panpan's appearance, finding her quite attractive, although she always wore a cold expression, as if she had entered menopause prematurely.

"She's not bad-looking. Why are you asking?"

Yue Liyue picked up a slice of Ginger Lotus Root and stuffed it into his mouth. "If there's a woman who's always on your case and you find it really annoying—yet you can't avoid her—then you might as well confess your feelings to her. Under normal circumstances, once you confess, the other person is likely to think you're a toad lusting after a swan's flesh and will keep their distance from you."

This suggestion was a lightbulb moment for Li Qiang.

As long as it would keep Qi Panpan off his back before he switched jobs, why not confess? One confession could save countless troubles. I'll do it! I'll handle this when I go to the store tomorrow. So, you like to hassle me and nitpick, do you? Well, then I'll advance by retreating!

Just thinking about having some peace before switching jobs made Li Qiang unexpectedly happy.

Panda, however, thought Yue Liyue's suggestion was rather reckless. "What if she says yes right away? What will Qiang do then?"

Li Qiang was taken aback, and then he too felt a surge of doubt.

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"Right, if she says yes, wouldn't I have basically shot myself in the foot?"

Yue Liyue watched the two of them, speechless. "If she agrees, you'd be off the market instantly. What's there to hesitate about? Didn't Brother Qiang say she looks good? You'd basically get a girlfriend for free. Just don't forget to treat me to a meal later."

Panda suddenly realized, "That's right! If she agrees, Brother Qiang, you'll be out of the singles club right away! And she's your female boss, tsk tsk. A cold and composed boss at work, but a gentle little wife at home. How great would that be, Brother Qiang?"

Li Qiang chuckled. "It's not even on the horizon. You two, stop teasing me... Oh right, Panda, didn't Host Wu visit your house the other day? Were your parents pleased?"

"Pleased? They were more than pleased! We all made dumplings together. My mom and Xinxin got along like actual mother and daughter. She even pulled out my childhood photos for Xinxin to see."

Speaking of his girlfriend, a proud expression appeared on Panda's face.

Yue Liyue shot Brother Qiang a helpless glance. Why did he have to bring up this topic, just to let Panda show off like this?

Now, it was just great. With every mention of Xinxin, all the food on the table seemed to turn lemon-flavored. Even the savory roasted chicken seemed to have turned into lemon chicken.

In the kitchen, Lin Xu lightly fried the bones of two leopard coral groupers before placing them into a pressure cooker.

He planned to stew a small pot of soup, then use it with tofu to make a Milk Soup with tofu dish. This way, Shen Baobao could have something warm to eat and wouldn't get hungry again in the middle of the night.

But when he went to get the tofu, he noticed some leftover Chinese yam from when he'd made Chinese yam with wood ear mushrooms. He grabbed them, deciding to use them as well.

When cooking for family, you use whatever you have on hand.

The goal is to minimize waste as much as possible.

He sliced the Chinese yam into diamond-shaped pieces. After the fish broth was ready, he strained out all the fish bones and bits of fish meat from the pot and discarded them.

Next, he added the sliced Chinese yam, brought it to a rolling boil over high heat, and began to cook the soup.

Soon, the savory aroma of the fish broth was enhanced by the fragrance of Chinese yam.

Lin Xu added salt, pepper, and a pinch of sugar for seasoning. He stirred it well, poured it out, and sprinkled minced scallions on top. The soup was ready.

He carried the soup outside, just in time to see Shen Baobao and Chen Yan coming upstairs.

"Xubao, all the ginger candy has been sent out. Those who live nearby have already started posting pictures to show off," Shen Baobao said.

"My mom originally said she didn't want any," Chen Yan said, "but as soon as she heard I'd topped up my account here with one million, she asked for thirty jars, and another twenty for my grandma."

Chen Yan was speechless.

Other mothers wouldn't dream of taking a penny from their daughters, but her own mom? She seized every chance to get something for free, even using Grandma's name to get in on it!

What a dear mother she was!

Lin Xu put the soup down for them to drink, then picked up his phone to check.

Sure enough, in the premium VIP group, people were posting pictures. For instance, Dou Wenjing, who was still busy at the office, had specially posted a picture of the ginger candy in the group and on her Moments, adding some informative details. For example, how ginger candy warms the uterus and stomach, and is beneficial for both women and men.

Just as she finished posting, Zeng Xiaoqi also uploaded a photo. This beautiful TV host seemed to be doing yoga. She was lying on a yoga mat with the jar of ginger candy placed in front of her, stretching out her hand to take the picture. In the blurred background, the curves outlined by her yoga pants were faintly visible.

The moment it was posted, Chen Yan muttered, "Director Zeng really knows how to accentuate her strengths and hide her weaknesses. You can't even tell she has a small chest in this photo."

Then, she bluntly commented in the group, "Such a flirt!"

Zeng Xiaoqi retorted, not to be outdone, "The one who rolls up their pant legs to show off shoes is the real flirt!"

To prevent the two of them from saying anything more outrageous, Lin Xu tagged everyone in the group and asked:

"For those who received the ginger candy, please help spread the word. If you think the taste needs any improvement, feel free to suggest it."

Soon, replies from those who had received the ginger candy started pouring in:

"The taste is great! I've already eaten several pieces."

"The spiciness is moderate, and the sweetness is just right. Very nice!"

"When will it be available in the store? I can't wait to buy more to give to my friends."

"I can't eat a single bite of ginger when it's in food, but I can devour a whole jar of this ginger candy in one go!"

"As someone with perpetually cold hands and feet, I can say that eating more ginger really helps a lot."

"..."

This stream of positive feedback further solidified Lin Xu's determination to officially launch the ginger candy.

