

Stay At home 871

Chapter 871 He Always Looked Impotent

Despite the conflicted emotions in his heart, Abraham still made his way into the restaurant in a determined manner. A bit of embarrassment certainly wasn't going to keep him from pursuing delicious food!

All of the customers that had already been waiting for a long time also quickly entered the restaurant.

"Abraham, male, 43 years old, normal human; symptoms: swollen abdomen, many areas of necrosis in the stomach wall, acid reflux, lackluster suppleness in the stomach and intestines, constipation.

Diagnosis: chronic gastric ulcers and inflammation with a high likelihood of developing into stomach cancer, coupled with chronic constipation."

"Vicennio, male, 29 years old, normal human; symptoms: excessively pale and colorless features, dry skin, weakness in the back and knees, mental exhaustion, cold extremities, back pain, decreasing memory functions. Diagnosis: severe impotence!"

"Harrison..."

Inside the kitchen, Mag inspected the strings of information flashing through his mind with a rather grim expression on his face. After installing the omniscient door, Mag had been made aware of many of the conditions that afflicted his customers, most of who appeared to be quite healthy on the outside.

Of course, Vicennio was an exception to this... He always looked impotent, so it would've been quite strange had the system given any other diagnosis.

However, it appeared that Abraham had some severe gastric issues. It was common knowledge that excessive consumption of food was quite taxing on the digestive system. Back in his past life, Mag had done his best to regulate his eating, but he had still ended up with some stomach issues.

In contrast, Abraham's issues were far more severe than anything he'd experienced in his past life. If he didn't address these issues properly, he'd develop stomach cancer, and that was an incurable condition.

Come to think of it, is cancer considered to be incurable in this world? Mag thought to himself curiously. This was an alternate world, after all, and gruesome injuries could be cured with a single spell here, so who was to say that magic couldn't cure cancer as well?

In any case, he had to warn Abraham about the issues regarding his digestive system. Even if cancer was curable in this world, it certainly wasn't a desirable condition to have, and if Abraham were to continue like this, cancer would most likely be the end result.

Yabemiya had begun taking orders from the customers, and even though the restaurant was completely packed, it wasn't rowdy in the slightest. All of the customers were either sitting in silence or conversing with acquaintances in hushed tones. There were no loud conversations, nor any arguments or conflicts.

Abraham glanced at the menacing minotaur demon and burly orc sitting across from him, and he was feeling rather uncomfortable.

He finally understood why Mag had made that bet with the head chef of Cary's Rotisserie back in Rodu. It was nothing personal; Mag simply didn't like how the restaurant was being run.

In Mamy Restaurant, there was no discrimination between social classes, nor even any racial restrictions.

Even as a duke of the Roth Empire, Abraham had never shared a dining table with a demon and an orc before.

However, there was also another man sitting at the table, and he displayed no fear at the sight of the minotaur demon sitting beside him. His calmness extended a calming effect to Abraham as well, and he gradually relaxed.

"Hello there, what would you like to order?" Yabemiya asked with a smile as she made her way over to him.

"Let me see." Abraham opened the menu on the table, and a series of images of delicious dishes were revealed to him.

Spicy grilled fish, delectable steak, alluring roujiamo... Every single dish looked so tempting, and Abraham was struggling to hold back his drool.

Why do I need to choose? Only a kid would need to make choices! Abraham closed the menu before turning to Yabemiya with a smile as he said, "I want one of every dish on this menu. Please ask Boss Mag to devise a suitable sequence for these dishes to be brought to me."

"One of everything?" Yabemiya was rather hesitant to hear this. Giant dragons, trolls, and demons did indeed have a far bigger appetite than the average human, but no matter how she looked at him, Abraham clearly didn't fall into any of those aforementioned categories; how was he going to be able to eat so much food?

All of the surrounding customers were also appraising Abraham with shock in their eyes. Setting aside how much it cost to order one of every dish on the menu, there was no way that a normal person would be able to eat all that food. After all, each person only had a single stomach!

"That's right, I'll get one of everything." Abraham nodded in confirmation. He had starved himself for a few days prior to coming here, so his stomach was completely empty. He didn't want to miss out on any of the delicious dishes here.

"Alright, please wait a moment." Yabemiya nodded without asking any further questions.

"Did you starve yourself before coming here?" Vicennio, who was sitting across from Abraham, asked with an astonished look in his eyes. Even though he was coming to Mamy Restaurant every day to replenish himself, he discovered that he had still underestimated just how lustful and insatiable a woman in her thirties was, and as opposed to improving his condition, he could only feel his impotence getting worse.

He was only glad that his wife still didn't know about Mamy Restaurant at the moment. Otherwise, he couldn't imagine how he was supposed to satisfy a woman who had eaten roujiamo...

“I never refuse any delicious food that comes my way,” Abraham replied with a smile and a nod. Vicennio was the only other human on his table, so Abraham instantly felt a connection with him. In the past, he didn’t have many opportunities to dine at the same table with a commoner, and he looked at the dark rings around Vicennio’s eyes as he advised in a meaningful and heartfelt manner, “Young man, I advise you to exercise restraint. Otherwise, you’re going to regret your decision when you grow older.”

Vicennio buried his face in his hand and heaved a long sigh upon hearing this. As a pretty boy, he had to make some sacrifices in order to continue living his current life. There was no turning back for him now, and no one was more aware than him of the negative effects of not exercising restraint. He was hoping to turn everything around through consuming Mag’s food, but he found himself in a worse situation than he’d begun with...

Mag was preparing to begin cooking when he heard Abraham making his order, and after a brief hesitation, he still decided to step in. Thus, he put down the cooking utensils in his hands before making his way directly over to Abraham with a smile on his face. “Duke Abraham, I don’t have a habit of interfering with the orders made by my customers, but I have an obligation to look out for the health of my customers. As such, I suggest you limit your order to two or three dishes, and that you pick some dishes with milder flavors.”

“Why? I’m as healthy as a horse! With so many delicious dishes on the menu, how can I only choose two or three? As for the flavor of the dishes, the stronger the better! Are you sure you’re not mistaken, Boss Mag?” Abraham appraised Mag with a confused expression as he patted his own chest as if to prove a point.

All of the customers also turned to Mag with curiosity in their eyes. Mag had never interfered with any customer’s order in the past, so why was he doing this now?

Mag shook his head, and said, “Sometimes, conditions will only begin to manifest after things have deteriorated to a certain extent. Let me ask you this, Duke Abraham: have you been experiencing dull and swelling abdominal pain? Are those symptoms exacerbated right after your meals? On top of that, do you often get a scorching feeling in your chest with occasional bursts of stomach acid flowing back into your oral cavity?”

Chapter 872 God of Cookery or God of Medicine?

“H-how did you know?”

Abraham had initially thought that Mag was only making something out of nothing, but his eyes abruptly widened with incredulity upon hearing this.

Mag was completely right! He had been suffering from the aforementioned symptoms for many years. In the beginning, he didn’t pay this any heed, but during recent times, the symptoms had been progressively worsening, to the extent that there were occasionally nights when he would wake up in agony. Only then did he reluctantly go to a doctor, and even the royal doctors in the palace had seen him for consultations.

The root of the condition lay in his stomach, and healing spells had alleviated a lot of his symptoms, but all of the doctors he saw asked him to do the same thing: eat less! They advised following a diet of plain rice congee for an extended period of time in conjunction with treatment sessions from healers.

However, this kind of treatment was akin to torture to him, so he refused to follow such a protocol without a second thought.

If he couldn't eat the delicious foods he wanted, then he might as well be dead!

