



# The Signature Dish

A Full English translation is available.

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**Scriptwriter:** Hsin-Mei Cheng **Comic Artist:** ANIYONG **Publisher:** Dyna Books

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**Adaptation:** TV film

**BFT2.0 Translator:** Cindy Ko

After a disappointing loss in a French culinary competition, young chef Ching-Hsiung returns to Taiwan in search of the true essence of cooking. Determined to recreate his mother's signature dish—minced meat with pickled cucumber—he struggles to capture its familiar taste. Then he meets Master Awang, a legendary chef who roams the island in a food truck, serving dishes tailored to each customer. From him, Ching-Hsiung learns that what's missing is not a recipe, but the love and care his mother once poured into every meal.

In this warm and hopeful story, a disheartened young chef and a master of roadside banquets journey together across Taiwan, uncovering the human stories behind every recipe. This book celebrates the power of food to nourish not only the body, but also the heart. Minced pork with pickles, fried rice noodles, crispy spring rolls, braised pork knuckles over rice—each handcrafted dish carries not only flavor, but the weight of memory and emotion.



## Scriptwriter **Hsin-Mei Cheng**

Born in 1976, Hsin-Mei Cheng began her career as a journalist before transitioning to full-time scriptwriting. Known for her keen social insight, she is dedicated to uncovering stories rooted in Taiwan and crafting emotionally powerful narratives that resonate with its people.



## Comic Artist **ANIYONG**

ANIYONG is known for her compelling storytelling, vivid characters, and engagement with social issues, offering readers both emotional resonance and deeper layers of interpretation.

# *The Signature Dish*—The Untold Stories Behind Home-Cooked Meals

by Wen-Chien Hsu

In Taiwan, culture, memory, and food are deeply intertwined. Locals eagerly recommend dishes to international visitors, and food is a constant topic of conversation. Food here is more than nourishment—it is a symbol of identity, a way of understanding relationships with family and loved ones, and a vessel for memory. In many ways, every home-cooked meal carries an untold life story.

*The Signature Dish* is not a cookbook that teaches you how to cook. It's a comic about food and memory, flavor and emotion. It explores how the dishes that raised us quietly preserve pieces of the past, staying with us long after the moment has passed.

The protagonist, Chiang Ching-hsiung, was once teased by classmates

because his mother sold pickled vegetables. Embarrassed, he grew up dreaming of mastering the refined world of French cuisine. After years of hard work and studying abroad, he returns to Taiwan in defeat after losing at an international culinary competition, only to discover that his mother has developed Alzheimer's disease. Determined to recreate her signature dish—minced meat with pickled cucumber—he finds himself unable to recover its familiar taste. It isn't until he meets Master Awang, a street chef for hire, and tastes his cooking that he realizes what's missing is not a recipe, but the love his mother once poured into every dish. When he finds his mother's diary, he realizes that the meal his mother longed for most wasn't her own creation, but the

very first “failed” dish he had made for her as a child.

From there, Ching-hsiung becomes Master Awang's apprentice, traveling across Taiwan and taking on cooking requests for people yearning to relive a particular taste from their past. In the process, he encounters a series of deeply personal stories embedded in flavor. Lung, who spent his childhood on the road with an opera troupe, misses the backstage fried rice noodles that had long gone cold. An unnamed elderly man, once imprisoned for political activism, remembers little from those years except for his wife's pork rolls. Master A-Yung still recalls the salt baked chicken his father had once made just for him—a taste that brings him to tears. And Master Awang himself continues to cook pork trotter rice, clinging to the memory of a daughter who left home long ago.

