

## Culinary 781

Chapter 781: Truly a Delicacy Praised by Ancient Poets! The Bulk Preparation of Fish!

「In the private room upstairs.」

After Chen Yan had served the Silver Shrimp Soup to everyone, they picked up their bowls and took a small spoonful to taste.

Then, everyone was stunned.

"The flavor, the texture! It's truly Silver Shrimp Soup!"

"One sip takes you back to the feasts of ancient literati and scholars."

"No wonder the great poets of the Tang and Song Dynasties continuously wrote poems in its praise."

"This exquisite flavor is indeed worthy of being lauded in poetry and prose."

"After tasting this soup, I finally understand why Sun Yue'e complained. The hair-thin Fish Filaments in it must be sliced one by one—what painstaking work that must be!"

"The owner of this restaurant is truly skilled!"

"..."

Praises were unending. After tasting a few more sips, the conversation shifted from Silver Shrimp Soup to the preparation of Fish.

Ren Chongmo said, "During the Tang Dynasty, Fish was a delicacy for nobles. Scholars could only taste it when invited to the feasts of the wealthy, which is why many poems from that era are full of flattery. In the Song Dynasty, it became exclusively enjoyed by cultured men, who often used Fish metaphorically

to describe their emotions. By the Yuan and Ming Dynasties, it became a specialty enjoyed by destitute scholars. This shows that fine cuisine has always trickled down from the top."

Geng Lishan commented incisively, "Royalty and nobility are temporary, and even cultured men cannot escape the turbulence of their times. Only when a delicacy spreads among the common folk can its culinary art truly be passed down."

Professor Xu asked, "Mr. Lishan, as a culinary expert, is this Silver Shrimp Soup truly a lost dish?"

Geng Lishan tasted the soup, nodded, and said, "Silver Shrimp Soup has indeed been lost to time. This soup requires stock for its preparation, and that alone limited its spread among the common people. However, Fish itself is still made today."

Seeing everyone's puzzled expressions, Geng Lishan explained which regions still preserve the tradition of making Fish. "Essentially, regions such as Hunan, Hubei, Guangdong, Guangxi, as well as Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan, all have traditions of using Fish to preserve food. However, the methods for preparing Fish have changed significantly based on local characteristics and are completely different from what is recorded in historical texts."

Cuisine, after all, is always evolving.

Back in the 1980s, who could have imagined that Sichuan cuisine would, in just a few decades, evolve from its 'hundred dishes, hundred flavors' tradition to a state where the numbing-spicy flavor became overwhelmingly dominant?

「Downstairs in the kitchen.」

Lin Xu had originally intended to make use of the leftover soup. Looking at the completely empty soup tureen, he said with a smile, "That was the broth for poaching the Fish Filaments. Don't you find it too salty?"

Wei Qian replied, "It was a bit salty, yes, but it was delicious!"

"Let's make a few more fish next time! That was really satisfying to eat."

"Exactly! This soup could be sold as a high-end dish in our restaurant. It has a storied history and a wonderful flavor; customers would surely be scrambling for a taste."

Lin Xu said, "Now isn't the best season for making Fish. It needs to be done around the fourth or fifth month of the lunar calendar, using lotus leaves. That method brings out an even better aroma."

With that, he instructed one of the kitchen assistants, "Go buy some more Carp, Grass Carp, and Spanish Mackerel. We'll use these types to make some more Fish."

"You got it, boss."

After giving these instructions, Lin Xu left the kitchen and headed to the duck roasting oven area.

When he opened the oven door, a delightful, savory aroma immediately wafted out.

"Wow, what's roasting in there? It smells so good!"

Lin Xu turned his head, saw Shen Baobao behind him, and said, "I sliced some marinated fish and have been roasting them over low heat for half an hour. Let's see how they've turned out. Want to try some?"

"Of course, I do! I skipped lunch just so I could try your cooking. See how much I support your work? Don't you think you should reward me?"

Lin Xu smiled and took out the roasting net that was hanging on the rack.

The white fish slices that had been laid on it were now all roasted to a golden yellow. They exuded a captivating aroma, a blend of the fresh taste of Fish and the unique savory fragrance developed during fermentation.

In short, it smelled incredible and was utterly mouthwatering.

He picked up a piece, blew on it to cool it down, then tore off a strip and put it in his mouth.

After being roasted over charcoal, the texture of the Fish had become chewier, yet it wasn't dry like fish jerky. Instead, it was firm with a hint of tenderness. And within that tenderness was the distinctive savory umami of the marinated fish. This flavor, combined with the special fragrance from being roasted over fruitwood charcoal, elevated the texture and taste of the Fish to an exquisitely delightful level.

Delicious!

He tore off another piece and was just about to taste it again when Shen Baobao snatched it from him.

"Be careful, it's hot."

"Wow, this is so delicious! Who knew roasted fish could be this amazing? It's fragrant, savory, and chewy. I think it's even tastier than little dried fish snacks!"

That's the benefit of fermentation. It allows ingredients to achieve an even purer umami.

After finishing one strip, Shen Baobao took the piece Lin Xu was holding. "This makes me really crave a beer... If even I want a drink, others definitely will too! Xu, why don't we add it to the menu? We can serve a plate of this roasted fish and call it 'Ancient-Method Roasted Fish.' What do you think?"

Lin Xu initially wanted to tell her not to mess around. But on second thought, he realized the restaurant did indeed lack a roasted dish that would pair well with drinks.

The preparation of this type of Fish wasn't too complicated and could easily be done in bulk. For example, they could wrap the fish with Glutinous Rice, place it in a large bamboo basket with alternating layers of fish and straw, and then leave it in a warm place. After a few days, the Fish would be ready. It could definitely supply the restaurant's needs.

Thinking of this, Lin Xu put his arm around Shen Baobao and gave her a kiss. "Thanks for the suggestion! I'll start making the Fish this afternoon. Once it's ready, we'll start selling it in the restaurant. This kind of Fish fills a gap in the culinary market, and there's no reason we shouldn't capitalize on it."

Chapter 782: Truly a Delicacy Praised by the Ancients in Poetry! The Mass Production Method of Fish!  
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With that, he picked up the baking tray and went to the kitchen. He planned to arrange a plate to take upstairs so everyone could have a taste.

What was going on? wondered Shen Baobao, who was in the middle of eating fish.

"You stop right there! Kiss me and then run? Do you think you can get away?"

The girl leaned in, wrapped her arms around his neck, and resolutely kissed him twice before letting the exasperated yet amused Lin Xu go.

The roasted fish curled up as it cooked, and due to the fish's anatomy, the pieces naturally formed comma-like shapes. Lin Xu arranged these fish pieces on a plate with the narrow ends of the 'commas' pointing outward and the bulk of the fish meat inward, creating a pattern resembling a wheel of fire.

Finally, he sliced a few pieces of White Radish, carved them into orchid shapes, and placed them in the center of the plate. After this simple garnish, he had a server take the dish out.

As for the remaining fish, he divided it into two portions. One was left in the kitchen for the staff to taste, and the other was brought out for Shen Baobao to enjoy with her beer.