Whenever the pain became too unbearable for him, he'd get a healer to alleviate his symptoms before rushing to the next restaurant. He had been living this way for many years, but he didn't think that Mag would be able to identify all of his symptoms just by looking at him.

Is Boss Mag a doctor as well? Everyone could tell from Abraham's expression that Mag was right, and all of them turned to Mag with curiosity and surprise in their eyes.

Mag maintained a calm expression as he replied, "I'm quite familiar with food, so I've also done some research into some conditions that can result from overeating. Your symptoms are already quite obvious, and if you don't address your condition, catastrophic consequences could follow, and in the worst-case scenario, you could even die. I cook delicious food for everyone to enjoy; I don't want to see my food inflicting harm on anyone."

Due to the exceptional ingredients used in Mag's dish, all of them were very beneficial to consume, and they even possessed miraculous effects, such as Mag's spicy grilled fish that had managed to cure Vivian's chronic condition.

However, regardless of how beneficial these dishes were to one's body, excessive consumption would result in negative consequences, especially for someone with chronic digestive conditions.

Chronic gastric ulcers resulted in an extremely fragile stomach wall, and overeating under such circumstances could result in stomach perforation or hemorrhages.

If Abraham were to eat one of every dish on the menu, that was around the amount of food a normal adult human would eat in four or five meals.

He wasn't going to be directly killing Abraham, but Abraham could quite possibly die because of him. Mag simply couldn't stand by idly and allow this to happen, even if it were rather uncharacteristic for him to step in.

"Is it really that serious...?" Abraham was also slowly growing rather concerned at the sight of Mag's serious expression. In the past, many doctors had told him the same thing, but he'd never taken their advice to heart. After all, eating delicious food was so enjoyable; how could it possibly be bad for him?

However, now that the same advice was being relayed by Mag, the most exceptional chef he'd ever seen, those words suddenly seemed to take on a different meaning.

He respected any chef who could cook delicious food, regardless of their identity or status.

Only by gaining an in-depth understanding of food and ingredients could one cook delicious dishes, and this was a skill that normal people didn't possess.

In recent times, his symptoms had indeed been getting worse, and even healing spells were unable to completely repress them, but he'd never even considered that these issues could have been caused by eating delicious foods.

As such, he was naturally growing quite uneasy. Each person only had one life, and he hadn't lived enough yet.

Besides, he'd just discovered a treasure vault. Aside from spicy grilled fish, black pepper steak, and braised chicken and rice, there were so many more alluring dishes on that menu; he couldn't afford to die yet!

"That's right. I'm sure you've heard the same advice from doctors already. I hope you can look after yourself better for your own health so you can taste more delicious dishes in the future," Mag replied with a smile and a nod. Thankfully, Abraham wasn't as stubborn as he'd feared.

"Then... alright," Abraham opened the menu again and carefully inspected it for a while before amending, "I'll get a fried rice, a sweet tofu pudding, and braised chicken and rice."

"Sure, please wait for a moment." Mag nodded before turning back to his kitchen. This was still slightly more than what a normal person would eat for a meal, but it was already a significant decrease for Abraham, so this was a good beginning. On top of that, all three of those dishes were quite nurturing to the stomach, so they would be beneficial to his condition.

"That's amazing! Boss Mag can diagnose people just by looking at them now?!"

"Chef + doctor = Boss Mag? That's... incredible!"

"I want Boss Mag to take a look at me now! Recently, I feel a really strong constricted feeling in my head as if it's being strangled by something."

"You don't need Boss Mag to take a look at you for that, old man; just loosen that headband that you're wearing, and your symptoms will immediately be alleviated."

"He looked so cool diagnosing customers in his chef's suit! As expected of the Boss Mag I know and love!"

"Oi, oi, please calm down; you do realize that Boss Mag is also a man, right?!"

"So what? Can't you see that none of these women have managed to catch his fancy? Maybe Boss Mag likes men... Hehe, I'm going to steal his heart for sure!"

Due to this brief interlude, all of the customers also began to discuss quietly among themselves. After all, everyone had an ailment or two that they couldn't be bothered to go to a doctor for. Furthermore, normal doctors couldn't diagnose patients just by looking at them like Mag could, so the demand for Mag as a doctor was steadily beginning to rise.

Is he a doctor as well? Firis was staring at Mag with a shocked expression. Elves cultivated nature magic, so most of them had good aptitude when it came to healing spells. However, even the best elven healers couldn't pinpoint a patient's condition just by looking at them.

Boss really is so awesome! Yabemiya was looking at Mag with admiration overflowing from her eyes.

As he listened to the conversations between the customers, an amused smile appeared on Mag's face, and he suggested, "System, how about you open a clinic for me on the side? That'll be much more profitable than selling food! All you have to do is supply me with medicine."

"As a candidate to become the God of Cookery, how can you pursue other occupations before you've honed your cooking skills to an acceptable level? On top of that, a true God of Cookery doesn't need to sell medicine, as his dishes are the best forms of medicine that can bring health and prosperity to his customers!" the system said in a proud voice.

"So you're saying dishes are medicine? Am I the God of Cookery or the God of Medicine?" Mag raised an eyebrow as he envisioned the following scenario in his mind.

Customer: "Boss Mag, what can I do about my current condition?"

"You'll be fine. Just take a spicy grilled fish and a Yangzhou fried rice together twice a day and you'll be cured in no time."

...

Er...

That was a rather strange scenario to Mag.

Chapter 873 The Princess Would Support Me, Right?

Mag switched on the stove, then turned to Firis with a smile, and said, "I don't have a habit of speaking while I cook, as I feel that's disrespectful to the ingredients, so you'll have to watch and learn as much as you can."

Firis immediately nodded with an earnest look on her face.

Thus, Mag didn't say anything further as he ladled some oil into the pan, allowing it to heat up before adding the spices. All types of ingredients were then added in an extremely well-rehearsed sequence, and watching Mag cook was like witnessing a graceful dance as he controlled the pan and spatula in an expert manner.

Firis looked on from the side, completely entranced by what she saw. Her cooking style ensured that each and every step was completed to perfection, thereby ensuring the consistency of the flavor of her dishes. However, as a result of this, her cooking was rather wooden and robotic.

However, watching Mag cook was quite a sensual experience. His lithe and powerful body appeared as if it had combined into one with the pan in his hand, and despite the weight of the heavy black metal pan, he was able to control it to perfection as if it were as light as a feather.

And this was only the beginning. Soon, Mag began adding pots and pans to the stovetops.

Before Firis knew it, there were four dishes being cooked on the stovetop at once, consisting of two portions of Yangzhou fried rice and two portions of black pepper steak. At the same time, there were around 100 kebabs being roasted on the rack, and Mag was able to keep track of all of these dishes at

once in a calm and graceful manner. He made no extra unnecessary movements as he traversed from one cooking station to another, and despite the amount of workload he was taking on all at once, the process wasn't chaotic in the slightest.

Soon, the fried rice was ready, the steaks were plated, cumin powder was applied to the beef kebabs, and one delicious dish after another was carried out to the eagerly awaiting customers.

Firis' eyes lit up further and further as she looked on from the side. If she were in his shoes, she wouldn't even be able to keep up this speed if she were only cooking one dish at a time, let alone so many at once.

What was even more incredible was that despite the number of dishes he was cooking at a time, each and every dish was still cooked to perfection, without any discrepancies in appearance between one dish and the other. An alluring aroma began to waft through the air, and even though Firis had just had lunch, she was still beginning to salivate uncontrollably.

She could hear a steady stream of praise from the customers outside, and all of them wore blissful smiles on their faces as their attention was drawn entirely to the delicious dishes before them.

Firis didn't doubt the authenticity of their reactions even for a single instant, as she had tasted these very same dishes during lunch earlier, and she knew just how extraordinary they were.