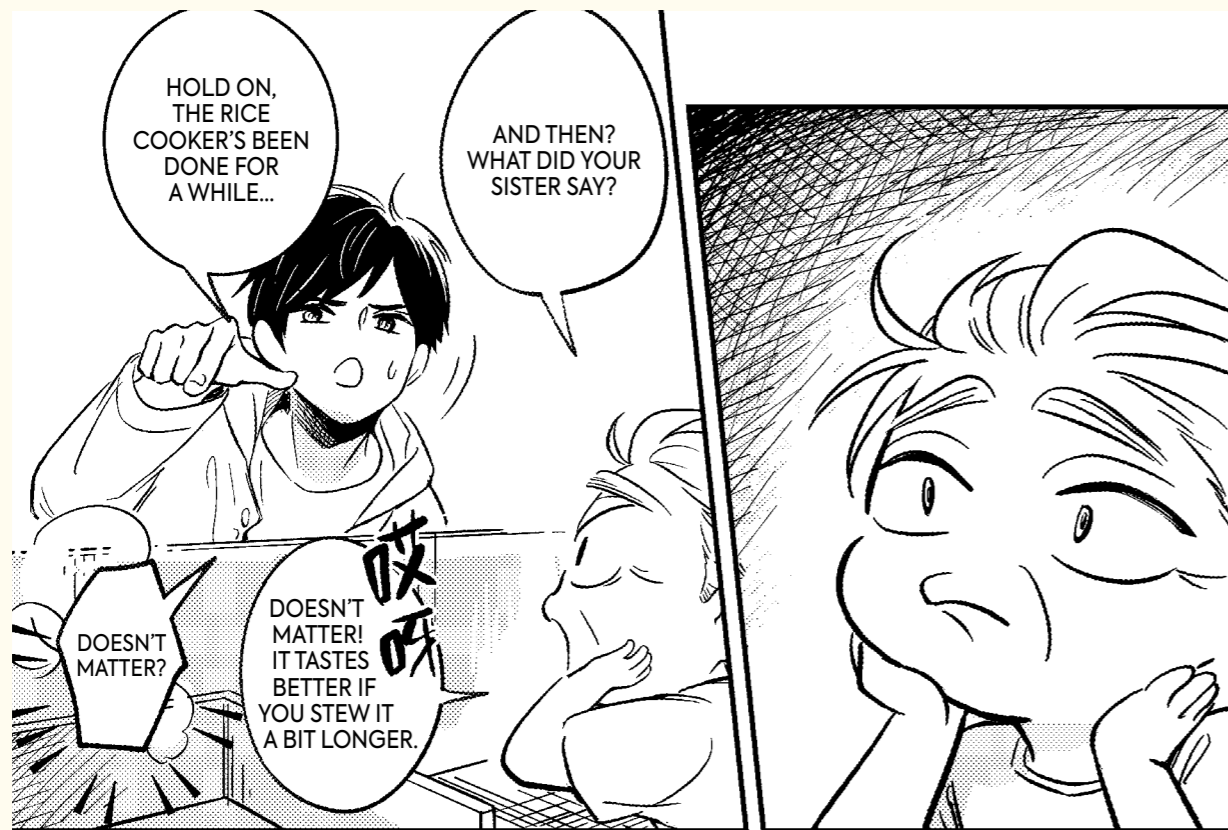
Through Ching-hsiung's journey, the comic weaves together stories rooted in the soil and soul of Taiwan. In these pages, food is not a show or an ornament—it is the emotional anchor of memory. One especially endearing character is Li-

Mei, a sharp-tongued but warm-hearted ingredient supplier. Though demanding and blunt, she genuinely cares for others. Her interactions with Ching-hsiung bring sparks and tenderness to the story, adding a layer of warmth to their shared path.

Overall, *The Signature Dish* is a touching, warm-hearted comic—like a familiar meal that always brings you home. It may remind you of something your family once made—a bowl of soup after school, or the braised pork rice always served at New Year. These flavors not only nourish the body—they connect us to our past, to the people we've loved, and to all the unspoken words between us.

It's a story for anyone who misses home, and for those still searching for where they belong.