He also let Shu Yun and the others try it. After all, they would be serving this traditional roasted Fish in the future, so it was important for everyone to taste it to better describe it to the customers.

「Upstairs in the private room.」

The professors, who were enjoying their drinks, became completely intrigued when the roasted Fish was brought to the table.

Tian Qinglan tasted it and said with a smile, "No wonder Wang Wei wrote in his poem, 'If the mackerel Fish from the river town is not sent, how can one from Qin be satisfied with noodle soup?' I always wondered when reading it just how delicious this Fish must be to make someone from Shaanxi forgo noodles. Now that I've tasted it, I understand. The flavor is indeed savory and delicious; once you get used to it, you truly can't do without it."

Professor Xu sipped his Floral Carving Wine and said, "People in the Tang Dynasty truly loved Fish to their very core. For instance, Pi Rixiu wrote the lines, 'Bamboo leaf drink has the color of sweet dew, lotus Fish carries the fragrance of fleshy Ganoderma.' And Bai Juyi wrote, 'Wrap Fish in lotus leaves, soak wine flasks in the stone channel.' It sounds so delightful."

Ren Chongmo remarked, "On a hot summer day, serving roasted fish on lotus leaves with chilled wine from a stream is indeed very pleasant. However, I prefer the imagery in Ma Zhiyuan's 'Southern Tune: The Golden Character Classic,' which says, 'Catkins drift like white snow, the fragrance of Fish carried on the lotus leaf breeze.' During the season when willow catkins fill the air, a down-and-out scholar carries home freshly bought Fish to eat—his cheerful mood practically leaps off the page."

Listening to everyone so effortlessly quoting ancient poetry, Chen Yan, who was sitting by the door, felt as if her master's degree was a sham.

The professors' knowledge was truly profound; they remembered even the most obscure poems so clearly.

They might be profound, but I just think it's delicious... Chen Yan took a bite of the roasted fish. The more she ate, the more delicious she found it, especially its firm texture and the charred aroma on the surface. It made her instinctively want to pick up her wine glass for a sip.

It's a pity that young police officer is still away on business. If he were here, and I put a plate of this on the table, he'd definitely eat it until his mouth was glistening with oil.

I wonder what he's so busy with on this trip... Hurry back! I'm still waiting to turn myself in to you. If you don't come back soon, I might just have to become a fugitive to escape punishment!

As Chen Yan was lost in her thoughts, Tian Qinglan, beside her, remarked, "If Xiao Chen enjoys gatherings like this, we'll invite you to future ones. Not many young people nowadays are willing to learn about these things. They all prefer fast-food culture and have completely forgotten traditional culture."

I've forgotten it all too... Chen Yan thought, then replied with a smile, "Oh, that'd be great! I wouldn't be bothering everyone, would I?"

"Not at all, not at all! We'd be delighted to have more young people join our conversations."

Her husband had become idle ever since he could no longer give lectures, and with so much free time, he'd been getting grumpy. Tian Qinglan thought that if she could invite a group of young people over for frequent chats, it might help him a lot.

Seeing that Tian Qinglan's bowl of Silver Shrimp Soup was empty, Chen Yan got up and refilled it for her.

The gray-haired professor was overjoyed and said, "Thank you, Xiao Chen. I truly never imagined that a restaurant today could recreate such historical soups. This flavor is truly excellent."

Chen Yan smiled. "When it comes to cooking, even the head chef of the State Banquet at the Fishing Platform admires my brother-in-law. When you're free sometime, I'll bring you to try the staff meals here. All the dishes we sell in the restaurant are chosen from our staff meals."

Tian Qinglan's interest was immediately piqued. "Well then, this old woman will have the audacity to tag along with you for food and drinks."

"What old woman? Professor Tian, you're still so young!"

The two chatted more and more congenially.

「Meanwhile, in a small coastal city thousands of miles away, Ren Jie lay quietly on a hospital bed, an IV drip in his arm.」

His arm injury wasn't very serious, but he had undergone a minor surgical procedure. Additionally, he had several soft tissue contusions from falls, so Sui Fusheng had him rest in the hospital.

Ren Jie didn't need to participate in the remaining interrogation and other work. He just needed to focus on recuperating and wait for his commendation.

Just as he was feeling bored, Sui Fusheng walked in with a meal tray.

Sui Fusheng's eyes were bloodshot, but his spirits were high. "Xiao Jie, you've performed a great service! The man you injured at the container entrance is a wanted fugitive active in the central region, with over a dozen lives on his conscience. This time, he was planning to abscond overseas by boat with the kidnapers. Unexpectedly, they all fell into your hands, kid!"

Sui Fusheng was ecstatic.

His apprentice had not only successfully captured the kidnapers but had also, in the process, apprehended a wanted criminal responsible for over a dozen deaths.

What was even more commendable was that both culprits were captured alive. They would receive preliminary medical treatment before the official interrogation began, to see if any other cases could be uncovered.

After the Haidian branch received the report that morning, they immediately dispatched another team as reinforcements, preparing to dig deeper into the matter.

The fact that Ren Jie had single-handedly apprehended two dangerous felons had already been reported up the chain of command, and his commendation was practically guaranteed.

Chapter 783: Truly deserving of the ancient poets' praise for its deliciousness! The mass production method for Fish! \_3

Raising the hospital bed and then placing a small table on it, Sui Fusheng arranged the dinner plate on top, smiling as he said, "Isn't there a saying 'you are what you eat'? I specifically asked the hospital canteen to make you cola chicken wings and soybean-stewed pork feet. They're all good for restoring your hand, so hurry up and eat while it's hot."

Ren Jie smiled, picked up a chicken wing with his chopsticks, took a bite, and then curiously asked, "Why didn't the wanted criminal show up when I took down the kidnapper? If he had shot me at the door then, I reckon I would've been boxed and buried right away."

"Those two didn't trust each other, and each wanted to screw the other over, so you got lucky."

After finishing their discussion about work, Ren Jie became forlorn again. "Captain, what should I do if my parents really can't accept Little Chef? She's not from Beijing, has no education, and I reckon she's at least twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old, though she has good looks... Do you think my parents might find me shallow?"

Sui Fusheng laughed and said, "You should first see if she despises you for being a criminal investigator... Plus, just because you can't convince your parents doesn't mean she can't. Maybe she'll be even closer to your parents than you are. Hurry up and eat, rest well, and don't end up with your arm still in a sling when it's time for commendations."

「12:30 PM.」

While everyone was busy with their work and studies, Lin Xu's personal account suddenly updated with a video, which had a very enticing title: "Tired of hearing 'drink more hot water'? Try this little snack that will keep your loved one warm all winter!"

The moment the post went live, netizens flocked to it.

"What the hell, the trend from some Red Book of warming her up for a day just ended, and here comes Lin Boss with a winter version?"

"Case closed, this is a stealth ad for heaters!"

"I just want to know if Dundun made an appearance. If not, I plan on mailing Lin Boss some local specialties."

"Add me in, I'll send stuff too. As a Dundun fan, I couldn't care less about fancy foods (SLURP)."