If possible, I also want to become a chef just like him. A thought that had never occurred to Firis suddenly sprang into her mind, and it quickly took root firmly in her heart.

Ever since she could remember, her life had constantly revolved around Princess Irina. She'd learned flower arrangement, cooking, massage... Everything she did was so that she could better serve the princess and make her happy.

However, she had never thought about what she wanted for herself.

In her world, there was only the princess and no one else, yet for the first time ever, she wanted to do something for herself.

Perhaps it was because she'd left the Wind Forest and been shown a whole new world, but she suddenly found that she was unable to rid herself of this desire.

The princess was still extremely important to her, but she now had a dream. She wanted to become a chef who could bring joy to his customers like Mag... This was a simple yet bold target.

The princess would support me, right? Firis was still rather concerned, but as she cast her gaze toward Mag, a determined look appeared in her eyes.

"Here's your Yangzhou fried rice." Yabemiya placed the first dish in front of Duke Abraham, who was feeling slightly dejected and anxious after hearing Mag's words of warning, but his eyes immediately lit up at the sight of the dish that had been placed before him.

Fried rice was considered to be a dish consumed by commoners, and stalls that sold this dish were quite prevalent on the food streets of Rodu. Most of the time, the dish was cooked using eggs and rice. Some chefs would add some other ingredients to make their fried rice more unique, but those two were the main ingredients used.

As a veteran foodie, Abraham had also tasted some fried rice, but aside from the fried rice he'd had once on the Renhe Food Street, he hadn't tasted any other fried rice that had struck him with the urge to eat it again in the future.

However, the appearance of this so-called Yangzhou fried rice came as quite a surprise to him.

At first glance, the combination of so many ingredients seemed to be rather chaotic, and in the world of professional chefs, this was often frowned upon as it was very difficult to make a dish taste harmonious with too many ingredients thrown into the mix.

However, the aroma that was wafting toward him was posing a stern challenge to this preconceived notion. The aromas of the ingredients in the dish were so rich and alluring that Abraham couldn't help but be swayed in his beliefs.

After inspecting the dish closely, the surprise in Abraham's eyes grew even more pronounced.

All of the ingredients had been diced into rice-sized pieces, including even the green peas. What was even more incredible to him was that the grains of rice had been covered in egg.

As opposed to the fried rice dishes he'd seen in the past, where the egg had been separated from the rice, the egg in this dish perfectly coated the grains of rice to give them a shimmering golden hue, but none of the individual grains of rice clumped together as a result.

H-how has he achieved this effect?! Abraham had never seen fried rice like this before.

The delectable aroma in the air was making his empty stomach rumble loudly, and he couldn't help but pick up his spoon, scooping a spoonful of fried rice into his mouth.

The fragrance of chopped green onions and eggs tickled his nose, the texture of grain-sized shrimp and ham was so smooth, and the egg-coated rice had a sweet flavor after being chewed well. Tastes of every ingredient melted in his mouth and tickled his taste buds. Even when it was all swallowed, the residual flavors still lingered in his mouth.

This is incredible!

A stunned expression appeared on Abraham's face; all of his prior doubts had been completely erased.

Not only had the multitude of ingredients not affected the taste of the dish in the slightest, they only worked to produce more layers of complexity in texture and flavor to the dish.

I can't believe a simple fried rice dish could taste so good. As expected of Boss Mag! At this point, Abraham found himself simply unable to stop eating as he scooped up one spoonful of fried rice into his mouth after another. The delectable flavor of the dish blossomed on the tip of his tongue, and he felt as if all of the hardships he'd endured during the past few days weren't even worthy of a mention in the pursuit of such an extraordinarily delicious dish.

"Ding!"

All of a sudden, his spoon struck his plate, and he looked down to find that he'd already finished the entire dish before he knew it. He immediately raised his hand, and said, "Please get me one more... no, three more portions of this dish!"

“With all due respect, didn’t you just make a promise to Boss?” Yabemiya said as she turned to Abraham with a resigned look on her face.

“Er...” Abraham’s face fell as he cast his gaze toward the kitchen, and after a brief internal conflict, he sighed, “Alright, next time, then.”

Not being able to eat as much as I want of such delicious dishes is simply far too painful! Abraham slumped down in his chair in a dejected manner while waiting for the next dish to be brought out to him.

I heard the owner of this restaurant has a half-elf daughter who’s around four years old? A figure wearing a straw hat suddenly stopped outside the restaurant.

Chapter 874 It Must be Because Father’s Smile is Too Handsome, Right?

Through the use of the omniscient door, Mag could see all of the ailments that his customers were suffering from, but he didn’t go around handing out diagnoses to everyone. After all, there were no perfectly healthy people in the world, and it was only normal to have a few niggles here and there.

Furthermore, he was a chef and a restaurant owner, so he really wasn’t qualified to practice medicine. Just because he could diagnose everyone’s conditions, it didn’t mean he knew how to cure them.

However, if there were some regular customers with extremely severe conditions that had to be addressed as quickly as possible, then Mag would commit these customers and their corresponding conditions to memory. He didn’t know how to cure them, but he would find chances in the future to issue a few gentle warnings to them. After all, it went against his character to remain silent despite having knowledge that could help others.

During the cooking process, Mag would cast an occasional furtive glance at Firis, and he was very pleased to see the earnest look in her eyes. Her attitude made it very rewarding for him to continue to teach her.

Mag had once seen a quote that went along the lines of “not all successful people are geniuses, but most of them work extremely hard.”

In the art of cooking, he was a complete noob. Even with the system’s assistance and all of the perfect experience bags he’d been given, the true key to his success was his ability to grind and put in all those hard hours in the test field for the God of Cookery.

Firis clearly possessed far superior aptitude compared to him, and it appeared that her attitude was very commendable as well.

“Miss Miya, is there really no way for us to order stinky tofu for lunch? Can you get Boss Mag to make a portion for me? After tasting it yesterday, it’s been the only thing that I can think about, and I can’t even concentrate on anything else that I’m doing,” Harrison said as he looked up at Yabemiya in a hopeful manner.

“I really want to eat it too. That flavor is simply unforgettable.”

“If Boss Mag is willing to serve stinky tofu for lunch, then please give me a portion as well!”

A few more customers immediately chimed in as they turned to Yabemiya with expectant looks in their eyes.

Yabemiya was always quite pleasant and accommodating, but on this occasion, she shook her head firmly, and replied, "I'm sorry, but I can't. Boss says that stinky tofu can only be served during the dinner service, and only 100 portions will be served in total."

Harrison and the other customers were all very dejected to hear this, and they were already beginning to think about coming back early for dinner so they didn't miss out on the 100 portions being served.

Abraham was just enjoying a portion of sweet tofu pudding when he overheard this conversation, and he asked, "Stinky tofu? What's that? Why isn't it on the menu?"

Generally speaking, dishes that were so unforgettable to customers were always exceptional dishes; this was something that he'd deduced during his years as a veteran foodie.

Vicennio replied, "It's a dish that Boss Mag only just released yesterday, and it's only sold during the dinner service. I've heard that it really stinks, so I don't plan on ever trying it."

"It stinks?" Abraham was rather surprised to hear this. He had tasted delicious cuisine all over the continent, but he'd never had anything that stank before.

A truly exceptional dish had to excel in appearance, aroma, and taste; how could a stinky dish possibly fit under that category, and why was it so unforgettable to those customers? Abraham was becoming more and more curious as he followed this train of thought.