A little after eight o'clock, the banquet upstairs officially concluded.

At the entrance, gift boxes prepared for each guest were placed. Each contained a vacuum-packed roasted chicken, a jar of ginger candy, a small box of Shakima, and a box of Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake.

The banquet was a great success, with both hosts and guests thoroughly enjoying themselves. The leaders also showed great interest in the Horse Farm project, mentioning they would visit the site when construction began and also take the opportunity to inspect the Longqi Mountain Scenic Area.

After seeing everyone off, the store's evening rush hour had also passed.

Lin Xu delegated the remaining tasks at the store and then headed home from work with Shen Baobao and Dundun.

To protect Dundun from the cold outside, Lin Xu had carefully tucked the little fellow inside his coat.

The daytime temperature had risen slightly recently, but the nights were noticeably colder.

"Tomorrow, I need to dig out my thermal leggings; my ankles are freezing," Shen Baobao said. "I wonder if Yan Bao will get sick from rolling up her pant legs every day."

Lin Xu held Dundun, who was hidden inside his coat, with his left hand, and put his right arm around Shen Baobao. "Still cold?"

"Not anymore. Thank you, Xubao."

Back home, Dundun, unusually, didn't bounce around playing. Instead, he climbed onto the cat tree, lay down quietly, and fell fast asleep.

[Elsewhere.]

Ren Jie, flashlight in one hand and gun in the other, was slowly searching an abandoned container yard near the docks.

After receiving a tip that afternoon, his team, in coordination with the local SWAT, had quickly located the fishing boat scheduled to go out to sea that evening.

After some "friendly" persuasion, the boat owner confessed to taking money to smuggle people into international waters. He also revealed that their contact person frequented the abandoned container yard.

The abandoned container yard was vast. Spreading dozens of officers across it was like casting a clay ox into the sea—they seemed to disappear into the expanse.

Normally, it wouldn't have been so difficult. A drone hovering overhead could have easily found their target.

However, starting that evening, a typhoon had begun to approach. The winds at sea were too strong, making drone flights impossible. The yard itself was being battered by flying sand and debris, posing a significant challenge to the search operation.

Reaching a corner, Ren Jie was just about to contact Sui Fusheng to ask about the search progress when he suddenly heard a noise from a nearby container.

He hurried over and saw that the door of this container was ajar, swaying in the wind. Inside, it was pitch black; nothing was visible.

Ren Jie turned off his flashlight and cautiously approached. He listened intently, but there was no sound from within.

He casually picked up a stone and tossed it inside, but there was still no response.

Just as he reached the doorway, preparing to turn on his flashlight and investigate inside, the container door, caught by the wind, slammed violently against his back.

At that very moment, a BANG echoed from inside the container.

As the impact sent Ren Jie stumbling forward into the container, a bullet whizzed past his forehead and struck the metal door he had just passed through.

After hitting the ground, Ren Jie, without pausing to check if his head was injured, raised his pistol and instinctively pulled the trigger toward the depths of the container.

"BANG!"

Chapter 775: Ren Jie, You've Made a Great Contribution! The Fish is Just Cooked, A Gathering of the Literary Circle!

The shipping container was an enclosed space, and the sound of gunfire was amplified many times as it reverberated off the walls. After Ren Jie fired, the gunshot made his ears ring.

But he still heard a muffled groan from the depths of the container.

Could that have hit him?

He didn't dare be careless and promptly rolled to one side of the container to avoid return fire.

However, there was no counterattack, only a subdued scream.

He pulled out a flashlight and, in the instant he switched it on, tossed it deep into the container.

As the flashlight spun into the depths of the container, Ren Jie got a clear view of the situation inside.

There was only one man inside, writhing on the floor and wailing, a dark red patch blooming on his right shoulder—the spot Ren Jie had just hit.

Three meters away from the man, a handgun lay silently on the ground.

He must have reflexively tossed it aside after being shot.

It's a pity my ears are still ringing so badly from that shot; otherwise, I definitely would have heard the handgun hit the floor.

The flashlight landed, illuminating the man's body.

Ren Jie, holding his gun with both hands, slowly advanced.

He didn't move quickly, uncertain if the man had truly lost the ability to fight back.

When he reached the flashlight, he picked it up. Gripping it backward in his left hand, he steadied his gun on his left wrist with his right hand, keeping the sights aimed at the man on the ground as he slowly leaned in.

Reaching the fallen handgun, he kicked it aside. Just as he was about to tap the small earpiece clipped to his ear to inform his captain, he realized it must have fallen off somewhere.

Shining the flashlight on the man's face, he confirmed it was the mastermind of the Beijing kidnapping case.

He then looked at the wound on the man's right shoulder. Looks like the scapula.

Characters in movies might keep moving after being shot in the scapula, but in reality, such a wound would send shockwaves through the entire skeleton and abruptly contort the internal organs, rendering a person practically immobile.

Even so, Ren Jie couldn't afford to be careless.

Ren Jie cautiously approached. He first kicked the man's left hand to check for weapons, then grabbed one of the man's legs and forcefully flipped him over.

He checked under the man for explosives and also to prevent the scoundrel from spitting at him and impairing his vision.

"Ah—"

The movement pressed on his wounded right shoulder, and the kidnapper let out a pained scream.

Ren Jie unfastened the handcuffs from his waist. Just as he was about to cuff the man, the kidnapper, still lying on the ground, suddenly spoke,

"Let... let me go... I... I'll give you... five million..."

"Heh... that little money can't even buy an apartment in Beijing. You're valuing your life too cheaply, aren't you?"

Ren Jie quipped, gripping the man's left hand and fastening one handcuff tightly. He then reached for the man's right hand, preparing to cuff both hands behind his back.