"I really want to see Dundun play the piano. I'll have my cat watch it several times; maybe it'll awaken some supernatural ability... hehe, it's time for the pets to enter the fray."

"Wow, the scope of discussion has really broadened upstairs."

"..."

Without even watching the video, the silly netizens were already lively in the comment section.

It was only after clicking on the video that everyone discovered it contained the detailed method for making candied ginger slices.

"Damn, this is my favorite!"

"Love candied ginger slices! The question is, will they be introduced in the store?"

"I actually wish Lin Boss would open an online store to cater to us fans from afar. We really can't afford to travel to Beijing every time."

"Exactly, Lin Boss, please open an online store, even if you don't offer free shipping."

「In the store.」

Standing in front of the service counter feeding Dundun duck breast, Lin Xu laughed as he responded to Shu Yun's feedback, "Rushing into opening an online store isn't a good idea. All of our snacks are homemade, with no additives, and we don't know what they could turn into after being shipped."

It's not too bad now while it's cold. In summer, however, the high temperatures inside delivery trucks could cause the products to spoil. Moreover, the shop's production capacity is limited. It's best to focus

on in-store customers for now. As for opening an online store, we can always consider it later when we have the capacity.

The duck meat today was prepared by Zhuang Yizhou. The duck breast was thinly sliced and quickly blanched before being served. The meat was tender and moist.

Dundun ate happily, running over to Lin Xu every few bites to nuzzle against him, looking very content.

After hearing what Lin Xu had said, Shu Yun sent a message to Dou Wenjing: "The boss said that there's no guarantee on food safety, so it won't be available for now. Let the operations department send out a notice."

While they were talking, a fishmonger from the market came to deliver the fish. "Hello, Boss Lin. In accordance with your request, I've brought a total of eighty Carp, each weighing forty pounds. I've also brought the bamboo baskets and straw you asked for. Are you planning to make some tasty dish with these?"

Lin Xu rubbed Dundun's big head and smiled as he said, "I'm planning to marinate some fish for grilled fish. It probably won't be ready until next week. I'll send you a WeChat invitation then; you can come have a taste, guaranteed you haven't had anything like it elsewhere."

"Oh, I'm certainly looking forward to trying it."

Soon after, the cart guy came out of the elevator, pulling a flatbed cart. When he saw Lin Xu, he said, "Boss, the glutinous rice has started steaming. Should we throw away the stuff you scraped off the fish earlier?"

"No need. Later, mix it into the new glutinous rice, as this will help speed up the growth of mold."

The cart guy and the fishmonger busily moved all the fish to the kitchen, and then they also carried up the bamboo baskets and bundles of straw.

Once everything was taken care of, Dundun had finished eating the duck meat. Now, it was squatting on the service counter, attentively washing its face. Lin Xu didn't disturb it and took the plate upstairs.

After cleaning it with detergent, he placed it in a cabinet specifically for Dundun's tableware. Then he went to the kitchen and, looking at several large basins of fish in the big iron pans on the floor, he said, "Those of you not busy with other tasks, come over and help with the fish. All the Carp's fish scales, fish bladders, fish roe, fish liver, and fish intestines need to be sorted and packed separately."

When you usually butcher a fish or two, it doesn't really matter whether you keep these innards and fish scales or not. But with so many fish, it would be a terrible waste to throw them away. They are all top-notch ingredients that could be sold for money.

Ma Zhiqiang came over, rolling up his sleeves to start preparing the fish. As he was busy at work, he asked, "Boss, are you planning to turn these fish scales into spicy fish scale dishes?"

Lin Xu shook his head. "No, they will be made into Fish Scale Jelly. It's getting cold, so it's time to make various kinds of jellies to enrich the cold dish selection in the restaurant."

Fish Scale Jelly? Everyone was already intrigued.

It was said that Fish Scale Jelly is even more delicate and delicious than pork skin jelly, beef tendon jelly, or chicken feet jelly. They hadn't expected the boss to make this dish—it sure seemed they were in for a treat.

After saying this, Lin Xu sent a message to Shu Yun with his phone: "Notify everyone that today we are adding some new dishes for a limited time only in the restaurant, including boiled Fish Bladder, oil-poured fish liver, Stir-Fried Fish Intestines, dry pot Fish Roe..."

Shu Yun, salivating at the thought, replied, "Okay, boss. I'll start sending out messages in the customer group right away!"

Chapter 784: Bowing to the Power of Money! The Secret to Crystal Clear Fish Scale Jelly!

Upstairs, the glum expression had finally vanished from Ren Chongmo's face after he had had his fill of wine and food.

He was very satisfied with today's meal, and even more pleased with chatting with a group of like-minded people.

Discussing ancient and modern times in such a setting really felt great.

Geng Lishan, slightly drunk, had the dishes cleared from the table and, flourishing a brush, copied down Lu You's famous lines praising fish:

"The wine is like nectar, the fish is like flowers!"

After writing, he switched to a smaller brush and added two lines to his signature:

"In the late autumn of Renyin, along with literary friends at Lin Ji's Food tasting Silver Shrimp Soup, we spoke jovially, got drunk, and thus I copied this famous line from Fang Weng to cover the cost of the alcohol."

Professor Xu grinned and said,

"Lishan, sir, with those last four words, you've insulted all of us poor scholars."

Ren Chongmo, however, was quite pleased with these words:

"Well insulted. Being a scholar should mean being untainted by material desires. I feel like Lishan is really getting more profound. Maybe I should also resign and stay at home for a couple of years?"

Geng Lishan wrote this partly as a small joke with Lin Xu.

Laughing, he said,

"Don't do it. I sat at home for two years and nearly drove myself mad. Only after meeting young Lin have I gained many insights into life. If you're not busy, feel free to come by more often. At Lin Ji's, there's good food, good wine, and plenty of human warmth—a great place to experience the myriad flavors of life."

Ren Chongmo nodded and said to his partner, Tian Qinglan,

"Since the kids seldom come home for meals, let's frequently eat here from now on. Maybe we'll bump into Lishan and can raise a glass in joy."

"Sure, and it happens that Little Yan is here every day too, so we can also try the staff meals that aren't available to the public."

Over the course of the meal, Tian Qinglan grew increasingly fond of Chen Yan, eventually calling her by the more affectionate "Little Yan" instead of "Little Chen."

Chen Yan also respected this graceful female professor greatly. She truly embodied the demeanor of someone devoted to academia.

Geng Lishan pointed at the calligraphy on the table and said to Shu Yun,

"Miss Yun, this is today's meal payment. Ask young Lin if it's enough. If not, I can write a couple more pieces. Ever since I finished 'World's First Chicken,' I've had more insights into writing about 'the world's firsts.' If he doesn't mind, I can write about 'The World's First Duck,' 'The World's First Pig,' 'The World's First Goose'..."

Shu Yun covered her mouth and laughed,

"You're just teasing our boss, especially since he's not here."

She had always thought Geng Lishan was a very serious person, but the old man turned out to be quite adorable. She remembered the helpless expression on the boss's face when he brought in the 'World's First Chicken' last time—it was absolutely hilarious.