"That's right, I've heard that it's a flavor that you'll never forget after eating it once. All of the people who've ordered it have displayed extremely strong reactions. There was one guy who tried to rush out the door, and Little Amy almost took his head off with a fireball, thinking that he was trying to get a free meal." A hint of lingering fear flashed through Vicennio's eyes as he thought back to the intense sequence of events that had unfolded the day before. If it weren't for the fact that the customer in question had turned around just in time, that fireball would've struck him on the back of the head.

"That's very interesting." Abraham was only becoming more intrigued by the second. Just how stinky would a dish have to be to evoke such a reaction.

"It sure is." Vicennio also wore an intrigued look on his face. After all, everyone liked delicious food, but it was the first time he'd ever seen anyone enjoy stinky food.

"You haven't had it, so you wouldn't understand. The stinkiness only stems from an extremely rich fragrance, so when a dish is stinky to a certain point, it goes back to become fragrant. This is something you'll only be able to interpret after you eat it," Harrison said in a slow voice, but from the glazed-over look in his eyes, it was quite clear that he was already somewhere else in his mind.

I have to try this dish for dinner! Even if it really does smell absolutely abhorrent, so be it; I can't afford to miss out on a dish like this, Abraham thought to himself. At this point, he'd already finished his tofu pudding, which was the last of the three dishes that he'd ordered. Even though he still wanted more, he could only reluctantly pay the bill before departing.

After walking out of the restaurant, he turned back to look at the sign hanging above the door as he sighed. "I haven't set foot outside of Rodu for 45 years, but it looks like I'll be staying for the rest of my life in Chaos City now."

The busy lunch service concluded, and Mag put down the pan in his hand as he turned off all of the stovetops. He heaved a faint sigh, and just as he was about to wipe the sweat from his forehead, a warm towel was handed over to him.

Mag faltered slightly upon seeing this, and then turned to discover Firis offering the towel to him with a faint blush on her face. After a brief hesitation, he accepted the towel and wiped his hands and forehead with it before handing it back to Firis with a smile. "Thanks."

"Y-you're welcome." Firis' blush became even more pronounced as she quickly rushed out the door with the towel in her hands. This was the first time she'd served anyone aside from the princess, and it was a man. Just the thought of this made her feel as if her heart were about to jump out of her throat.

However, she was doing this purely out of the admiration in her heart. She couldn't imagine how a normal human had been able to bring so much joy to so many customers during a short span of less than two hours.

In her eyes, Mag was practically glowing with radiance.

"Big Sister Firis, why is your face so red?" Amy asked with a curious expression as she held Ugly Duckling in her arms.

"I..." Firis was at a loss for how to respond.

"It must be because Father's smile is too handsome, right?" Amy asked with a smile.

Firis immediately thought back to Mag's warm smile upon hearing this. It was indeed very handsome.

"It's alright, Father smiles like that at everyone, so he doesn't feel anything special for you," Amy reassured.

Firis: "..."

Thus, the lunch service drew to an official conclusion after Sally used her water-type magic to clean up the entire restaurant and the kitchen.

Yabemiya strapped her little bag to her back, and then smiled at everyone as she said, "See you later, Boss, Amy, Firis. We're going to the ice cream now."

"I'm going to back to sleep and read. See you soon." Babla also left with Miya and the others.

Thus, Mag, Amy, and Firis were the only ones left in the restaurant.

"I..." Firis was feeling rather awkward, but there was no place for her to go. As time passed, she was only beginning to feel more awkward, and she could only look down at her shoes, not daring to look up at Mag.

Mag appraised the anxious Firis with a smile, and he was able to guess the thoughts that were running through her mind as he said, "If you don't have any place to go, you can stay and rest in the restaurant."

I'll be teaching you some things that you can do in the afternoon. Oh, I almost forgot; tomorrow is a rest day for the restaurant, so your official first day on the job will be delayed for a day. However, the restaurant is going to be expanded and upgraded soon, so you can truly begin cooking once you officially start."

Firis immediately looked up upon hearing this, and a surge of warmth flowed through her heart at the sight of Mag's trusting eyes. She nodded in an earnest manner, and said, "I'll be sure to work hard."

Firis? Why is she here? A figure outside the floor-to-ceiling windowpane was looking into the restaurant, surprised.

Chapter 875 Do You Not Know How to Talk? Are You a Mute?

Snarr had been in Chaos City for close to a month now, and he'd been searching for Alex this entire time.

Much to his surprise, a piece of news that shook the entire continent was spread from Rodu a few days ago. Alex was still alive, and he'd slain four 10th-tier powerful beings on his own, including the patriarch of the spatial demons, Benson.

This came as a complete shock to everyone across the entire continent, including Snarr himself.

Three years ago, all of the information that he'd gathered indicated that Alex had been completely crippled, and that it was impossible for him to recover from those injuries.

Otherwise, those beings that stood at the pinnacle of the Norland Continent would've never allowed Alex to emerge from that rainy night alive.

They only wanted him to live as a cripple so he could suffer pain that was worse than death.

However, three years later, he was back, and he was just as powerful as ever.

All of the beings who had played a role in his assassination were in complete disbelief. Even a divine deity shouldn't have been able to heal those injuries!

Snarr was also in disbelief because if all this were true, just how stupid did those beings have to be to have allowed Alex to survive?

10th-tier powerful beings were extremely rare even across the entire Norland Continent; how could they have made such a stupid mistake?

There was only one knight in the entire history of the Norland Continent capable of killing three 10th-tier powerful beings as well as Benson along with his Eye Beast on his own, and that was Alex.

Of course, what served as even more concrete proof of his return was that his purple-striped griffin, which had disappeared for three years as well, had also reappeared.

There was no one in this world aside from Alex who could tame that griffin.

This news created a massive stir across the entire continent, and countless powerful beings were undoubtedly suffering sleepless nights as a result.

Snarr was very elated that the princess had reunited with Alex, and he wasn't disheartened in the slightest that all the work he'd done in the past three years had gone to waste. After all, this was most definitely good news.

However, just as he was about to return to the Wind Forest, another piece of shocking news emerged: Irina had been deposed as princess by the panel of elders.

This piece of news had also shaken the entire Norland Continent.

If it weren't for the existence of Alex, Irina would most definitely be the most powerful being on the entire continent among the current younger generation.

Even while being attacked by six 10th-tier powerful beings, she'd managed to kill three of them, which was an extraordinary feat that very few people on the continent could achieve.

With the lengthy lifespans that all elves possessed, it was almost scary to imagine what kind of heights she'd scale to in the future.

However, just as everyone had thought that she would become the next elven queen for sure, she was deposed during the ceremony.

Snarr was quite surprised by this news, but he could also deduce the factors that had led to this. He'd also heard that Alex had appeared in the Wind Forest on the same day, and that Irina was now in seclusion in her cave, so at the very least, she was still alive.

As Irina's right-hand man, he naturally couldn't return to the Wind Forest at a time like this. As such, he was very concerned about Firis. He'd heard that Alex had arrived at Chaos City two days ago before announcing a firm stance against mercenary squads that hunted down elves, and that an elven woman had accompanied him at the time. Thus, he'd been wandering Chaos City for the past two days in order to tie up all of the loose ends in his investigation as well as to search for Firis.

Much to his surprise, Firis was in this very restaurant, and this discovery filled him with both elation and befuddlement.

During this recent period of time, he'd expended a lot of effort to search for Alex and his daughter. Even though he hadn't found any concrete leads, all of the information that he'd gathered suggested that Chaos City was the likeliest place for the two of them to be.

After investigating the few half-elves in Chaos City, everything seemed to be pointing toward this Mamy Restaurant.

Now that Alex had returned, there was no need for him to continue investigating this restaurant, but his curiosity still urged him to come here and give himself some closure in his investigation. Thus, found himself outside the restaurant, looking at Firis with a shocked expression on his face.

