

Folly 119

Chapter 119: Making Rou Jia Mo

On a corner of the bustling street, a man and a woman busily worked on their tasks. In front of them were two simple stoves, each topped with a pot.

One pot was filled with water that had already come to a boil, happily bubbling away.

The other pot contained a savory broth, with cubed meat mingling in the hot soup. The rich aroma wafted through the air, causing passersby to stop in their tracks.

Another collaboration between Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, and as always, it was perfect.

Lu Yuanfeng handled the heavy labor—kneading dough, carrying water, and stoking the fire—while Shuangshuang cut the meat Lu Yuanfeng brought into cubes and placed them in the broth seasoned with star anise and cinnamon.

She had left in a hurry last night without instructing Lu Yuanfeng to add various supplementary ingredients to the meat, so she needed to re-season it today, stewing the meat in the pot to infuse it with flavor. When customers arrived later, she'd chop the meat on the spot and make the meat sandwiches.

The bread for the meat sandwiches was somewhat different from steamed buns. The dough only needed to be half-leavened, unlike steamed buns which needed to be fully leavened, though the process was still quite tedious.

Shuangshuang first soaked an old dough starter in a bowl of water to use as yeast water. In ancient times, there was no yeast powder, but there was a substitute.

After making buns, people always saved a small piece of old dough to use next time during the leavening process.

"Lu Yuanfeng, you need to watch the dough kneading process closely; it's a bit different from kneading dough for steamed buns."

Speaking while demonstrating, Shuangshuang added the old dough water to the flour, stirring it with chopsticks until the flour in the bowl resembled snowflakes, and then began kneading the dough.

Bit by bit, the dough gradually became smooth in her hands. Only after that did Shuangshuang wrap it in a cloth. In such hot weather, it seemed an hour was enough for the dough to rise.

Following Shuangshuang's steps, Lu Yuanfeng kneaded the remaining dough. While waiting for it to rise, he played with Black Mink on the side.

The Little Black Mink seemed to have a good relationship with Lu Yuanfeng, chittering excitedly whenever it saw him.

Shuangshuang now realized that when the mink was angry or scared, it made a "hissing" sound, and when it was happy, it chattered nonstop, much like it was doing now.

The dough had almost risen, so Lu Yuanfeng placed the Black Mink into a small bag made of tree bark and strapped it onto his back, checking it multiple times.

Now, Black Mink was quite valuable, so he couldn't be careless at any time.

After washing his hands, Lu Yuanfeng noticed a bundle of wild vegetables among the items Shuangshuang had brought. He asked her about it.

"Shuangshuang, do you want to sprinkle some water on the wild vegetables you brought? They're about to wilt."

The weather was indeed the uniquely stifling summer heat; even with the big trees blocking the sun, the stuffiness was palpable, so the vegetables wilting was quite normal.

"Go ahead and sprinkle some. I'll take them to sell at the market later."

That bundle of wild vegetables could fetch a few coins.

"Why don't you make soup with the wild vegetables? A bowl of soup for a single coin, I'm sure many would drink it."

Lu Yuanfeng thought that since the weather was hot, Shuangshuang's meat sandwiches might be a bit dry, and a soup could offer some relief.

"You keep an eye on things here, I'll borrow a stove and make the soup."

"Then I'll add more firewood."

Mu Shuangshuang headed to Aunt Wang's house and returned shortly, borrowing a stove and a pot, thanks to Aunt Wang's help.

The soup could be kept simple—just a vegetable broth with a bit of minced meat.

Lu Yuanfeng watched as Shuangshuang cut the wild vegetables finely, took out a piece of semi-lean meat, chopped it up, and set it aside before starting to slice ginger, garlic, and spring onions.

Shuangshuang's cuts were particularly neat; the length and thickness were almost identical.

With three spoonfuls of clear oil heated up, the minced meat and ginger, garlic, all went into the pot, which immediately sizzled, releasing a wonderful aroma.

In the oil pot, the spices and minced meat seemed to dance, joyfully hissing and sizzling.

Mu Shuangshuang began to stir-fry them. Once the ginger and garlic had infused their aroma into the minced meat, she added water.

"Lu Yuanfeng, add a little more fire, the water needs to come to a boil."

Lu Yuanfeng quickly added wood; he watched as Shuangshuang started working with the dough again, the leavened dough looking like a small toy in her hands, transformed into a round shape in no time.

Larger than a bun, yet it was more flat.

These round molds didn't need steaming but were placed in the pot to fry. Frying two hundred pieces was indeed time-consuming.

It was truly tiring, but compared to those carrying goods at the docks, Mu Shuangshuang felt that she and Lu Yuanfeng had it much easier at this moment.

The laborers worked all day, earning perhaps a dozen or twenty coins, enough to bloody their shoulders, and still couldn't rest.

Shuangshuang poured clear oil into the hot large pot and started simmering the breads one by one.

Lu Yuanfeng played along, reducing the flame.

After simmering for about two minutes, Shuangshuang turned them over, the bottom of the bread had turned yellow. She cheerfully said to Lu Yuanfeng, "Halfway there, now let's see about the other side."

The first batch of breads was ready, and Aunt Wang came to help again.

She brought two wicker baskets from her home to hold the breads for Mu Shuangshuang. Obviously, two weren't enough. Shuangshuang gave her a few more coins and had her borrow some more, since renting things here was cheaper than at the tavern.

It was Lu Yuanfeng's first time seeing this method of making breads, and he was a little mesmerized by it.

In the baskets, the golden breads lay there, emitting a unique fragrance.

Lu Yuanfeng's stomach growled immediately, having skipped breakfast.

Without a word, Shuangshuang picked up a bread, sliced it open with a knife, then fished a piece of meat from the pot, chopped it up with some green peppers and mixed it together.

For the filling, she added a few spoonfuls of chili oil, sandwiched it between two pieces of bread, wrapped it in oiled paper, and handed it to Lu Yuanfeng.

"Eat up. Next time, have breakfast before leaving. Such a long way, you don't want to be hungry all day, do you? Silly."

As he accepted the meat sandwich from Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng quickly lowered his head, suddenly aware of the thumping in his chest, as if his heart was about to leap out.

The bread was hot in his hands, but he was reluctant to let go.

Reluctant to let go of the warmth in his hands.

So be it, foolish. If he could live like this for a lifetime, it wouldn't be so bad.

If a lifetime...

Lu Yuanfeng took a bite of the meat sandwich, his mouth filled with the aroma of meat, the scent of bread, a hint of green pepper, and a spicy fragrance.

"Mmm... so delicious..." Lu Yuanfeng mumbled incoherently while chewing on the sandwich.

"Is it good? Later, save one each for Little Zhi Yuanbao and Xiao Han, and then have another for yourself. One small sandwich surely isn't enough for a man."

As she spoke, Shuangshuang was already making Lu Yuanfeng a second sandwich, her movements skilled, whether cutting the bread or chopping the meat.

Lu Yuanfeng squinted, watching the young girl in front of him earnestly prepare breakfast, his heart suddenly tingling.

"Shuangshuang, your hair is about to come loose."

At her forehead, a lock of hair had fallen over her cheek, obscuring her fair face.

"Can you fix it for me? My hands are tied."