After the jokes, everyone prepared to leave.

Older people tend to feel sleepy after a drink.

It was a good opportunity to go back and have a good nap in the afternoon.

Upon exiting the private room, they saw gift boxes at the entrance filled with various snacks from Lin Ji's, including ginger candies made that morning.

Shu Yun specially explained,

"These are little delicacies from Lin Ji's Food. Teachers, you can try them when you get home. They also include ginger candies made by our boss this morning, which are very good for warming the stomach. Have a few whenever you're free to help warm you up."

Hearing this, the professors and scholars were even more pleased with Lin Ji:

"Boss Lin is really too kind."

"Since Boss Lin made them himself, I must try them."

"Next time we have a family banquet, we should just come and eat here at Lin Ji's. It feels wrong not to arrange a few tables as a way to thank Boss Lin's generosity."

"It's a pity I'm not good at calligraphy; otherwise, I'd also write a few words to compete with Lishan's charm."

Carrying the gift boxes, they walked downstairs where Lin Xu was in the first-floor hall seeing everyone off.

Just as they exited, they saw several vans parked at the entrance.

Geng Lishan was puzzled:

"What's this?"

Chen Yan smiled,

"After listening to the lectures from the teachers today, I learned a lot, so I helped arrange rides for everyone. Just tell the driver where you want to go, and please don't be shy about it."

Tian Qinglan, holding Chen Yan's hand, said,

"You shouldn't have spent your money, Little Yan."

"It's no big deal. You and Professor Ren, please get in the car; it's windy outside, don't catch a cold."

After the guests left, Chen Yan turned to Lin Xu and asked,

"Brother-in-law, got anything to eat right now?"

"Didn't eat enough?"

"They're all experts in the field of Chinese language, and some of them even taught me. I was too awestruck to focus on eating."

Lin Xu pointed upstairs,

"Well, in a minute Wei Qian can make you some stir-fried noodles. They're processing fish upstairs; I need to get back to the kitchen and keep busy."

After saying this, he turned and went back inside.

Processing fish? Is more delicious food being prepared?

Chen Yan followed him inside, just about to ask what was being made, when she heard Shu Yun reporting to Lin Xu:

"All four orders of Boiled Fish Bladder are pre-ordered. Only one of the eight servings of Scalded Fish Liver remains. Fifteen orders of Stir-Fried Fish Intestines have been pre-ordered, and more than half of the dry pot Fish Roe has also been pre-ordered. They should all sell out before dinner."

Eighty fish, with twenty fish bladders making one serving of Boiled Fish Bladder, comes out to exactly four servings.

The fish livers are slightly smaller, but the livers from ten fish can still make a substantial dish.

As for the fish intestines and roe, about two or three fish are needed per serving.

If all these sell, about half the cost of the fish might be recovered.

While that's just revenue, not profit, it's still pretty good.

Hearing about these dishes, Chen Yan couldn't help but swallow hard:

"Brother-in-law, can you make me one serving of each? I'm still not full."

Lin Xu was just about to suggest she settle for stir-fried noodles since it was quite busy, but then his sister-in-law pulled out her membership card, numbered 00001:

Chapter 785: Bowing Down to the Power of Money! The Secret to Crystal Clear Fish Scale Jelly! \_2

"Little Shu, charge ten thousand!"

Faced with such a generous patron, Lin Xu simply chose to bow to the power of money. What else could I say?

"More chili or less?"

"More!"

"Got it, I'll go prepare."

Upstairs, to ensure there was enough fish offal for the evening, Lin Xu asked Che Zai to buy more, the more the better.

After that, he began preparing the dishes for Chen Yan.

He poked open the Fish Intestines with scissors, first washing them to remove internal impurities. Then, he scrubbed them with salt, followed by two more washes with flour. He continued washing until the Fish Intestines no longer felt sticky to the touch.

The cooking method for the Fish Intestines was similar to that of Stir-fried Pork Intestines. To achieve a crisp and tender texture, he needed to scrub them with a bit of baking soda. However, since Fish Intestines were thinner and more tender, the baking soda couldn't be added directly. Instead, it had to be dissolved in water first, then used for scrubbing, and finally rinsed off with clean water.

Next, he laid the Fish Intestines on the cutting board, aligned them, and cut them into segments about five centimeters long, much like cutting green beans. He then marinated them in Scallion and Ginger water along with other seasonings.

After finishing these tasks, he chopped Pickled Peppers and pickled ginger, then used a kitchen knife to mince some Doubanjiang, preparing to cook the intestines in the style of Stir-fried Pork Intestines.

With the ingredients for Stir-Fried Fish Intestines ready, he started cleaning the Fish Liver.

Unlike other offal, Carp liver was smaller and extremely delicate, so there was no need to score it; he simply sliced open the thicker parts. After slicing, he rinsed it with water to clean off any blood. Then he marinated it in Light Soy Sauce, scallion segments, ginger slices, and a bit of pepper powder.

While it marinated, he prepared some side vegetables. He washed cucumbers, cut them into strips, then removed the seeds, keeping only the crisp, tender flesh. He cut these cucumber strips into four to five-centimeter lengths and placed them in a small bowl. Then, from a jar of refreshing pickles, he scooped out some sweet and sour radishes, cutting them to the same size as the cucumber strips. After finishing the cuts, he placed them on top of the cucumber strips. Later, he would place the cooked Fish Liver on top and then pour the dressing over it.

The dish, Fish Liver with Oil Drizzle, was essentially a cold appetizer. The liver was blanched until just cooked through, then drizzled with a specially prepared sauce to complete it.

Once the Fish Intestines and Fish Liver were ready, Lin Xu took some Fish Bladder. He pierced each one with a knife to release the air and set up a wok to boil water. Fish Bladder has a fishy smell, so it needed to be blanched. However, it couldn't be blanched for too long. It had to be quickly removed the moment it hit the boiling water. Otherwise, the bladders would overcook, losing their crisp-tender texture and becoming as tough as rubber bands.

When the water boiled, he added a spoonful of Cooking Wine, then quickly dropped in the Fish Bladders. He blanched them for three seconds, then immediately removed them and rinsed them with cold water to prevent overcooking.

Once done, he turned off the heat.

When the water in the pot cooled to about seventy degrees Celsius, he poured the marinated Fish Liver into the pot and turned on the heat. The Fish Liver was very delicate, so it couldn't be blanched in boiling water, which would overcook it. Instead, it had to be gently cooked in water at seventy to eighty degrees Celsius, similar to preparing Boiled Shrimp, just until it was cooked through. The flame on the stove couldn't be too high; a very low flame was sufficient to prevent the water temperature from rising too much and overcooking the liver.

This step required patience. While waiting, he continuously skimmed the scum from the surface of the water to prevent it from adhering to the liver or affecting its taste. After about two minutes, when no more scum appeared in the pot, the liver was ready.

He scooped it out, rinsed it with cold water, drained off the excess water, and then placed it in the bowl with the cucumber and radish strips.