From what she's wearing, it appears that she's an employee of this restaurant already. Is this just a coincidence, or was it by design? Snarr turned away from the restaurant and inspected Mag out of the corners of his eyes.

Just as Snarr was getting wrapped up in his own thoughts, the restaurant doors were opened, and a half-elf little girl emerged with a curious look on her face. "Your hat looks really good, Uncle Straw Hat; did you weave it yourself?"

What?! An incredulous look immediately appeared in Snarr's eyes.

This half-elf little girl had blue eyes, long silver hair, and a little pair of virtually translucent pointy ears. Her intricate facial features looked as if they'd been carved out of a block of the finest jade, and she was the spitting image of Irina in her childhood.

Snarr appeared to be a young man, but he was actually already 200 years old. Even so, he was considered to be quite young in the elven race.

As someone who'd been designated to protect Princess Irina by the elven queen, he'd watched her grow up through every stage of her life. Even though he was nowhere near as powerful as the princess now, he could still clearly remember what the princess had looked like as a child.

This little girl was a half-elf, but her facial features were almost completely identical to those of a younger Irina, so how could he not be surprised?

"Do you not know how to talk? Are you a mute?" A hint of pity immediately appeared in Amy's eyes, and she cast a quick glance back at the restaurant before carefully pulling out a copper coin that she handed over to Snarr as she whispered, "Go by some food for yourself, Uncle Straw Hat. I saved this up in secret, so you can't let Father know."

Snarr looked at the pure smile on Amy's face and the copper coins being held in her little hands, and he experienced a sense of *deja vu*, just as if he were looking at the princess as a little girl who was holding a snowball in her hands.

He was wearing tattered clothes and an old straw hat, so he really did look like a homeless man at the moment.

After a brief hesitation, Snarr accepted the copper coin before giving Amy a warm smile, and then taking a final glance at the restaurant before slowly departing.

Regardless of whether he had guessed right or not, the best thing he could do for now was clearly to leave everything as it currently was.

As for approaching Firis to ask her about what had happened in the Wind Forest, that would just have to wait until a more suitable opportunity arose.

Back when Alex had appeared in Rodu, there was a sign on this restaurant's door stating that the owner had gone to Rodu to cook for the king.

When Alex had appeared in the Wind Forest and Chaos City a few days ago, the owner of this restaurant had gone out for a day to procure new ingredients.

Too many coincidences simply culminated in irrefutable truths.

After ascertaining all that, Snarr sped up even further, and quickly disappeared into the crowd on the plaza.

“What a strange uncle.” Amy shook her head before setting Ugly Duckling down in front of the restaurant to play with it.

At this moment, a middle-aged man in a Catering Association uniform made his way over to Amy with a smile, and asked, “Little girl, is the owner of this restaurant here?”

Chapter 876 I Trust You“ll Also Look Very Beautiful in Female Attire

“You are looking at her.”

Amy looked at the middle-aged man and nodded.

“Uh...” The man looked at Amy solemnly, and then scratched his head. “Is the owner of this restaurant your father?”

Mag heard the conversation at the door and came out. “May I help you?” he asked, looking at the man in the Catering Association uniform.

The Catering Association had disappeared from his life for a long time. After the last battle for the ranking, it was said that the Catering Association was reorganizing. They had announced to the public that the food competition had been stopped indefinitely, and that the Catering Association would take on a new look after the rectification. Mag hadn’t heard anything about the Catering Association for three months.

The man’s face brightened when he saw Mag.

“You must be the owner of Mamy Restaurant!” he said, excited. “You see, the Catering Association, after reorganization and improvement, is ready to launch an entirely new food competition, and now we’re looking for participating restaurants. In the last competition, five dishes of Mamy Restaurant entered the top 100. Really impressive. Will you participate in this new food competition?”

“A new food competition?” Mag looked at the man, thoughtful.

Now that his restaurant was famous, there was no need to increase its popularity through food ranking. Besides, if the procedure was as tedious as before and required him to pay for his own tickets, he had no desire to participate.

Seeing the hesitation on Mag’s face, the man hurriedly said, “The rules of the competition are totally different from those before. Because of the notorious fraud in the past, the result of the competition is no longer decided by guests’ votes, but by a review group of 12 anonymous experts, who will eat in each restaurant and then make a fair evaluation. They will rate the dining environment and the taste of food, and then we’ll get the final rankings.

“In addition to the rankings of 30 best restaurants, there are also five sub rankings, each of which have 20 spots. They are: meat dish rankings, aquatic dish rankings, soup rankings, veggie dish rankings, and snack rankings.

“No participating restaurant needs to pay any fees. The food reviewers will eat in the restaurants as ordinary guests, and will not inform the restaurants. All participating restaurants must be willing to accept the evaluation from them.”

“The rules sure have changed a lot.” Mag nodded slightly. These criteria were similar to those of the Michelin restaurants. Anonymous food reviewers could largely avoid the occurrence of fraud and do a more objective evaluation of food.

Having overall rankings and five sub rankings was really convenient. After all, the original purpose of food rankings was to better recommend delicious food to customers. The food association seemed to have returned to its original passion.

Of course, the more important thing was the simplification of the process. Restaurants only needed to sign up, and didn’t have to spend manpower and money on the competition. That was undoubtedly a significant improvement to the previous Catering Association.

Yet Mag was still not interested. His restaurant needed to limit the flow of customers now, so there was no point in continuing to attract customers. He was not one who wanted to be the first in everything.

“New mission!” the system called out suddenly when Mag was about to politely decline. “Take part in the competition and win first place in all the rankings!”

“What?!” Mag replied, raising an eyebrow.

“Your reward for mission completion: a chance at the God of Cookery upgrade wheel. Your punishment for mission failure: dance to Gokuraku Jodo in front of the restaurant in female attire.”

It was all Mag could do not to curse.

“How can you be so despicable, System?!” Mag fumed. Maybe he could take the first place in the overall rankings and four sub rankings, but he could never win the veggie dish rankings, not when he had no veggie dishes whatsoever on the menu!

Mag had not even the slightest hope of accomplishing the mission; he couldn’t avoid the punishment of dancing to Gokuraku Jodo in female attire.

“I’m positive you’ll find a way to do the impossible,” the system, smiling. “You’ll become a great God...

“...or a fantastic drag queen.”

“You smug son of a...” Mag crushed out his anger as the middle-aged man looked at him with great expectations. “Sign me up,” he said at last.

The man’s face lit up immediately. “Great! This is the agreement. Please sign here if there is no problem.” He handed a piece of paper to Mag.

Mag skimmed the terms. The agreement was simple; it was similar to what the staff had said before. There were no additional terms. It was just to confirm that the restaurant participated in the competition and accepted the evaluation from the reviewers. He signed his name and the name of his restaurant.

“I’m sure Mamy Restaurant will get a great ranking,” the staff said sincerely, and took his leave.

Mag gave a dry smile.

Getting the top spot in all six rankings. The system was really pushing him to his limits.

“System, explain to me, why are you so determined to see me dance to Gokuraku Jodo in female clothing?” Mag demanded as he walked back into the restaurant in a bad mood.

“Your task has been released. You should focus on finishing it. As for your question, I choose not to answer it.” Mag could hear a smile in its voice.

“You bastard!” Mag mumbled.

Mag rubbed his brow with his thumb and forefinger. He was confident he would win the overall rankings and four sub rankings, but how could he manage to take the first spot in the veggie dish rankings? The only dish that hadn’t been launched was Peking Duck, but there was no way a Peking Duck would pass for a veggie dish!