As Ren Jie moved the man's right arm, it pulled on his wounded shoulder.

The kidnapper let out a wail,

"AH!!!!!!! Shoot, shoot him dead!"

Shoot?

Without a second thought, Ren Jie dove to the ground, simultaneously switching off the flashlight.

Just then, a gunshot rang out from the container entrance:

"BANG!"

Ren Jie felt his left arm go numb, followed by a throbbing sensation that pulsed up to his brain.

Only then did the pain and true numbness set in, accompanied by the smell of blood.

Damn it, my left forearm's hit! Ren Jie cursed inwardly. Using the kidnapper's body as a shield, he fired three shots at the silhouette that had suddenly appeared at the entrance.

A scream, and the figure at the entrance collapsed.

Seems like another hit...

While the pain in his left arm was still just a dull ache, Ren Jie crawled, shifted the kidnapper's body, bent the man's left leg, and cuffed his left hand to his right ankle.

Once done, the gunshot wound in his left arm began to throb intensely.

He didn't dare turn on the flashlight. Instead, he fumbled to check the wound and found it was a clean through-and-through. That's a relief.

He lifted his jacket and started tearing strips from his undershirt, intending to quickly bandage the wound and stop the bleeding.

Just as he was doing this, several flashlight beams pierced the darkness from the container entrance, accompanied by the shouts of Sui Fusheng and the local criminal police officers,

"That one's hit in the left arm and knee!"

"If he's not one of ours, cuff him."

"Captain Sui, should we call an ambulance?"

"No need. He won't die right away. Let him stew in his pain for a while. Take his gun and search him thoroughly."

Hearing Sui Fusheng's voice, Ren Jie quickly shouted out,

"Captain, I'm in here! I've got the kidnapper!"

Hearing this, Sui Fusheng quickly jogged over, flashlight in hand. Ren Jie also managed to switch his own flashlight back on.

Seeing the kidnapper on the ground, howling continuously as his bonds pressed into his wound, Sui Fusheng couldn't help but grin,

"Ren Jie, my boy, you've performed a great service this time!"

Ren Jie raised his left arm with a pained smile.

"I've been shot..."

Sui Fusheng shone his flashlight on the arm, then spun around and yelled towards the entrance,

"Call an ambulance! My guy's been hit! Get an ambulance, quick!"

After yelling, he shone the flashlight on Ren Jie's arm again.

"It's just a clean shot through the arm. Why's your face so pale?"

"I'm scared of pain. Always have been, since I was a kid."

"Then why become a police officer?"

"Just 'cause I like it, I guess..."

「The next morning.」

Lin Xu woke up and came outside, only to find that Dundun was not scratching his claws and playing with the little mouse as usual. Instead, the cat was tucked away sound asleep in a cardboard box padded with a blanket.

What's the matter today?

He gently rubbed Dundun's big, round head. Only then did the little fellow groggily open his eyes.

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"Why are you so listless today?"

Dundun yawned, its small mouth gaping wide. It then stood up from the cardboard box, first arching its body forward in a stretch, then bending backward, sticking its little butt out to complete it. After these activities, it jumped onto the cat tree to start sharpening its claws.

"Move around a bit; I'm going to wash up. We'll go to the store together later. It's time for egg yolk today; I'll prepare two for you."

Upon hearing this, Dundun immediately rubbed its head against Lin Xu. Clearly, it was very satisfied with this arrangement.

After Lin Xu washed up, the little fellow had returned to its usual liveliness.

Lin Xu returned to the bedroom, kissed Shen Baobao's tender cheek, then put on a fleece-lined knit jacket. He zipped it halfway, picked up Dundun, wrapped the cat in the jacket, and then pulled the zipper up all the way. Holding Dundun like that, he left the house and strolled towards the store.

Along the way, Dundun poked its round head out from the zipper opening, like a joey being carried by its kangaroo mother, finding the experience quite novel.

「Arriving at the store.」

Dundun crawled into its little den at the service counter to continue its nap, while Lin Xu washed his hands at the entrance of the braised goods section and began preparing the roast chickens.

Thanks to the neighborhood's support during National Day, the Trial Task of selling 2,000 chickens in seven days was successfully completed. Now, Lin Ji Roast Chicken had made a name for itself, and the 300 to 400 chickens prepared each morning would be sold out before eight in the evening.

He placed the deep-fried chickens into the pot, added the braising liquid, and poured in the braising oil. The day's batch of roast chickens officially began to simmer.

After finishing these tasks, he went upstairs where breakfast was already prepared.

Today's morning meal at the store included vegetable and lean meat congee, served with fried vegetable turnovers, fried sugar cakes, and fried dough cakes, accompanied by crisp small pickles and tossed blanched cabbage hearts.

The so-called tossed blanched cabbage hearts involved peeling the tender hearts of cabbage and slicing them into strips. These were placed in a bowl with salt, sugar, vinegar, and other seasonings, with a handful of dried chili segments scattered on top. Hot oil was poured over it, then the bowl was covered to let the spicy aroma of the chilis permeate the cabbage. Afterward, it was mixed thoroughly, completing the tart, spicy, and refreshing appetizer.

Lin Xu looked around and asked Ma Zhiqiang, who was on the morning shift:

"Do you have boiled eggs?"

"Yes, how many do you want me to get for you?"

"Two... no, bring three."

He took three plain boiled eggs outside. He then got himself a large bowl of vegetable and lean meat congee, two fried vegetable turnovers, one sugar cake, one fried dough cake, and filled a small dish with pickles and the tossed cabbage hearts. Lin Xu sat at a booth and began eating his breakfast.