Then he grabbed another bowl to prepare the dressing. Into this bowl, he put minced scallion, minced garlic, ginger juice, chopped cilantro, minced bird's eye chili, salt, and sugar. To this, he added Chinese black vinegar, Light Soy Sauce, Dark Soy Sauce, oyster sauce, Chili Oil, Sichuan peppercorns powder, and regular pepper powder. Finally, he topped it with two small clusters of green Sichuan peppercorns and poured sizzling hot Seasoning Oil over them.

He then covered the bowl with a lid to trap the aroma in the dressing. Two minutes later, he lifted the lid, added some sesame oil, mixed the sauce well, and drizzled it over the Fish Liver.

With that, a dish of Fish Liver with Oil Drizzle was ready.

Lin Xu picked up a piece of Fish Liver with chopsticks and tasted it. His eyes immediately lit up. He knew this dish wouldn't taste bad, but he'd never imagined Fish Liver prepared this way could be as tender as goose liver! And the dressing, infused with the fragrance of green Sichuan peppercorns from the hot Seasoning Oil, also greatly enhanced the dish. The spicy and numbing sensations mingled with the savory flavor, leaving a slightly sweet aftertaste.

It was a pity that Carp liver was so small, and liver from other types of fish was too expensive. Otherwise, I would have loved to add this dish to the restaurant's menu, allowing all customers to savor the exquisite taste of Fish Liver.

Carrying the small bowl outside, Chen Yan was in the group chat, discussing Geng Lishan's calligraphy piece.

Yue Liyue asked curiously, "Why did Mr. Lishan sign it 'Ren Yin Ji Qiu'? Shouldn't it just be 'autumn'?"

Zeng Xiaoqi, who had recently brushed up on her traditional cultural knowledge, explained, "Spring, summer, autumn, and winter each have three months. To distinguish them, ancient people called the first month of a season 'Meng,' the second 'Zhong,' and the third 'Ji.' So, 'Ji Qiu' means the third month of autumn, which is the ninth month of the lunar calendar... Correct me if I'm wrong, our resident Master of Chinese studies?"

"Bingo!" Chen Yan sent an emoji. She was just about to enlighten everyone a little on traditional cultural knowledge when she saw Lin Xu carrying over a bowl of food, instantly losing all interest in playing the teacher.

"Hahaha, my dish is here! This young lady specially spent ten thousand to order some dishes for herself. Don't you dare be jealous," she declared.

After speaking, she lifted her phone, took a photo of the dish in the serving bowl, and enthusiastically shared it in the group.

Chapter 786: Bowing Down to the Power of Money! The Secret to Crystal Clear Fish Scale Jelly! \_3

Lin Xu returned to the kitchen to prepare the remaining dishes.

Once the oil was hot, he poured in the Fish Intestines and other ingredients all at once and stir-fried them over high heat for a dozen or so seconds before taking them out and plating them.

The cooked Fish Intestines were rolled into thin rolls, resembling white chocolate bars drizzled with Red Oil.

Next, he used the method for boiled meat slices to prepare the boiled Fish Bladder.

Finally, he removed the membrane from the Fish Roe, cut it into pieces, deep-fried it, and then stir-fried it with other ingredients and Dry Pot Sauce, and thus the Dry Pot Fish Roe was officially completed.

After finishing, the assistant chefs had also nearly completed slaughtering the fish.

"Clean them thoroughly, then rub salt all over, inside and out, and let them marinate in a bowl for a while."

If each fish was prepared individually, rubbing salt and directly packing it with glutinous rice would suffice. But since it was being done in bulk, the surface moisture of the fish had to be drawn out before applying the glutinous rice.

This method produced tastier Fish, and the glutinous rice also fermented better.

While everyone was busy, Lin Xu brought the prepared Fish Scales to the sink area.

"Boss, should all of these be turned into Fish Scale Jelly?"

"Yes, turn all of them into Fish Scale Jelly. They'll go on sale in the store tomorrow morning."

The carp weighed about four or five pounds. Their scales weren't very large and wouldn't be satisfying to eat when fried, so Lin Xu decided to turn all these Fish Scales into Fish Scale Jelly for today.

If I want to eat spicy Fish Scales later, I can just buy a few large fish.

That stuff lasts a long time.

Once fried, it can last for several days without being finished.

The Fish Scales collected from eighty fish amounted to about a large basinful, enough to make several dozen pounds of Fish Scale Jelly.

If sold portion by portion, at least fifty or sixty portions could be sold.

At twenty yuan per serving, that's over a thousand yuan.

Calculating this way, the revenue from the fish offal might even be higher than the cost of buying the fish themselves.

Fish Scales have a strong fishy smell, and sediment from the riverbed can get trapped in their grooves. To eat them confidently without any fishiness, they must be washed repeatedly.

Lin Xu put salt and flour in the basin and carefully mixed and scrubbed the Fish Scales.

After doing this, he rinsed them with clean water.

After several such washes, the originally gray Fish Scales became clean, even sparkling slightly under the light.

With this step complete, the Fish Scales were ready.

Lin Xu set up a large soup pot to boil water. He added the Fish Scales, along with ginger slices, Scallion sections, and a ladle of Liquor, and started blanching them.

Fish Scales have a strong odor and couldn't be used directly; otherwise, the Fish Scale Jelly would be both fishy and unpalatable.

After the water boiled, he skimmed off the foam with a spoon, then took out all the Fish Scales, rinsed them with cold water, and removed the ginger slices and Scallion sections. Then, he formally began the preparation process.

Just like with Pork Skin jelly, achieving a good appearance for Fish Scale Jelly meant not boiling it; instead, it required steaming.

He placed the Fish Scales and cooled boiled water into a steaming cabinet to steam them, which would produce crystal-clear Fish Scale Jelly that resembled glass.

He took several large deep trays and laid a layer of cling film in them for easy demolding.

He scattered a two-centimeter layer of Fish Scales, then added Scallion and Ginger, salt, and Rice Wine again. Finally, he poured in cooled boiled water until the water in the trays was six centimeters deep.

The reason for using cooled boiled water was because it's clean and clear, much like the principle of making ice cubes at home.

Ice cubes made from unboiled water, no matter any adjustments, are always turbid.

But ice cubes frozen from cooled boiled water became crystal clear, indistinguishable from purchased edible ice cubes.

All the Fish Scales were placed onto trays. He carefully carried them and put them into the steam cabinet to start steaming.

After finishing these tasks, Lin Xu began to look for a suitable place to ferment the Fish.

First, he ruled out the cold storage, as its temperature was too low and unsuitable for fish fermentation.

The kitchen was quite suitable, but there wasn't much free space at the moment, not enough to fit several bamboo baskets of marinating Fish. Moreover, the kitchen floor was frequently washed with a hose, which made it too easy for the Fish to be splashed with unboiled water.

Lin Xu went outside the kitchen and looked around, finding that outside was also not suitable.

The Fish would emit some odor during the marinating process, so it could not be placed in areas frequently visited by customers, to avoid affecting their dining mood.

Upon arriving on the third floor, Lin Xu checked the private rooms. Just as he was about to leave, he remembered that the banquet hall was rarely used recently and pushed the door open to enter.