Firis was waiting expectantly for Mag to teach her how to cook, but when she saw his furrowed brow, she became nervous and uneasy. “Did I do something wrong?” she asked hesitantly in a small voice.

Yet Mag was so preoccupied with his own thoughts, he seemed not to hear her. “Maybe I can stir-fry some bean sprouts.”

Firis’s cheeks turned red in a split second. Bean Sprout was the nickname used only by her princess, so when she heard Mag say it, she couldn’t help but feel embarrassed.

“Bean sprout?” Amy echoed, looking at Firis with her big eyes. “Big Sister Bean Sprout? I like the sound of it!”

Firis opened her mouth and closed it. She looked at Amy’s innocent face and nodded with a wry smile.

By then, Mag had remembered himself. He cleared his mind and turned to Firis. “Let’s go to the market and buy some ingredients for you to practice your cooking skills.”

Chapter 877 Pikachu

Amy needed to study in Urien’s place today. Mag took her there, and then took Firis to the market.

“Pikachu! A freshly caught pikachu! Its meat is tenderer than rabbit! A rare 1st-tier electric-type magic beast. Come and buy it!”

“Ice and fire lotuses, freshly picked from the Kachar mountain, 1000 gold coins each. They are perfect tonics for prolonging life!”

“Blood python from the black swamp, alive! Only 100 gold coins! Don’t worry about killing, draining blood, and cutting out the gallbladder; I’ll do it for you. Although it’s extremely poisonous, its blood and gallbladder are both very nourishing, and they are particularly helpful to detoxify your body. Its meat can be used to make soup, which is divine!”

Mag and Firis were greeted by cries of sellers as soon as they entered the market.

There were all kinds of beasts and ordinary livestock hanging on meat racks. They had been skinned. Some butchers were killing animals in their stands. The scene was quite brutal and bloody.

Mag took a look at the penguin-like creature in the cage at a stand. Although it was yellow and looked just like a pikachu, it didn't seem to be able to release a 100,000 volt thunderbolt. Its teeth were deformed and rotten. Obviously it could not make a good pet. It could only lie there pitifully, waiting to be eaten.

This was the first time that Firis had come to the market. The sight of bloody meat hanging on racks and beasts struggling in the hands of butchers was too much for her. She hid behind Mag, her face pale like the white of a hardboiled egg.

Mag looked back at Firis and quickly understood her fear and confusion. He smiled, and said, "This is the market. Residents of Chaos City can buy all kinds of ingredients here, and then they take them home to cook. It's somewhat different from obtaining ingredients directly in the wild. Most of the butchers in charge of slaughter are not hunters. They buy game from hunters or mercenaries, then kill and sell it in the market. Buyers just need to come here to get the ingredients they want. That is the division of labor and cooperation in the market."

"Division of labor?" Firis echoed, thoughtful. She watched as a man in front of a stall pointed to a piece of meat, paid some coins, and then took the meat directly.

The elves of the Wind Forest lived a life of self-sufficiency. Some of the elves were in charge of hunting, and some of them were responsible for cooking. They didn't have to pay for food, unlike the people here. Buying things from people she didn't know seemed strange to her.

"Markets are product of social development," said Mag. "When people produce more than they can consume, superfluous product appears, which can then be traded. The use of currency greatly facilitates the trading of goods. Most parts of the Norland Continent are very developed; you can buy almost anything you want anywhere as long as you have money. You elves prefer to keep to yourselves. You don't use money unless you do business with other races."

"Currency, product..." Firis had never used money in the Wind Forest. She could find everything she needed in the forest or in their warehouse. Only then did she realize that the world outside the forest was so different.

"Let's buy some beef first. I'll teach you how to make beef kebabs today," Mag told Firis, and then he went straight to a beef stand.

Making the sauce and adjusting the temperature of the cookfire required skills. The kebabs had to be watched over by someone all the time and kept turning to avoid being burned. Mag had to do everything himself, so he often overcooked some kebabs, and sometimes even burned a whole batch. It hurt him to waste expensive ingredients.

It would be great if someone could help him make beef kebabs.

Of course, the most important thing was there were many people who ordered kebabs, so he could make huge profits off this dish every day.

Mag had first planned to have Firis start with Yangzhou fried rice, but he had thought better of it. It would be much more difficult and take a longer time for her to master Yangzhou fried rice.

The eggs had to be perfectly wrapped over the rice grains and not be damaged in the process of stir-frying. All the ingredients had to achieve their perfect tastes at the exact same time. Furthermore, wielding a heavy iron wok required skill as well as strength. So, Mag had decided not to teach Firis cooking Yangzhou fried rice.

Besides, Mag could operate four woks at the same time.

After careful consideration, he felt beef kebabs were undoubtedly the best for Firis to learn.

Firis quickened her pace to catch up with Mag. "You'll teach me how to grill cubes of beef over a cookfire?" she asked, her voice full of pleasant surprise.

"Yes." Mag said, looking over the beef on the rack.

A bright smile bloomed on her face. The way Mag cooked the beef was totally different from what she had seen before. She had never seen anyone cut beef into small pieces and grill them on skewers, but the taste of that dish was to die for.

She would soon be able to find out what secrets lay in that dish. She was extremely excited, but she managed to calm herself down and watched Mag select beef. Learning how to choose ingredients was the first step to becoming a good cook. That was what Mag told her on their way here.

"I'll have the chuck part," Mag said, pointing. "Could you please cut off the lean meat at the bottom? I don't want that."

"This meat is very good. Stew it in a pot, and you'll get yourself a perfect dish to go with wine. You really don't want it?" The butcher smiled and picked up the meat.

Mag shook his head. "Good as it is, I don't need it."

"OK, I'll cut it off for you." The butcher said nothing more. He cut off the lean meat, weighed the other part, tied it with a length of straw rope, and handed it to Mag.

Mag paid the money and took Firis to the next beef stand.

Firis looked at the meat in Mag's hand. Thin lines of fat ran through the beef. Beautiful.

Yet, she didn't understand why Mag chose the chuck part, because most people preferred to eat lean meat.

Mag saw the doubt on her face. "Chuck meat is the best when it comes to making kebabs. The fat in it is the secret. Put the meat on the fire. You don't need to brush much oil over it. The fat will melt and come out and make the meat tenderer and juicier," he explained with a smile.

"But not all chuck meat is good enough. Look at the meat I chose. The fat is evenly distributed, and the meat is fresh. This chunk of meat is top grade, but that one is not," he said, pointing to a piece of meat hanging on a rack.

Chapter 878 It's Much More Comfortable Sitting Here Than Standing In The Kitchen

Mag continued to search for top-grade beef while explaining to Firis. The girl listened attentively. She had already gotten totally used to the smells of the market and the scenes of animal slaughter. She asked questions when she didn't understand, and Mag answered them one by one.

They visited five beef stands in a row, but only managed to find two acceptable pieces of chuck meat. "Considering it's already noon, I can't complain too much. Anyway, the two pieces should be enough for you to practice your skills, I think."

"When is the best time to come to the market, Boss?" asked Firis curiously.

"The best time to come is in the morning, when all the ingredients are the freshest," answered Mag, "but smart buyers will wait here even before dawn begins to break because that's when the butchers start to work. This way, they get to see the health of the cattle, and the beef cut from the freshly slaughtered cattle is indisputably the best."

"You are obviously an expert in buying meat, sir," a man running a beef stand cut in. "The people who are responsible for buying ingredients for big and small restaurants come here as soon as the market lights go on in the early hours of morning. They place their orders even before the livestock is killed, so you can't hope to buy a good part like a kidney if you don't come early enough."

"Some people come here that early just to buy the best parts of meat?" Firis didn't understand, but she looked at Mag with admiration. She had seen his attitude towards food, so she was convinced that Mag had to be among those people.