He peeled the eggs, ate the whites, and placed the yolks on a plate to cool down a bit to feed Dundun later. He had initially planned to prepare two for Dundun, but the little guy seemed a bit weary this morning, so he prepared an extra one. Dundun could eat as much as it wanted.

After finishing the egg whites, Lin Xu tasted the vegetable and lean meat congee. The vegetables must have been added after turning off the heat, maintaining their fresh, crisp texture. The lean meat is also perfectly cooked—very tender and tasty.

A couple of spoonfuls of congee warmed him considerably, dispelling much of the morning chill. He felt warmth spread through his body.

Lin Xu took a bite of a freshly fried vegetable turnover. Its crispy shell encased a savory filling of eggs, chives, dried shrimp, and mung bean noodles.

"Tasty, Master Ma, your fried vegetable turnovers are really good."

While eating, Lin Xu saw Ma Zhiqiang come out of the kitchen and couldn't help but give him a thumbs-up.

Ma Zhiqiang smiled and said, "This is pretty simple, nothing difficult. If you like it, we can make more tomorrow."

"Eating the same thing every day can get boring. You guys can just decide what to make for breakfast."

Lin Xu ate a few bites of the fried vegetable turnover, scooping up hot congee from his bowl to eat with it. Surprisingly, the two dishes pair really well, he thought.

After finishing the vegetable turnovers, he tried the fried dough cake. Crisp on the outside and fluffy on the inside, it paired well with the pickles and tossed cabbage hearts.

After finishing breakfast, he felt warm and cozy. The egg yolks on the plate had also cooled down sufficiently.

Lin Xu transferred the egg yolks into Dundun's feeding dish, crushed them with a pet food spoon, and then carried the dish downstairs.

Before he even reached the service counter, Dundun dashed out of its little den, eyes eagerly fixed on the dish in Lin Xu's hands, clearly famished.

He took out the little food table and placed it on the service counter. As soon as he set down the dish, the little fellow excitedly pounced, burying its head in the dish and began to feast, licking with its tongue. It hummed contentedly while eating, its tail wagging slightly. Clearly, it loved the egg yolks.

Lin Xu rubbed the little guy's large head, "Sweetie, eat slowly. I'm going to wake up your mom."

He went upstairs, grabbed a few freshly fried sugar cakes, and ate one as he walked towards the store entrance. There, he bumped into Old Mr. Zhou, Granny Liang, and the long-unseen Professor Xu and Auntie Liang.

"Little Lin, we've come for breakfast again."

"Are we interrupting?"

"Old Zhou here kept saying how tasty your breakfasts are, so we came especially to try them."

Lin Xu smiled and said, "Not at all! Please, go on up and help yourselves. Today we have vegetable and lean meat congee, fried vegetable turnovers, fried dough cakes, and sugar cakes. Just ask the kitchen for whatever you'd like. Don't be shy."

"All right!"

Upon entering the store and seeing Dundun eating, the group decided against going upstairs for their meal. Instead, they walked straight to the service counter and gathered around, watching the little fellow eat.

Lin Xu bit into a fried sugar cake. The rich, brown, sweet, sticky syrup inside immediately gushed out.

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He blew on it and nibbled away as he walked towards the residential area behind him.

Unlocking the door, Lin Xu popped the last bite of sugar cake into his mouth, chewing it as he made his way to the bedroom. Before he reached the bed, Shen Baobao sat up, her eyes bleary, and said, "It smells so good, what are you eating?"

"Fried sugar cake... Hurry up and get out of bed, I brought two for you. From now on, I'll eat one every five minutes, and if you get up late, you'll miss out."

"Stinky Xu, you're so mean!"

Shen Baobao pouted and began fumbling with her pajamas, her eyes still half-closed.

Lin Xu wiped the grease from his hands, found her clothes for her, then headed to the living room with the sugar cakes.

He planned to sit down for a while, but suddenly he caught a faint scent of freshness coming from the kitchen. He went in and discovered that the Fish seemed to be well-fermented.

These straw-wrapped Fish were placed on a tray.

By now, a thin layer of liquid that smelled both fresh and fishy had seeped out onto the tray, which was likely the result of the fish meat fermenting.

The production of this liquid made Lin Xu think of Fish Sauce.

It seemed that Fish Sauce, often used in Cantonese cuisine, was made from small miscellaneous fish mixed with coarse sea salt and sealed in a jar for fermentation.

If he followed the same method as for the Fish, wouldn't he also be able to make Fish Sauce?

Lin Xu thought it was worth a try later on.

"Xu, what are you doing in the kitchen?"

Shen Baobao, with a bite of sugar cake from the coffee table, curiously approached the kitchen door.

"Why does this Fish have a strange smell? Has it been fermented properly?"

Lin Xu nodded and said, "It should be ready. I'll unwrap one later to try... Have you brushed your teeth and washed your face before eating?"

"Right away, right away. I just wanted to taste the saltiness..."

She quickly devoured a sugar cake and then, prodded by Lin Xu, went into the bathroom to brush her teeth and wash up.

After she finished, Lin Xu carried the Fish out of the house while Shen Baobao followed with her sugar cake, eating and wondering about the taste of the Fish.

"In ancient times, people usually treated Fish soup as a hangover cure, probably using its freshness and the acidity from fermentation to sober up, right?"

Lin Xu couldn't understand why ancient people praised Fish so much.

He planned to make the Silver Shrimp Soup according to the tutorial to taste it for himself and see what the fuss was all about.

Back at the shop, Dundun had finished breakfast, and the kitchen helper in the marinated goods section had cleared away its small plate and dining table.

Upstairs, Uncle Zhou and the others were having breakfast, including Uncle Yu from the next-door supermarket and Old Sun, the angler.