In the banquet hall's entrance corridor, there was a utility closet. It was initially planned for storing disposable cups and utensils. However, because the window exposed it to direct sunlight, which could cause disposable chopsticks to bend, it hadn't been used.

Lin Xu opened the door to this room and took a look. He found the small room was actually quite good. Its front was made of highly transparent glass, and it received direct sunlight from ten in the morning until three in the afternoon.

Such a place was naturally suitable for making Fish.

"Let's do it here then."

Water would drip while making the Fish, so the bamboo baskets needed to be placed in iron basins. Ideally, a rack should also be placed in each basin. This would prevent the drawn-out water from soaking the bottom layer of Fish and causing the Fish to spoil.

After returning downstairs, Lin Xu instructed Che Zai to make the preparations: buy whatever was needed and arrange for any necessary processing, ensuring nothing would delay their use in an hour.

"Then I'll have someone weld some iron racks, placing the bamboo baskets on the racks and the water basins under the racks. Does that work, Boss?"

"That's fine, as long as the water doesn't drip onto the floor or soak the Fish," Lin Xu replied.

"I'll get on it right away."

After Che Zai left, Lin Xu and a few kitchen helpers brought out the steamed and cooled glutinous rice from the cold storage. They mixed in some glutinous rice they had scraped off earlier and then began to apply it to the Fish.

These Fish had already had much of their moisture drawn out. Before applying the rice, their surfaces needed to be wiped dry; otherwise, the glutinous rice wouldn't stick.

After applying it evenly, they laid a layer of straw in the bamboo baskets and sprinkled some coarse sea salt. They then arranged the Fish flat in rows, sprinkled another layer of salt, and covered it with another layer of straw.

After stacking them up meticulously layer by layer, they switched to another bamboo basket.

While they were busy, Lin Xu's phone rang.

He pulled it out to look, and it was actually his senior, Xie Baomin, calling.

"What's up, Senior?"

"It's like this: tomorrow Master Dai is going to a TV station to make Boiled Fish with Pickled Cabbage. He's a bit nervous and wants you to appear with him. Are you free tomorrow morning?"

Boiled Fish with Pickled Cabbage?

Lin Xu remembered he still had two Cooking Learning Cards, so he immediately agreed.

"I'm free. I'll head to the TV station first thing tomorrow morning. I won't cause any delays."

Winter was approaching, the perfect time for Boiled Fish with Pickled Cabbage. Eaten then, its sour and spicy flavor would be absolutely warming and appetizing. I wonder how Chef Dai's version tastes? A flicker of excitement went through Lin Xu. He rubbed his hands, already eager to learn this dish...

Chapter 787: Li Qiang: What's It Like to Become an Ex-Boyfriend Before Even Dating? Cooking Suan Cai Yu!

"Bro Qiang, are you heading out?"

At five thirty in the afternoon, while everyone else at the office was working overtime, rushing to meet deadlines and hoping to leave by ten, they suddenly noticed Li Qiang packing his bag.

This...

Him, the esteemed head of the tech department, planning to throw in the towel?

Li Qiang shut down his computer, smiled at everyone, and said, "I've got something on, so I'm heading out first."

Having said that, he slung his bag over his shoulder, holding a printed resignation letter, and strode towards the department manager's office.

Everyone stared, their eyes wide with shock.

Oh my god, oh my god, was there even more to this story?

If the boss hadn't still been around, everyone would have really wanted to stir things up and see the number one and number two kiss.

All day long, the tech department had been feeling quite pleased with themselves.

In other departments, the number one and number two were constantly undermining and backstabbing each other, practically at each other's throats for the top spot.

But their tech department's number two had aimed directly for the number one herself. He wasn't just after the top spot; he wanted the person too.

Now *\*that's\** what you call the ultimate king of internal competition, huh? Hands on hips!

The tech department manager's office was really just a small partitioned cubicle, but even this small space was a coveted prize among all department heads.

Inside the office, Qi Panpan was nibbling on candied ginger from a jar.

As she ate, she cursed under her breath, "You jerk. If you're going to confess, just confess. Why use such a humiliating method? If I actually treated you nicely, would you, you jerk, really have the heart to leave this place?"

Even before joining the company, she had heard of Li Qiang's reputation. His technical skills were undeniable, and he was good at maintaining relationships with his colleagues.

More importantly, Li Qiang was somewhat famous in their circle as a "Desperate Saburo"—a real workaholic.

He often clocked in on DingTalk at three in the morning, working himself to the bone as if his life depended on it.

Yet, someone like him hadn't even made it to department manager.

Qi Panpan felt quite indignant on his behalf.

After joining the company, she had hinted to Li Qiang that the world outside was more exciting. But the jerk just didn't get it, even telling her that foreign countries were too chaotic and he didn't want to travel around.

What a pigheaded guy!

To prevent him from wasting his youth at the company, Qi Panpan had resorted to the usual workplace tactic for ousting someone—nitpicking!

She had assumed that a tech guru like Li Qiang would have a fiery temper. But he didn't. She had nitpicked to the extreme, finding fault where there was none, yet he remained unfailingly cheerful.

His wits were as sparse as the hair on his forehead.

She had originally planned to have a heart-to-heart talk with Li Qiang today, but who knew he'd resort to such a humiliating tactic!

Is that your confession?

Clearly, you just wanted to embarrass me.

You jerk, may your forehead shine bright and bald!

Just as she was muttering to herself, there came a knock on the door.

Qi Panpan popped a piece of candied ginger into her mouth and said listlessly, "Come in!"

She assumed it was the department clerk delivering a work progress report, so she didn't pay much attention. But when she saw it was Li Qiang, a wave of panic hit her, quickly followed by a surge of blazing anger.

You jerk, you still dare to show your face here?

When Li Qiang entered and saw the jar of candied ginger was already half-empty, he felt a flash of anger himself.

That's not candied ginger she's eating; that's all my hair!

"What are you here for?" Qi Panpan asked.

Li Qiang didn't say anything, just slammed the resignation letter in his hand onto the table. "Sign it!"

Qi Panpan was already furious, but seeing the resignation letter, she felt a strange sense of elation.

Ha, my embarrassment wasn't for nothing.

If you had done this earlier, I wouldn't have had to rack my brains every day trying to find fault with you.

She asked curiously, "Which company are you planning to join?"

Li Qiang was still staring at the half-empty jar of candied ginger, a pained expression on his face.

He said irritably, "None of your business!"

Qi Panpan immediately pushed the resignation letter back. "If you don't tell me, I won't sign."

Li Qiang: "..."

She really knew how to be difficult!

He said helplessly, "Huixuan Technology Company, in the Huixuan Building on North Fourth Ring."

"What's the annual salary? Tell me, and I'll sign."

"750,000."

"Wow, a raise of 150,000. That's quite a lot. Is it the highest offer from all the headhunters?"

Seeing that Qi Panpan had stopped trying to find fault, Li Qiang answered honestly, "No, the highest offered over 800,000, but it's too far from where I live. The Huixuan Building is pretty good. It's less than two kilometers from my place and less than one kilometer from Lin Ji. It's very suitable."