Mag nodded. "Ingredients are the foundation of food. A great chef can make a delicious dish with inferior ingredients, to be sure, but that dish is far from perfect in his mind."

"Are perfect ingredients always expensive and rare?" asked Firis.

"Not necessarily. In fact, perfect ingredients have nothing to do with price or rarity," Mag said, shaking his head slightly. "It's meaningless to use phoenix eggs in fried rice for ordinary people. Different restaurants target different kinds of customers. Know your target customers and make the best food they can afford. That's the basic ability of an excellent chef."

"Make the best food the target customers can afford," Firis echoed, thoughtful.

There were many kinds of vegetables at the market, such as radishes, cabbages, and green peppers. Mag also found some strange ones that were unique to this world, such as monkey heads and overlords, which opened his eyes to a large extent, but he still hadn't figured out what vegetable he should cook for the competition.

The system wanted him to do the impossible, so he judged that he only had himself to rely on to win the veggie dish rankings.

Perhaps the system wanted to test his creative abilities in cooking.

He could never do such a shameful thing as dancing in front of the restaurant in female clothing.

Mag made note of the vegetables he had seen today in his mind. He decided to think about the veggie dishes he had tried in his previous life when he went back. Without the system's experience bag, he felt pressure weighing down on him.

"It's getting late. Time to get back. It takes time to make sauce. If we go back too late, I won't be able to teach you how to cook kebabs today," Mag told Firis. He bought some spices at a spice stand, and then took Firis back to the restaurant.

Mag put on his apron, stopped at the kitchen door, and looked back at Firis, who was tying up her apron around her waist. "Are you sure you want to become a cook?" he asked suddenly.

Firis thought for a moment, and then nodded solemnly.

"Good. I hope you can become a good cook soon. I'll promote you and double your salary when you're good enough." Mag smiled and stepped into the kitchen.

"The temperature of the cookfire is crucial when grilling beef kebabs," Mag said when they were both in the kitchen. "It will take a lot of practice to get the hang of adjusting the temperature, but before that, I'll teach you how to make sauce, which is also very important.

"If kebab is the body, then sauce is the soul. Anyone can grill kebabs, but they can have 100 different tastes in 100 different places. Why is that? Because they use different sauces. As such, how good a kebab tastes depends largely on how good the sauce is."

Mag put the spices he had just bought at the market on the table.

"So how to make the sauce, Boss?" Firis asked, looking at Mag nervously. Her learning journey had begun.

"There are three kinds of sauces I make, which are barbecue sauce, spicy sauce, and garlic sauce. The three sauces bring three different flavors to the beef Kebabs sold in the restaurant, which can satisfy most of the customers." Mag smiled. "Of course, you can always be inventive and create new sauces, but unless customers love them, you can't use them. Now let me show you the spices you need and how to make the three sauces."

Firis nodded. "OK." She seldom used spices when cooking; salt was the only seasoning she added in most cases, so she didn't know much about the spices, which had strange fragrance.

Mag put the beef in the fridge, and then patiently introduced Firis to the spices.

Of course, a chef's best teacher was their tongue and nose. After chewing dozens of peppercorns, Firis memorized the numbing sensation they created in the mouth.

Mag taught her how to make the barbecue sauce first. He told her in detail the order in which each spice was added, the amount needed, and the time interval between them. Then he walked out of the kitchen, leaving Firis to it.

It had taken Mag several tens of days to master the skills of making the three sauces, so he didn't hold out much hope of her making something to his satisfaction by dinner.

Mag found a piece of paper and a pencil, and put them on the table. He then poured himself a cup of tea and sat down. It was much more comfortable sitting here than standing in the kitchen.

He began to think about the vegetable dishes he had eaten in his previous life that impressed him.

“Sour and spicy shredded potatoes, braised bamboo shoots, fried corn...” One dish after another passed through Mag’s mind. He had tried many amazing veggie dishes, but he didn’t know which one could beat all the restaurants in the Aden Square and make it to the top of the veggie dish rankings.

“Which one should I choose?” When he raised his head and looked into the kitchen, his eyes widened in disbelief.

Spices were flying in a circle around Firis, like the ribbon around a dancer.

Green light shone from her body, her eyes closed tightly; she looked as if she were meditating.

Suddenly, her eyes snapped open.

The spices fell into the bowl in front of her. The soy sauce bottle floated up, the lid came off, and the soy sauce poured into the bowl without her even touching it. More bottles and cans were opened, and various kinds of spices and seasonings were added into the big bowl in an orderly fashion.

Chapter 879 No, It’s Just Perfect

“Look, System! Look! She is using magic to make sauce! That’s not fair!” Mag called out to the system after freezing for a moment in shock.

Wind elements were circling around the body of Firis, adding the spices and seasonings into the big bowl in front of her. Bottles and cans were floating in the air with their lids open. It looked like a miracle to Mag.

The system sighed. “Everything would be a lot easier if she were my host.”

Mag didn’t know if her magic would make the sauce even more magical, but he was clearly impressed. He looked envious. “Magicians sure are cooler than swordsmen!”

Five minutes later, the bottles and cans were covered again, and flew gently back to their original positions.

Firis looked down at the brown thick sauce in front of her, surprised and happy. The fragrance of the sauce found its way into her nose. It seemed that it was no different from the sauce made by Mag.

The pleasant smell tickled his nose the moment Mag walked into the kitchen. “Done?” He took a deep sniff and decided he liked the mellow fragrance. The aroma alone was enough for Mag to think highly of it.

“Yes, please try it.” Firis looked at Mag, her hands gripping her skirt nervously.

Mag walked over. The brown sauce in the large porcelain bowl looked very thick. He stirred it gently with a chopstick, forming ripples on the surface. The mixture was smooth, without any lumps whatsoever.

“The fragrance is good, and so is the thickness,” Mag said. Then he brought the chopstick to his mouth and licked it with the tip of his tongue. He closed his eyes.

The mellow taste of the sauce spread across his mouth in a heartbeat. All the different spices and seasonings had contributed a variety of flavors to the sauce, fascinating him.

However, he couldn't shake off the feeling that something was wrong. What was it?

Mag's brow wrinkled. He had to admit, though, that she had done quite well on the very first try after seeing him demonstrate it only once. She was absolutely a genius.

After all, the sauce he had made for the first time was extremely disgusting, even with the system's experience bag.

Her sauce was very good, but it seemed to Mag something was missing.

Firis looked at Mag uneasily. Her heart sank when she saw him frown.

Although she hadn't expected to succeed on her first attempt, she had hoped that the sauce would be near the required standard.

Mag didn't open his eyes. He licked the chopstick one more time.

The kitchen was so quiet she could hear her own nervous breathing. Ugly duckling raised its lazy head from the counter, only to drop it back down again when it saw what they were about.

After what seemed to be several minutes, Mag opened his eyes, put down the chopstick, and looked at Firis. “Did you use magic to stir it?”

“Yes,” Firis answered hurriedly. “I used a miniature tornado to drive the sauce to rotate so that everything can be mixed up completely. Is there a problem?”

“No wonder.” Mag smiled as Firis kept a tense expression. “You have combined everything almost perfectly, but the soul of your sauce is lost.”

“The soul?” Firis was as confused as she was depressed.

Mag saw the discouraged look on her face. “Don't lose heart. You did a much better job than I had when I tried making it for the first time. The sauce I made was just awful. You mixed all the spices and seasonings very well. The quantity and order of them were well controlled, and there were almost no defects and errors. You should be proud of yourself.”

Firis's eyes brightened again.