"Wow, Old Sun came today too, huh."

Old Sun was savoring his vegetable and lean meat porridge, slurping a spoonful before he said, "My wife complained I was always fishing and neglecting the family. She got angry and went to our daughter's house to take care of our grandson. I was too lazy to cook, so after hearing from Old Yu about the breakfast here, I followed him over... This breakfast is really good. Later I'll pack some vegetable pockets and fried dough to go."

Curious, Uncle Yu asked, "What? You're going fishing again?"

"Yes, I've recently been fixated on catching a wild carp in the little creek. It's already snapped two of my lines, but I'm determined to catch it."

Uncle Yu took a bite of his fried dough twist and said, "I can't tell if you're going fishing or feeding the fish. That ten-pound carp probably grew half its weight from the feed you gave it..."

Old Sun didn't get annoyed and cheerfully accepted his old neighbor's teasing.

Uncle Zhou glanced at the tray Lin Xu was carrying and curiously asked, "What's this, Young Lin? It smells a bit fresh and a bit fishy."

Lin Xu replied with a smile, "This is a lost method of curing fish, called Fish."

The elders present all looked puzzled.

"Fish?"

"What's that?"

"Does it taste good?"

"How do you eat it?"

Lin Xu said, "Usually, it's used in soup, like the Silver Shrimp Soup."

When this soup's name was mentioned, a hint of surprise flashed across Aunt Xue's face. "Silver Shrimp Soup? Isn't that the name of the dish from Chapter Eleven of **The Plum in the Golden Vase**, where Pan Jinlian provokes Ximen Qing into beating Sun Xue'e? When I read that part, I always wondered what Silver Shrimp Soup actually was—the soup that made Sun Xue'e complain so much she ended up getting beaten... Now, thanks to Young Lin, I can finally find out!"

Her words also piqued Professor Xu's interest. "Lu You mentioned the word 'Fish' in his 'Partridge Sky - Lazy to Learn Melon Planting at the Green Gate': 'Songs fade into the misty distance, the oars creak softly. The wine is like dew and the Fish like flowers. When asked where to return, I smile and point to the boat: here is home.' So, 'Fish' refers to cured fish."

The couple had a deep appreciation for literature and art and could casually quote poetry.

Aunt Xue said, "Lu You also wrote in his 'Drunk Song' about his yearning for delicious food with the line: 'Yellow sparrows are sought for their heads over a thousand miles, while white geese made into Fish are peerless in the world.' Young Lin, Fish is not just about curing fish, right?"

Lin Xu hadn't expected the couple to be showing off their literary knowledge so early in the morning and nodded as he said, "Initially, 'Fish' referred to cured fish, but later, it seems various ingredients could be turned into Fish—not only meats but vegetables too. Everything could be Fish."

Perhaps even today's salted vegetables and kimchi were descendants of Fish.

Seeing Professor Xu and his wife so interested in this delicacy, he smiled and said, "How about this: for lunch today, I'll prepare one of the Fish as Silver Shrimp Soup for us to try. If it's delicious, it'll become a secret menu item in the shop. If not, we'll have a laugh at the ancients' expense."

It was bound to be delicious; after all, it was Perfect Level.

Food rated at this level by the system could make even salted vegetables irresistible.

Hearing this, Professor Xu said with a laugh, "Then I must invite the head professor of Chinese from Beijing University over. He and his wife have done quite some research in this area, so it would be the perfect occasion to try something new. If we could get Mr. Lishan to come as well, that'd be even better. Both are researchers of ancient culture, and perhaps they'd gain new inspiration and insights..."

Chapter 778: Qiang Ge's daring death charge confession! The complicated process of making Silver Shrimp Soup, so fresh!

「In the kitchen.」

Lin Xu carefully untied the rice straws bound around the fish.

When it was sealed before, the fresh flavor was subtle and not very distinct.

Now that it was unsealed, the flavor became much richer. Not only was there the freshness of the fish, but also the sour taste of the fermented ingredients and the aroma of the liquor.

Together with a faint fishy smell, it invigorated one's spirit with just a sniff.

Could this be the reason why the ancients used it for hangover soups?

Removing the rice straw, Lin Xu placed the fish into a basin to start cleaning off the sticky glutinous rice from its surface.

Although the temperature hadn't been high lately, the glutinous rice still fermented. Compared to freshly steamed rice, it developed a taste of liquor and acidity, along with higher stickiness and moisture.

Carefully scraping off the glutinous rice, the fish's body was revealed.

The freshness and the fishy smell became stronger, while the sourness and liquor smell were somewhat reduced, but not entirely gone.

The entire fish seemed not much different from one that was freshly killed. However, the meat appeared to have shrunk a bit and lost its springiness. The body was also soft, not as stiff as a freshly killed carp.

Lin Xu checked it over and felt it was likely due to dehydration in the fish flesh.

When it was marinated, a layer of salt was applied to the fish's surface; salt has strong dehydrating properties. That must be how the moisture was drawn out of the fish meat.

After scraping the glutinous rice clean off the fish's surface, Lin Xu proceeded to remove the glutinous rice stuffed into the fish's belly.

Ancient people would either eat Fish raw, or grill it slightly before eating.

Lin Xu didn't dare to eat it raw because he couldn't get over that mental barrier, but grilling was something he could try.

He cut off the latter half of the fish along with the tail, scored the skin with a few decorative cuts, sprayed some high-proof liquor over it, and then put it in the oven to roast.

"Wow, this fish meat is quite white."

Zhu Yong had just arrived at work. He circled around the remaining fish body Lin Xu had cut and observed the flesh at the cut. It was not the brownish color typical of marinated meat but was instead white.