A commute like that is a dream come true for a programmer.

A casual stroll to and from work, and so close to Lin Ji! I could eat there from morning till night.

Qi Panpan quickly signed the resignation letter. After finishing, she said, "You should go to the HR department tomorrow. The HR manager got chewed out today. If you go now, they'll probably give you a hard time."

"Alright."

As Li Qiang reached for the resignation letter, Qi Panpan pressed her hand down on it. "Leaving just like that?"

Seeing her furious expression, Li Qiang, finally feeling a sense of release, also felt a bit embarrassed. "Sorry, Manager Qi, I shouldn't have said those things this morning."

"If 'sorry' was useful, what would we need the police for?"

This...

Li Qiang was a bit lost. He thought Yue Liyue was right; women were too much trouble. Being single was better—carefree and without worries.

As he was thinking this, Qi Panpan asked, "Do you really like me, or did you just say that on purpose?"

Like her?

Li Qiang felt a bit dazed.

Qi Panpan had the height, she had the looks—what guy wouldn't like a girl like her?

Chapter 788: Li Qiang: What's it like to become an ex-boyfriend before even dating? Cooking sour cabbage fish! \_2

Moreover, Li Qiang's personality was a bit gentle and easy-going. He had always liked assertive girls, and Manager Qi, with her powerful aura, was exactly his type.

"If you don't like me, let's pretend this never happened. By the way, I wish you all the best in the future. But if you do like me..."

These words made Li Qiang's heart leap with joy.

Am I about to break out of singlehood?

Damn, damn, damn, I need to grab a couple of beers tonight...

While he was thinking this, Qi Panpan said, "If you do like me, then sorry. You've missed your chance to have me as your girlfriend. Hmph, you made me embarrass myself in front of my colleagues. Happy breakup!"

After saying that, she disdainfully pushed the resignation letter across the table.

She picked up a piece of ginger candy, slowly placed it in her mouth, and started watching short videos on her phone, completely ignoring the balding "ex-boyfriend" standing across from her.

At this point, Li Qiang was utterly confused.

Although he had been bewildered since he walked in, he now felt like he had eaten ten pounds of Confusion Fruit, so perplexed he couldn't make heads or tails of anything.

Did Manager Qi actually, really, really, \*really\* like me?

Oh dear, what on earth did I do today!

He wished he could slap himself.

Damn it, if I had known, I would have planned a special ceremony to confess.

Breaking up before we even started dating... This feeling...

He was about to speak when Qi Panpan took out a pair of Bluetooth headphones from her drawer, put them on, and deliberately activated the noise-canceling mode.

This action made Li Qiang even more bewildered.

It seems my actions this morning really angered Manager Qi.

He picked up the resignation letter and said sincerely, "I'm sorry."

After speaking, he turned and left.

My brain's like mush right now. I need to quickly ask in the group chat... no, I need to rush to Lin Ji's Food and find out what's going on.

I heard Manager Chen is known as the 'Little Zhuge of Lin Ji.' I'll ask her for advice later.

Let's see how to proceed.

I really shot myself in the foot.

He left the manager's office, his face a mask of frustration.

Seeing this, his colleagues all cast sympathetic glances his way. It seemed his path to winning her back wasn't going to be smooth!

After the office door closed, Qi Panpan frustratingly took off her headphones. That's not what I wanted to hear, those three words! You blockhead!

As Li Qiang left the company and headed to the subway station, he remembered the ginger candies, of which only half a jar remained, and sent a WeChat message to Qi Panpan: "Manager Qi, don't eat too much ginger candy; it can cause stomach acid and pain. Just one or two pieces occasionally are fine."

"Mind your own business!"

Qi Panpan replied irritably, then she capped the jar of ginger candies and placed it back into her desk drawer as if it were a precious treasure.

When Li Qiang arrived at Lin Ji's Food, the place was already bustling with customers.

"Brother Qiang, you're off work so early today! Where are your roommates? How come you didn't get off work together?" Shu Yun couldn't help but greet him upon seeing him.

Of course, her main interest was to find out if there were any developments after his 'suicide-mission confession' that morning.

"I've submitted my resignation. I'm planning to find a new job... Is Manager Chen in?"

Li Qiang scratched Dundun's chin. Just as he was about to pat its head, the little creature deftly dodged him.

"Manager Chen is upstairs. Is something wrong?"

"I need her to give me some advice."

Shu Yun's eyes widened. Something's definitely up!

She immediately said, "Hold on, I'll call her down right away."

After speaking, she picked up her phone and tagged Chen Yan in the "Real Sisters Bra Size Unshrinkable" group chat: "Come down quickly! Brother Qiang's having a relationship crisis and needs Chen Zhuge to give him some ideas. He's at the front desk, so I can listen in too!"

She had barely sent the message when the group chat erupted with a string of "Got it!" responses.

Soon, Chen Zhuge, the tactician; the ever-curious Shen Jiayue; Dou Wenjing, who was always ready for gossip; Geng Lele, the master truant; and Zeng Xiaoqi, the deputy tactician, all came downstairs together.

With such a turnout, you'd think they were preparing for a group brawl.

"What's the matter, Brother Qiang?"

"Come on, tell us! We've been waiting all day for an update."

"Did you get your ginger candy back?"

"Why does Brother Qiang have such an indescribable expression?"

"..."

Li Qiang looked at everyone speechlessly.

Can't you at least *\*look\** like you're here to give advice?

Especially the boss lady, she actually came down holding a bowl!

Is she really treating this like neighborhood gossip?

He took a deep breath and recounted the afternoon's events.

Everyone listened with astonished faces.

Chen Yan asked, "The atmosphere was so charged, why did you just leave?"

Li Qiang was stunned. "What should I have done then?"

"Kiss her! Pin her against the wall and kiss her passionately! Keep telling her 'I love you' over and over again. That would've done it! Assertive women are most vulnerable to men who are even more assertive than they are. You missed your chance, Brother Qiang!"

Deputy tactician Zeng Xiaoqi nodded in agreement, adding, "Right, in that situation, you had to be more passionate. She was practically spelling it out for you, and you just walked away."

Just as Li Qiang was about to head back, Shu Yun said, "Don't try to fix it now. The mood was right then, but if you go back now, her emotions will have cooled down. All you'll get is a slap in the face..."

Seeing Li Qiang's distraught expression, Dou Wenjing couldn't help but suggest, "You can woo her all over again! Tomorrow morning, bring her some Horse Hoof Cake from our shop. The day after, bring her Shakima. After you resign, arrange special deliveries to send her food. Regularly check in on her via WeChat, show you care, express your love occasionally, invite her to the restaurant for a meal on the weekend, and then take her to see a couple of movies. Happy 'remarriage'!"

Since she was clearly interested, playing matchmaker for them would be a piece of cake.

Her words bolstered Li Qiang's confidence immensely.

Although everyone always says things like "being single is the best," when a genuine love presents itself, very few can remain indifferent.

