“You westerners are always so *dull* when you are in the kitchen.”

La-Mei toddled around her small, cramped workspace. Compared to the vast, rather ornate spaces that Thanya had become accustomed to working in, the tiny area in the back of the restaurant had seemed even more suffocating. And when her own vast, rather ornate poundage was taken into account…

“I forget how you say the word…” La-Mei tapped a plump digit against her dainty chin, “…*predictable*. That’s it—Westerners are *predictable* in their cooking.”

“You realize that I’m not from—”

“My point is that, if you really wish to succeed, you must first take *chances* with your cooking—you must be, um… ayah… *experiment* with your cuisine in order to truly discover the essence of taste!”

“…do you mean *experimental*?”

“That’s exactly what I just said.”

*Experimental* was one way to describe La-Mei’s cooking. Thanya had heard tale of the expert chef with *unusual* methods, and after tasting a recipe from one of her disciples Thanya had known that she needed to meet this woman and fly under her wing. But… if she had known just how that meal she’d so enjoyed all those weeks ago had been prepared, she might have thought twice about such a long plane ride.

La-Mei held the coffee cup close against her tummy as she dropped a spoonful of mayonnaise into it. Stirring it with a bone spoon, her cushiony arms jiggled ever so slightly in time with the spoon’s soft plunking against the ceramic coffee cup. The brown liquid inside of it didn’t lighten noticeably, but Thanya’s face had certainly paled.

“Ahh~”

She took a slurp, making Thanya gag a little.

“Perfect.”

To say that La-Mei wasn’t exactly what Thanya had been expecting would have been an understatement. In her excitement to find new methods in cooking and given the location, she had dreamt up a much poetic vision of a monk out in a hut. A hermit who had dedicated their life to cooking, perhaps with a small school of equally dedicated, stoic students. Someone that she could learn from and respect as a mentor.

Not someone who… did *that* to her coffee.

“Although I will admit that it is obvious that you are someone who *enjoys* cooking. Or at least eating.” The shorter woman toddled over to pat Thanya on the stomach, “Discarding vanity is the first step in ensuring that one’s heart is placed fully in the dish being prepared.”

Her own stomach pressed softly against Thanya’s greater girth. Her soft, fleshy apron of lily white chub sloshed lazily out in front of her, clearly outlined by her qipao. As she toddled around the small kitchen like a queen, La-Mei’s fleshy cheeks bounced up and down beneath the thin oriental fabric.

“Normally I have a rule against teaching Westerners my ways.” She said with (what she no doubt thought was) an air of mysteriousness, “But for someone as dedicated to your craft as you… I will consider making an exception.”

Thanya frowned tightly as the strange woman took another slurp from her mayonnaise coffee. Her eyebrows furrowed as she reached for the avocado paste, and her eyes widened in horror as she lowered a spoonful of the stuff into her drink.

“I am renown far and wide for my secretive recipes—*not* whether or not they are slimming.”

She pointed the spoon at Thanya who instinctively lurched backwards so as to avoid any contact with that nonsense.

“If you have sought me out thinking that I am a miracle worker, who has managed to substitute taste for the nutrition, then you are sorely mistaken, Westerner.”

She placed the cup down and wobbled towards the intricate storage system of ingredients, her fat belly pressing against the countertop as she struggled to reach far over her head. The back of her qipao rode up along the flanks of her fleshy ass. Here she paused, seemingly in embarrassment. Stepping down from her tippy toes and reeling her chubby arm back in, La-Mei adjusted her dress slightly where it had ridden up over her belly. A brief harrumph later, and she was back to addressing Thanya.

“Westerner, would you please be so kind as to grab the fish paste from the drawer there?”

The smaller woman huffed and crossed her arms. Clearly her weight, combined with her shorter stature made it quite difficult for her to navigate in such a small working area.

“You’re not… gonna add it to your coffee, are you?” Thanya grimaced, toddling thick-legged towards the drawer in question

“Why in the world would I do that?” the smaller woman scoffed as she slowly got out of the way of the larger woman, “Fish paste would taste *terrible* if I put it into my coffee. It’s meat! You clearly have a lot to learn.”

Thanya grumbled as she struggled against the high shelf, coming back down with heavy footfalls as she handed over the small jar of fish paste. Putting her hands on her hips crossly, she glowered as La-Mei opened the twist-off cap and took a big whiff.

“Yes, this will do well for lunch.” The smaller woman finally said as she put the cap back on, “Thank you very much, foreigner.”

Thanya backed up against the wall of the small kitchen, her wide behind spreading like butter against the sheetrock as the strange chef waddled forward with a smile in her eyes. Placing the jar on the counter with the rest of the ingredients that she had gathered, perhaps in anticipation of Thanya’s quest to be tutored, she turned around quickly to face the larger woman.

“We are going to start you off with something easy—a Chinese classic that you’ll find in vending machines just as easily as you’ll find them in mama’s kitchen.”

Thanya braced herself for the recipe. Fish paste, salt, flour, and eggs. She could handle anything, and she just knew it.

“Using only these ingredients, you are to make for me an *exquisite* batch of melon bread.”

Thanya’s face fell flat once more as La-Mei raised her hands to clap.

“Chop chop, Westerner!”