Lin Xu looked and then understood why it was called 'silver threads'.

The color was so white that, when cut into thin filaments, it really did resemble silver strands.

For ancient people who used a myriad of ornate terms to praise just about anything, calling fish filaments 'silver threads' was quite literal and not an exaggeration.

Before long, the fish tail in the oven was roasted to a golden-brown surface.

Opening the oven, a pleasantly fresh fragrance wafted out.

This scent was unique, somewhat similar to the previously roasted fish slices, but the fragrance was thicker and mixed with some liquor and other smells.

All in all, it was quite appealing.

Lin Xu tore off a strip of fish meat and tasted a salty aroma first, followed by the delicious flavor of the fish.

Different from freshly grilled fish, the texture of fish that had been marinated and then roasted was slightly tougher.

Combined with the salty taste of the fish, Lin Xu thought this was quite suitable for accompanying drinks.

Just roast it and it's ready to eat, fitting for drinks and meals, with its savory taste and how a small piece can suffice for a meal... This was probably why down-and-out literati of the Ming Dynasty liked to eat Fish.

Cheap, durable, high cost-performance... there were no reasons not to choose this delicacy.

Since today's gathering at noon was related to Fish, they might as well grill some Fish chunks over charcoal during lunch and let the professors and scholars taste the everyday delicacy of Ming Dynasty literati.

After eating two pieces, Lin Xu found the saltiness became increasingly strong, so he didn't eat any more.

However, Zhu Yong and Wei Qian, who came to work, were enjoying it immensely.

The two of them tore the meat on the fish tail into strips, rolled them with fried dough cakes and ate them that way. The salty fish paired with the soft fried dough cakes was actually a good match.

Going outside, several old men had already finished eating and left, each paying for their breakfast by scanning the payment code on the table before they left.

Shen Baobao was holding a bowl and gulped down a big mouthful of spinach and lean meat porridge. Then, she picked up her phone to send a voice message to Chen Yan:

"Yan Bao, Yan Bao, there's a gathering of literati at the restaurant today at noon, and it seems they want to taste the Silver Shrimp Soup made by Xu Bao. You should come over and get acquainted, so that when the company needs cultured people to make an appearance, you won't find yourself without anyone to turn to."

Shen Baobao was a minor shareholder in Joyful Media. Although she never got involved in business matters, it was a good idea to attend more of these networking events.

And Chen Yan always boasted about having the highest level of education in the family.

So today, they would find an occasion filled with highly educated people for her to come back to her senses.

Chen Yan seemed to be still half asleep and took a while to send back a groggy voice message:

"Alright, I was planning to freeload a meal at noon anyway."

Listening to Chen Yan's lazy tone, Shen Baobao bit into a piece of pickled radish and chewed it twice. CRUNCH. CRUNCH. She then pressed the voice message button and replied,

"You're still not awake? Then go back to sleep, I'm going to continue with my breakfast."

Breakfast?

Chen Yan, who was reluctant to move from her bed, was immediately attracted by this word.

She sat up and started getting dressed, planning to go to the restaurant for breakfast.

On another note, Dou Wenjing, leading the company's cameraman, drove to the storefront, ready to start filming the making of ginger candy, continuing to build hype for this snack.

「At nine in the morning.」

Inside an office building in Xi'erqi.

Li Qiang, carrying a jar of ginger candy, clocked in and walked into the company.

He had tried a few pieces of ginger candy given by the lady boss last night. He thought it would be suitable to eat at the office, so he brought it with him when he left for work this morning.

Arriving at the technical department's office area, he found Qi Panpan already there, standing at the entrance to their workspace, staring at him coldly.

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It was obvious she was gearing up to find fault again.

Seeing her icy expression, Li Qiang had an idea.

He decided to try the method Yue Liyue had taught him. Yes, confess to his cold-faced female boss before she could start talking, to avoid listening to her nagging.

With that thought, he quickened his pace. Just as Qi Panpan was about to speak, he said, "Manager Qi, there's something I've been wanting to say for a long time, and I want to tell you today."

Qi Panpan, who had been about to scold Li Qiang, was completely baffled. What's going on? This guy is usually as timid as a quail, shrinking back whenever he speaks. Why does he seem like a completely different person today?

She asked coldly, "What is it? Go ahead and say it."

As he walked up to Qi Panpan, Li Qiang felt a little timid. It was mainly because this female supervisor had such an imposing aura that he found it hard to speak.

But the arrow was already nocked, and besides, he was thoroughly fed up with the recent nagging and criticism. He bolstered his courage by holding the jar of ginger candy with both hands and said, "Manager Qi, I like you. I've been smitten with you since the very first day you joined our company."

His colleagues, who were secretly munching on steamed buns inside, thought: "!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" What in the world is happening? Has Brother Qiang developed feelings for Manager Qi from all her tormenting?

The colleagues in the adjacent office area thought: "!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" Wow, are the second-in-command and the head of the tech department playing such a high-stakes game?

As for Qi Panpan, the target of this declaration, she was utterly dumbfounded by Li Qiang's move. She'd never imagined this scoundrel would actually say something like that.

She glanced around and saw that all her colleagues were watching the spectacle with great interest. She couldn't help but lift her high heel and stomp on Li Qiang's foot. "Are you insane?!!!"

With that, she snatched the jar from Li Qiang's hand and retreated to her office.

Li Qiang was bewildered. Yell all you want, stomp all you want, but why snatch my snacks? Those weren't for you!

He wanted to ask for it back, but by then his tech department colleagues were already jeering and catcalling. Li Qiang's own roommates were so excited they were standing on their chairs, clapping and whistling. For programmers used to a dull routine, this scene was simply too stimulating.