Chapter 789: Li Qiang: What's it like to become an ex-boyfriend before even dating? Cooking sour cabbage fish! \_3

He thanked them and went to order some food and drinks, meanwhile using his phone to ask Yue Liyue and Panda to come over for a drink.

While eating chestnut braised rice, Shen Baobao whispered to Geng Lele, "I've figured it out. These dieters are all singletons, each with a hidden talent."

Geng Lele nodded in agreement, "Exactly, singletons with hidden talents."

The "silly squad" didn't participate in the strategizing at all; instead, they poked fun at the "fat-loss squad."

"What are you two whispering about?"

"Nothing, nothing. We're discussing Fish with Pickled Greens."

Speaking of Fish with Pickled Greens, Zeng Xiaoqi asked curiously, "What kind of fish can be used for Fish with Pickled Greens? I don't like Grass Carp; it has too many bones. Are there any fish with fewer bones suitable for it?"

You're asking us?

Shen Baobao said, "I heard Lin Xu mention before that snakehead, bass, and even leopard coral grouper can be used. There's no particular preference, but for a TV shoot, it would probably be snakehead or Grass Carp, right?"

The show \*Tastes of the World\* is about teaching the audience to cook, not flaunting wealth, so the ingredients are definitely chosen for their everyday, home-style quality.

Shu Yun said, "You're worrying unnecessarily. With the head chef of Fishing Platform in charge of Sichuan cuisine, how could they possibly let you get stuck with a fish bone? You just enjoy eating your fill at the TV station tomorrow. Anyway, we won't be there to see it."

"That's right. You go ahead and mercilessly pack on the pounds while the rest of us continue our diet."

Zeng Xiaoqi was speechless. It's as if I've betrayed the organization. Last time you guys secretly ate Fried Pork Chops, why didn't you mention dieting then? Hmph, those guys are all so sly!

「The next morning.」

After Lin Xu finished breakfast and took care of matters at the restaurant, he drove to the Yanjing City TV station to participate in the filming segment for the Fish with Pickled Greens dish.

「Elsewhere.」

As Li Qiang clocked into the company, he saw Qi Panpan standing in the tech department's office area from afar.

However, by the time he got closer, Qi Panpan had already entered her own office.

Clearly, she didn't want to run into him.

Standing at the door of the tech department manager's office, Li Qiang took a deep breath and knocked.

"Come in!"

He pushed the door open and placed a can of Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake on the desk. "I brought you some snacks."

Qi Panpan, pretending to read the meeting minutes, glanced over and said, "So flashy. You must have used this trick to charm many young women before... Go get the HR manager's signature; she's leaving for a job fair at nine-thirty."

After Li Qiang left, the stern-faced department manager's expression changed in an instant. She tossed aside the meeting minutes and eagerly picked up the can.

"No wonder netizens praise it. This Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake really is beautiful."

She happily took a photo of the can with her phone and sent it to her besties group chat, typing, "A beautiful day starts with Seven-colored Water Chestnut Cake, a gift from my fiancé-to-be! It's a genuine Lin Ji's Food product. Hurry and flood the screen with envy, haha!"

Many girls are like that; no matter how strong their aura or how elegant their demeanor, they tend to become silly in front of their best friends.

Soon, the group chat was filled with "blessings."

"May your chest get smaller and smaller."

"May your legs get shorter and shorter."

"May your butt get flatter and flatter."

"May your belly grow bigger and bigger."

"..."

Hahaha, just be jealous of me!

"Panpan, why 'fiancé-to-be'?"

"I would have normally accepted his confession, but he just had to dig his own grave and make me angry. So, I've given that stinker a 'suspended sentence'."

"Are these Water Chestnut Cakes really from Lin Ji's? I heard that Lin Ji's Water Chestnut Cakes sell out by noon. When did he buy them? He isn't tricking you, is he?"

Qi Panpan replied cheerfully, "No way. He was Lin Ji's first customer. He often brought snacks from Lin Ji that weren't sold to the public to share with colleagues. So, even though others can't buy these special Water Chestnut Cakes, he has no problem getting them."

In fact, the can of Water Chestnut Cake had been made especially for Li Qiang by Lin Xu the night before.

Li Qiang was about to escape singledom, and as his buddy, Lin Xu felt it was only right to give him a little push.

The friends in the group chat were truly envious now.

Being Lin Ji's first customer—what an immense honor!

「The TV station.」

Lin Xu parked his car, took the keys, and walked into the Travel Channel's office.

"Hello, Boss Lin."

"Welcome, welcome."

"Boss Lin, you haven't appeared in the videos for many episodes now, have you?"

"..."

Lin Xu smiled and greeted everyone before entering Zeng Xiaoqi's office.

The beautiful host was at her computer, busy managing the Lin Ji's Food online forum: highlighting important posts, deleting inappropriate comments, and banning ad bots.

"The Candied Ginger Slices are about to blow up! As soon as netizens share pictures, those who couldn't buy them go crazy. Some are even reselling unopened Candied Ginger Slices at high prices."

Lin Xu said with a smile, "The kitchen will increase production."

Making Candied Ginger Slices wasn't complicated or time-consuming, so they could definitely make several more batches each day.

While they were chatting, Dai Jianli came in holding a bag.

"You're here so early, Chef Dai? What's in the bag?"

Dai Jianli had planned to come early to familiarize himself with the venue. The kitchen setup at the filming location was more suited for home cooking, which could be slightly awkward for someone used to professional stoves.

He hadn't expected Lin Xu to arrive so early either. "I brought some homemade pickled items—pickled cabbage, pickled radish, pickled ginger, Pickled Peppers, wild mountain peppers—and a Grass Carp weighing a little over three jin. These are the usual ingredients for making Fish with Pickled Greens, nothing particularly fancy."

Zeng Xiaoqi hadn't expected Shu Yun (the "Boss Lady") to be so accurate. The home-style recipe indeed didn't use overly fancy ingredients.

She'd even wondered if Chef Dai might sneak a leopard coral grouper from Building 10.

If there were no restrictions on ingredients, this renowned chef might actually do something like that.

Soon, the filming venue was ready, and the program's consultant, Geng Lishan, also arrived on set.

While getting her makeup done, Zeng Xiaoqi didn't forget to tell the scriptwriter, Xiao Wei, "Make sure to cook extra rice. We ran short last time when Chef Song made steamed fish."

"Just focus on your makeup; you're always thinking about food! Your lines are written out for you; don't forget to memorize them while you're getting your makeup done."

Zeng Xiaoqi pouted. "It's not that I forgot! The food just captivated my mind. If you have to blame someone, blame the guest chefs for their amazing cooking that made my brain forget the lines. It's not that I didn't memorize them."

As she spoke, she looked down at her script and read, "My name is Zeng Xiaoqi: sour, a bad cook, and totally extra!"

"Xiao Wei!"

"Haha, just kidding, Zeng! The real lines are on the back. I'm off to cook the rice now. You focus on your makeup."

Zeng Xiaoqi picked up an eyebrow brush and started on her makeup.

But in her heart, she was already fantasizing about the sour, spicy, and savory taste of the Fish with Pickled Greens. For lunch today, should I have two bowls of rice, or three? What a dilemma!