*Wen-Chien Hsu possesses a free-spirited soul. She has worked at LGBTQ+ organizations, the 113 Domestic Violence Hotline, and works as an editor of Books from Taiwan 2.0. She is dedicated to bringing Taiwanese comics and picture books to a global audience.*



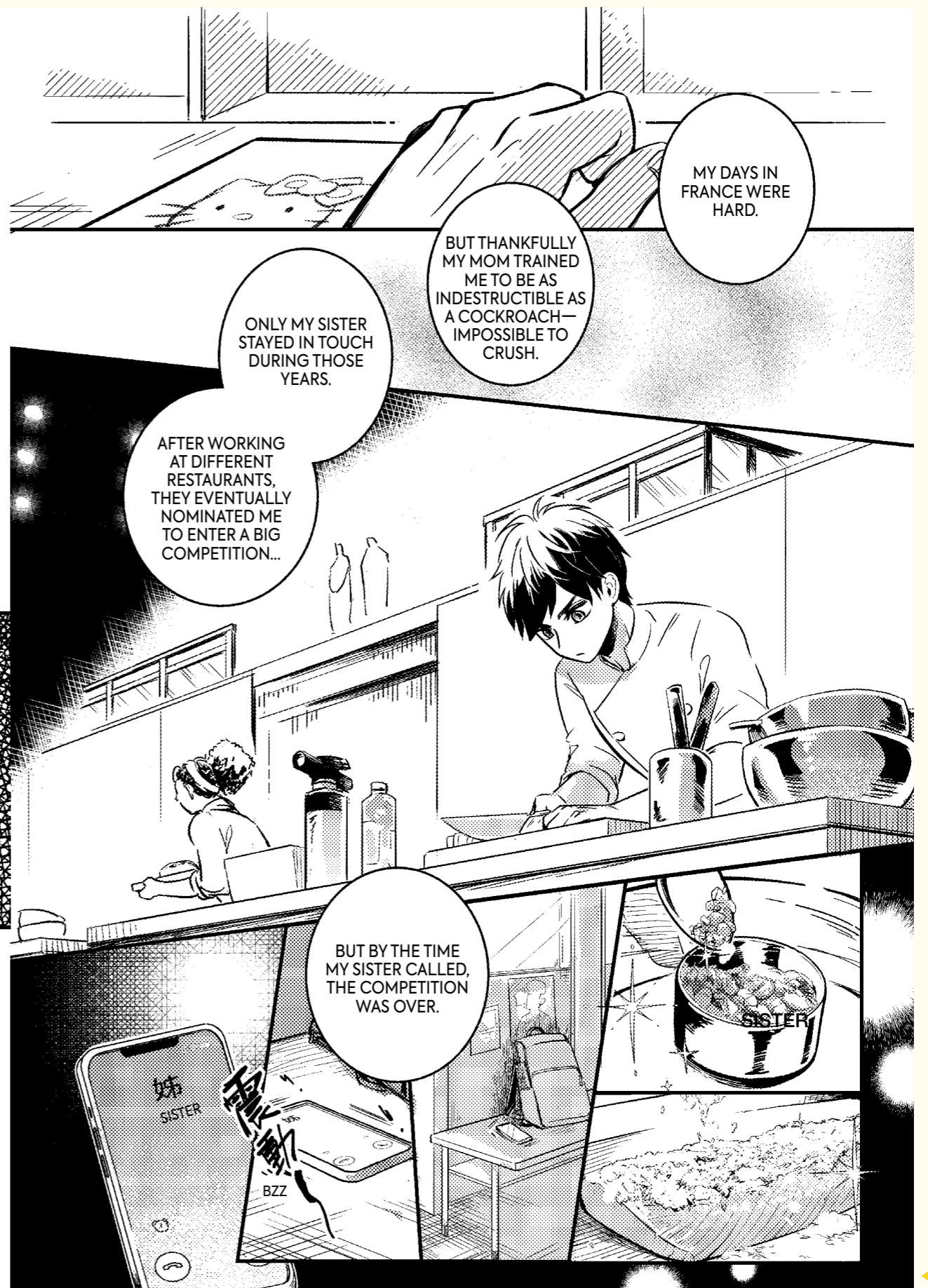
HOLD ON, THE RICE COOKER'S BEEN DONE FOR A WHILE...