Li Qiang waved at everyone. "Alright, back to work, back to work! Stop gawking."

Back at his desk, it felt great not to have someone constantly watching him, looking for faults. But what was that about snatching his snacks at the end?

He pressed the computer's power button, then immediately picked up his phone, opened the "Lin Ji's Food High-End VIP Customer Group," and quickly typed a message: "Guys, I just confessed."

The previously silent chat group instantly roared to life, much like a computer booting up.

Geng Lele: "Saw the message and BAM, I clicked right in! So fast!"

Yue Liyue: "Brother Qiang, you're so brave! What's the damage report?"

Zeng Xiaoqi: "Confessing to her right at the start of the workday? She didn't slap you, did she?"

Dou Wenjing: "Quick, tell us, tell us! I'm so curious about how your colleagues reacted."

Shen Baobao: "Got my little stool ready! Go, Brother Qiang, go!"

...

Everyone chimed in, one after another. Even Uncle Shen, who usually just lurked, popped up to say, "Good job, Little Qiang!" It was unclear whether he was praising Li Qiang's thick skin or marveling at how he dared to actually do it after being so easily egged on.

Li Qiang glanced around before typing another message in the group: "After I confessed, she called me a psycho and then stomped on my foot with her high heel."

Seeing this message, everyone sighed collectively. What a foolish kid, completely duped by Yue Liyue! How could a confession possibly succeed under these circumstances?

Still, Li Qiang's goal yesterday was just to get the manager to stop bothering him. After today, she probably wouldn't pick on him anymore, so in a way, his wish had been granted.

Just as everyone was consoling him, telling him not to lose heart, Li Qiang sent another message: "After stomping on me, she snatched the ginger candy I was holding... What do you guys think that means?"

Everyone: "??????" Good heavens, could there actually be such a plot twist?

This development immediately caught the attention of their resident armchair strategist, Chen Yan. She quickly typed in the group: "Looks like things are getting more and more interesting."

Zeng Xiaoqi sent a cheering emoji: "Rejected, but not completely rejected. If I had to describe this with an idiom, it would be—"

She was hoping someone would follow up with an idiom like "a sudden glimpse of hope in a desperate situation" or something similar, to show how in sync they all were.

Instead, Geng Lele chimed in with: "A thief never leaves empty-handed!"

Everyone: "... " Seriously, can you stop misusing idioms?!

Seeing that his group friends couldn't offer any constructive advice, Li Qiang decided to focus on researching job-hopping opportunities for now.

He sent emails from his personal account to several companies and headhunters. He also messaged peers on WeChat who had, before the holidays, subtly inquired if he was considering a job change.

After this flurry of activity, replies began to pour in, with notifications chiming on his email and WeChat.

Li Qiang refocused his attention and began to carefully review these replies. He planned to filter through them to find a company that suited him, and once everything was settled, he would submit his resignation.

「In the shop.」

After finishing filming the ginger candy recipe, it was about time to prepare lunch.

Just yesterday, they had hosted a table of people from the tourism industry, and now today, they were expecting a table of cultured individuals. The clientele at Lin Ji's Food is becoming more and more high-end, Lin Xu mused.

Lin Xu sighed inwardly, then took two salted fish wrapped in straw to the workbench. He unwrapped them, completely removed the cooked glutinous rice from their surface, and then rinsed them with clean water.

This would reduce the fish's saltiness and also improve its appearance.

Next, he patted the surface dry, filleted the fish, and removed the rib bones, resulting in four pieces of fish.

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He sliced two of the pieces of fish into sections about half a centimeter thick. He then placed them in a Peking duck oven and slowly roasted them over low heat, using fruitwood charcoal to gently draw out the fish's savory flavor.

As for the other two pieces, he officially began making Silver Shrimp Soup.

To make this soup, only the fish meat was needed; the fish skin and the red meat attached to the bones and skin had to be trimmed off.

After marinating, the fish meat firmed up, making it slightly more difficult to remove the skin.

However, with a thin slicing knife and some skill, the fish skin was manageable.

After removing the excess red meat, he was left with two pieces of snow-white fish meat.

Although the fish meat still contained moisture, it was much denser than salted fish. This density allowed it to be cut into thinner slices and finer filaments.

The time to challenge my Knife Skills has arrived!

Whether it was the Basic Knife Skills used for slicing or various decorative knife techniques, Lin Xu had already reached the Superior Level. In fact, his decorative knife technique had even surpassed expectations, reaching the Perfect Level during the last competition.

Such Knife Skills filled Lin Xu with confidence.

He took a kitchen knife and first trimmed the fish meat into a standard rectangular prism.

Although it's a bit of a waste of ingredients, slicing the fish meat into filaments of consistent length and thinness will make the resulting soup more beautiful.

Soon, he had fashioned the two pieces of fish meat into flat rectangular prisms, fifteen centimeters long, ten centimeters wide, and one centimeter thick.

Once prepared, he picked up the kitchen knife and began shredding them into filaments.

He first sliced all the fish meat into ten-centimeter-long pieces.

The fish slices were very thin, almost transparent. After adjusting their angle, he then cut them into fine Fish Filaments.

This was similar to making Steamed Rice Flour Silver Strips, but those were radish strips, while these were Fish Filaments.

After shredding, he placed the Fish Filaments in a basin and began the next step.

He added stock to the pot. Then, he put in all the trimmed ingredients like fish heads, bones, spines, and skins. He boiled them over high heat to infuse the salty and savory flavors of the Fish into the broth.

After simmering for twenty minutes, he strained out the solids.

By then, the stock in the pot was infused with the salty and savory taste of the Fish, and even had a slight fermented aroma.