“But good food has a soul,” continued Mag. “Precision is just one of the many key elements. Only when you feel the change of food with your heart and hands can you infuse the soul into it.”

“So should I abandon magic and cook with my hands?” Firis asked.

Mag shook his head. “No. Your talent in magic is your advantage. It can make you control more accurately. You don’t know how many chefs wish to have the power that you have.” He pointed to the sauce in front of him. “There is only one thing you need to improve. Use your hand instead of magic to mix the sauce. Feel the change of everything, and use your heart to feel the critical point where everything is perfect. Your sauce will be impeccable when you find that point.

“Although magic is convenient, that critical point can only be felt by your hands. Remember, overdoing is as much to be avoided as underdoing.”

“Critical point...” After thinking for a moment, Firis’s eyes suddenly lit up. She finally understood why Mag was such a great chef. He didn’t just cook with his hands; he cooked with his heart, and he became one with the food and the tools he used when cooking.

Firis was a good cook herself. She had thought cooking was boring and difficult, so she had seldom used her hands, let alone heart. Mag’s words were like a beam of light, lighting up her way.

She could cook with precision, but the soul of a dish lay in the chef’s devotion.

“Try again,” Mag said with a smile, and then left the kitchen.

“Not even enough. Try again.

“The thickness is wrong.

“No.”

...

Mag sat at the table, tasting the sauces made by Firis and making brief comments.

He had lost count of how many times he had said no, but she was not even a bit disheartened. Her determination never wavered.

The sun crept slowly towards the western horizon. Mag looked at the clock on the wall. It was time to prepare dinner. When he was about to stand up, Firis came out with another bowl of sauce and put it gently in front of Mag. She looked calm, but the expectation in her eyes was hard to hide.

Mag looked at the sauce. It was thick and smooth, and smelled wonderful.

He dipped a chopstick into it and tasted it.

His eyes widened. A familiar and delicious taste exploded on his tongue. It was rich and strong, just the way he liked it.

“Is it bad?” asked Firis nervously.

“No, it’s just perfect!” Mag put down the chopstick and stared at her like she were a treasure he had found.

Firis flushed under Mag's stare, but she was also over the moon.

She had searched for the critical point that Mag had told her the whole afternoon. After countless trials and errors, she had finally understood the characteristics of those spices more deeply and found the critical point this time.

It was a very strange feeling. She had stopped stirring the sauce when a voice suddenly sounded in her head, telling her to stop.

"Congratulations! You have mastered the mixing of barbecue-flavored sauce. I'll teach you the other two sauces next time. Now let me show you how to grill kebabs." Mag got up and went to the kitchen. Firis smiled excitedly and hastily followed after.

Grilling kebabs was easier said than done. Firis had so much to learn; how to control the fire, how to turn the kebabs to cook them evenly, when to brush the sauce, and how to tell when they were cooked to perfection. These skills could only be obtained through a large amount of practice.

Cutting beef into cubes and skewering them was effortless to Firis. She could do it much quicker than Mag with the help of magic.

In order to train her, Mag asked her to cut all the beef he needed for tonight and had her skewer it with bamboo sticks. Then he asked her to cut up all the other ingredients for other dishes, and told her it was also to train her cutting skills.

Mag watched as evenly chopped pieces of ingredients fell into several large containers. Each and every piece was so beautiful that even he himself couldn't do better. He looked at Firis, who was now surrounded by many tiny wind blades. She's like a cutting machine, Mag thought to himself.

Mag used to take two hours to prepare the ingredients, but Firis finished it in half an hour.

Mag then happily started teaching her how to cook beef kebab.

He told her about the advantages of beef kebabs and the temperature range of the grill, and taught her when to do what and how to do it. He was patient and meticulous.

But still he worried it might prove to be too difficult, especially for one who was new to kebabs.

It had taken him dozens of days of practice to make the kebabs acceptable to the system, and that had been with the help of the experience of many master chefs.

Of course, he had the patience to wait. It was not easy to become a chef. The good thing was she had talent as well as basic skills.

Firis listened attentively. Grilling kebabs was not of the same difficulty level as making sauce; she could tell just by listening to him.

"I have taught you everything you need to know. Remember the taste and then recreate it," Mag said, handing over one of the two kebabs he had just cooked to Firis, and walked out of the kitchen, eating the other one. Firis had helped him finish the preparation of ingredients in advance, so he had one more hour to rest today.

Firis looked at the beef kebab in her hand. The strong aroma of the beef and sauce made her mouth water. The sauce was made by her, while the beef was bought at the market.

The fat parts of the beef looked like small crystals. The sauce was well distributed. The surface of each piece was covered with grease. It looked very tempting.

After a short hesitation, Firis opened her mouth and bit off a piece of beef.

Her beautiful eyes went round when her white teeth bit into the meat. Tasty juice came out and mixed with the sauce, stimulating her taste buds. The sauce made the beef even more flavorful.

The more she chewed, the better it tasted, so she naturally chewed faster and faster. It was an interesting virtuous circle. She chewed happily until she swallowed the meat into her stomach, yet the pleasant taste still lingered in her mouth.

This beef kebab tasted a little different from the ones she had had for lunch. Perhaps that was because she now had a much deeper understanding of this dish now that she had seen firsthand Mag's wisdom and skills in making the sauce and grilling the kebabs.

She finished her kebab in no time at all. She licked the sauce off her fingers, her eyes shining with determination.

She looked at Mag, who was writing on a piece of paper, took a deep breath, and picked up a raw beef kebab.

...

"Eggplant with garlic sauce... maybe this dish will help me win the competition," Mag whispered.

Mag's eyes suddenly brightened after crossing off countless dishes. He wrote down eggplant with garlic sauce on the paper and then circled the four words.

Eggplant with garlic sauce was one of Mag's favorite dishes. He also liked grilled eggplant, which was a famous street dish that could bring happiness to anyone who ate it.

Mag still remembered the taste of the eggplant with garlic sauce he had tried in a small restaurant in Sichuan Province. Authentic or not, it was the best eggplant with garlic sauce he had ever had.

He had made a second visit to that place later, only to find a new building standing where the old and shabby restaurant should've been; it had been demolished.

Fortunately, on a whim, Mag had asked the owner there about how he had cooked it. The man clearly hadn't intended to keep it a secret. He had happily shared his experience with his curious customer. Mag searched his memories, and found he could still recall the ingredients and steps.

Yet knowing the ingredients and steps was not enough to make the dish magnificent. He had to figure out the amount of spices and seasonings, the temperature of the stove, and the most important thing—how to make chili broad bean paste.

Chili broad bean paste was the most necessary ingredient in this dish, which was also one of the most important seasonings in Sichuan cuisine. It could be found in the kitchen of almost every family in

Sichuan. In the eyes of many residents living there, eggplant with garlic sauce was not authentic without chili broad bean paste.

Adding some chili broad bean paste into the hot oil would give the dish a distinctive flavor, resulting in a pleasant and persistent aftertaste.

The chili broad bean paste was essential in twice-cooked pork slices with green peppers and Dongpo pig knuckle as well as in eggplant with garlic sauce.

Making bean paste was also a must-learn skill for every housewife in Sichuan.

Of course Mag didn't have this skill.

However, as a fan of Sichuan cuisine, he had criticized many Sichuan restaurants. In order to make himself look professional, he had made several trips to Sichuan's Pixian county to watch the residents there make the chili broad bean paste. He hadn't asked them for the recipe, though. Now he only vaguely remembered the ingredients and steps.

Mag looked at the steps and ingredients he had written down and sighed. "What I know right now is too little. I need to practice a lot to figure out the best recipe. The competition will start in five days. I don't know if I can make the eggplant with garlic sauce perfect by then."