AND THEN? WHAT DID YOUR SISTER SAY?

DOESN'T MATTER?

DOESN'T MATTER! IT TASTES BETTER IF YOU STEW IT A BIT LONGER.

AH



MY DAYS IN FRANCE WERE HARD.

BUT THANKFULLY MY MOM TRAINED ME TO BE AS INDESTRUCTIBLE AS A COCKROACH—IMPOSSIBLE TO CRUSH.

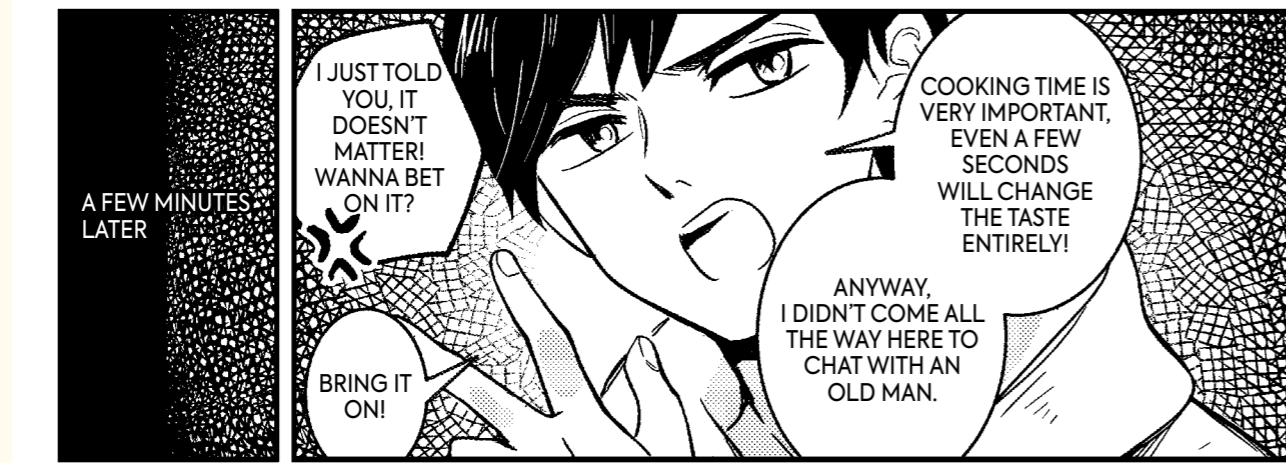
ONLY MY SISTER STAYED IN TOUCH DURING THOSE YEARS.

AFTER WORKING AT DIFFERENT RESTAURANTS, THEY EVENTUALLY NOMINATED ME TO ENTER A BIG COMPETITION...

BUT BY THE TIME MY SISTER CALLED, THE COMPETITION WAS OVER.

姊  
SISTER

BZZ



A FEW MINUTES LATER

I JUST TOLD YOU, IT DOESN'T MATTER! WANNA BET ON IT?

COOKING TIME IS VERY IMPORTANT, EVEN A FEW SECONDS WILL CHANGE THE TASTE ENTIRELY!

ANYWAY, I DIDN'T COME ALL THE WAY HERE TO CHAT WITH AN OLD MAN.

BRING IT ON!



IS THAT SO?

打  
LIFTS LID

I BET YOU'RE NOT POPULAR WITH THE GIRLS, HUH...

THIS TYPE OF PERSONALITY...

I'M VERY POPULAR, AND MY ROOM IS VERY CLEAN!



DRIP DRIP...