At this point, the broth needed no further seasoning; the saltiness from ingredients like the fish skin was sufficient.

He poured out half of the broth. He then brought the remaining half to a boil again, added the shredded Fish Filaments, and briefly blanched them before straining them out.

According to the system's instructions, the broth used to blanch the Fish Filaments was meant to be discarded.

This is why, in ancient times, only wealthy households prepared soup this way, while common families would simply roast and eat the Fish. Making soup like this was truly wasteful. Even from a modern perspective, discarding the broth after just blanching some Fish Filaments in it seemed wasteful. So, I'll add some other ingredients later. Perhaps I'll make salted fish tofu soup or salted fish vegetable soup to neutralize some of the broth's saltiness. That would surely be better than discarding it, right?

He poured the broth from the pot into an empty basin. Then, he returned the half of the previously reserved Fish stock to the pot, added the blanched Fish Filaments, and brought it to a simmer over low heat.

Then, he stirred in Water Starch to thicken the soup.

Finally, he seasoned it with a pinch of White Pepper powder, and thus, the so-called Silver Shrimp Soup was ready.

The soup was rich and white, with each hair-thin white Fish Filament clearly visible.

Its color and appearance unconsciously reminded one of a classic Huaiyang dish...

"Hey, Boss, the more I look at this soup, the more it resembles Wensi Tofu. Do you think Wensi Tofu could have evolved from this Silver Shrimp Soup?"

Zhuang Yizhou was curious, feeling that this soup's preparation and presentation were very similar to Wensi Tofu.

This question actually stumped Lin Xu.

In the Ming Dynasty, Wensi Tofu had already graced the tables of high society, becoming a favorite among the literati and scholars of the Jiangsu and Zhejiang regions.

But at that time, Silver Shrimp Soup couldn't be served at formal banquets. It was merely a breakfast item or one of the Snacks for wealthy households, not considered high-end cuisine.

Lin Xu didn't know if the two dishes shared the same origin, but their preparation methods had undoubtedly influenced each other.

After adding the White Pepper powder, he turned off the heat and removed the pot from the stove.

Lin Xu poured the finished Silver Shrimp Soup into a white porcelain basin. Under the force of gravity, the soup formed a pattern radiating from the center to the edges, resembling a chrysanthemum.

Carrying the soup upstairs, the server at the private room door knocked and then pushed it open. Lin Xu walked straight in.

"Everyone, the Silver Shrimp Soup is here."

Upon hearing this, Professor Xu and a middle-aged man about a decade younger quickly stood up. They were eager to see what this soup, praised by countless literary figures, looked like.

When they saw the daisy-like formation in the basin, the middle-aged man couldn't help but exclaim,

"No wonder Lu You, in his poems about Fish, compared it to flowers! The presentation is indeed beautiful. This calls for a grand toast!"

Professor Xu then stood up and said to Lin Xu,

"Lin Xu, come, let me introduce you. This is Ren Chongmo, the current chief professor of Chinese at Beijing University. Next to him is his wife, Professor Tian Qinglan from the Chinese Literature Research Institute. And this is..."

The scholars gathered today, both men and women, were all authoritative figures in the fields of Chinese studies or literature.

Lin Xu was too busy to attend to them, so he had left his sister-in-law Chen Yan in charge of entertaining the guests.

Chen Yan held a Master's degree in Chinese. Her college Chinese professor had been a student of several of these academics, so she found herself conversing animatedly with the senior professors.

With each introduction by Professor Xu, Lin Xu raised his cup of Rice Wine in a toast.

Fortunately, they were drinking heated Huadiao wine today, which, though fragrant, was not very potent.

After Lin Xu had toasted everyone, Chen Yan stood up to serve the soup.

"This is the famous Silver Shrimp Soup often mentioned in classical literature! I never thought I'd get to taste it in my lifetime."

"Thank you, Boss Lin! I haven't even tasted the soup, but I can already smell its exquisite aroma."

"As expected of a soup praised by countless scholars and poets, its presentation is so elegant!"

"Who would have imagined that these hair-thin strands are actually Fish Filaments?"

"Boss Lin, your craftsmanship is superb!"

Amidst the ongoing praise, Lin Xu said with a smile,

"If you all enjoy it, please come again often."

Although these professors were modestly dressed, each was an authority in their field. A casual remark from one of them could bring significant business to Lin Ji.

As Chen Yan served each guest, it eventually came to Tian Qinglan's turn. Chen Yan said cheerily,

"Professor Tian, I don't know why, but I felt an instant connection with you."

Tian Qinglan smiled broadly.

"I feel the same way about you. Yesterday, when you let my car go first, I thought to myself, Whose daughter is this? She's so beautiful and kind-hearted, truly delightful!"

These words made Director Chen (Chen Yan) beam with joy.

Lin Xu didn't disturb them for long. After exchanging a few more pleasantries, he excused himself.

When he reached the kitchen, he was about to add some stock to the previously reserved Fish soup to cook noodles for himself. However, he found Wei Qian and the other chefs gathered around that very basin, tasting the soup spoonful by spoonful.

"Lin Xu, you're just in time! How did you make this soup? It's unbelievably delicious!"

"Exactly! It's so savory and fragrant, simply indescribable."

"I never imagined that wrapping fish with Glutinous Rice and straw could produce such a delectable flavor!"

"No, I need another taste! I've learned so many seafood dishes from my uncle, I thought no fish soup could move me anymore. But this soup... it's making my mouth water uncontrollably!"

Their exclamations continued.

Lin Xu looked at the head chefs with utter astonishment.

I understand all that, but don't you find it incredibly salty?

If even this leftover broth, which was supposed to be discarded, is so popular, just how incredibly delicious must the soup I took upstairs be?