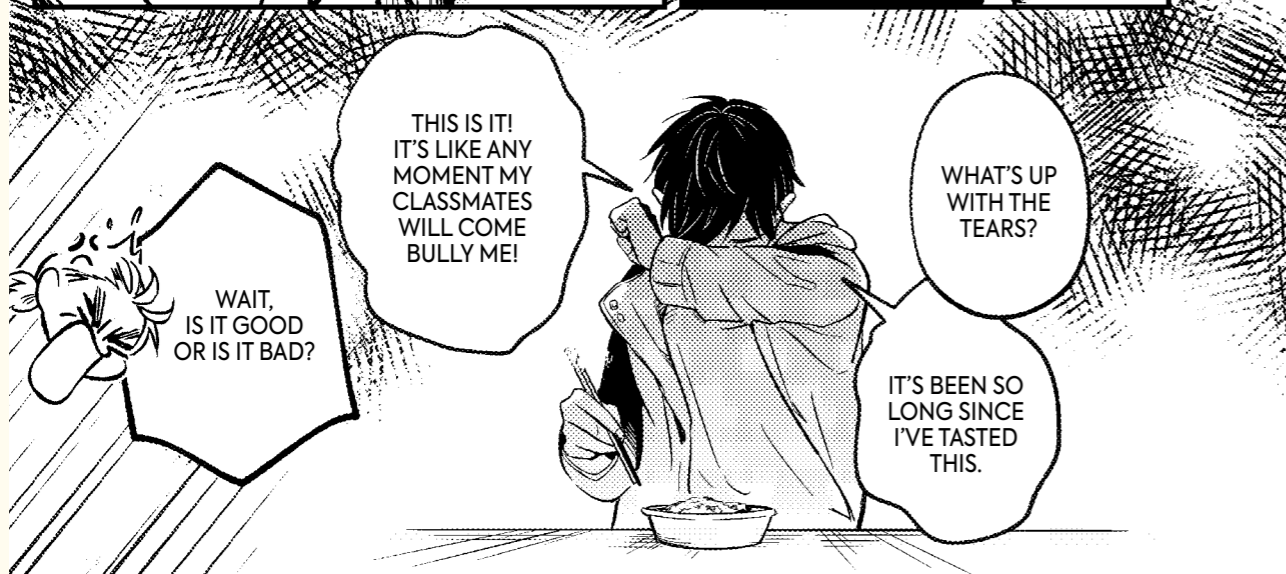
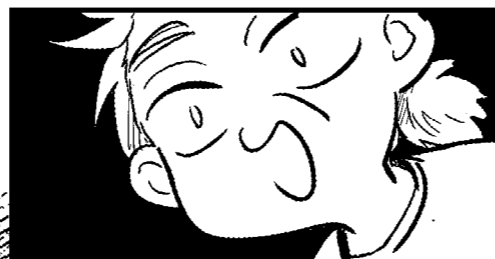


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HOW ABOUT OUR BET?

HOW IS IT?

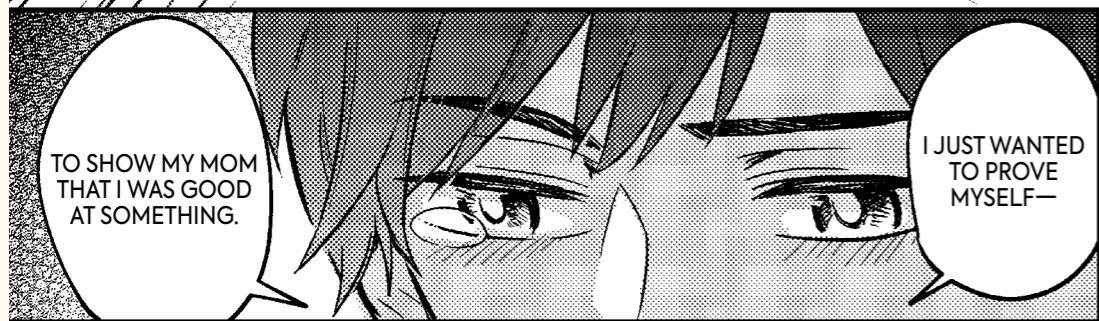


WAIT, IS IT GOOD OR IS IT BAD?

THIS IS IT! IT'S LIKE ANY MOMENT MY CLASSMATES WILL COME BULLY ME!

WHAT'S UP WITH THE TEARS?

IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE TASTED THIS.



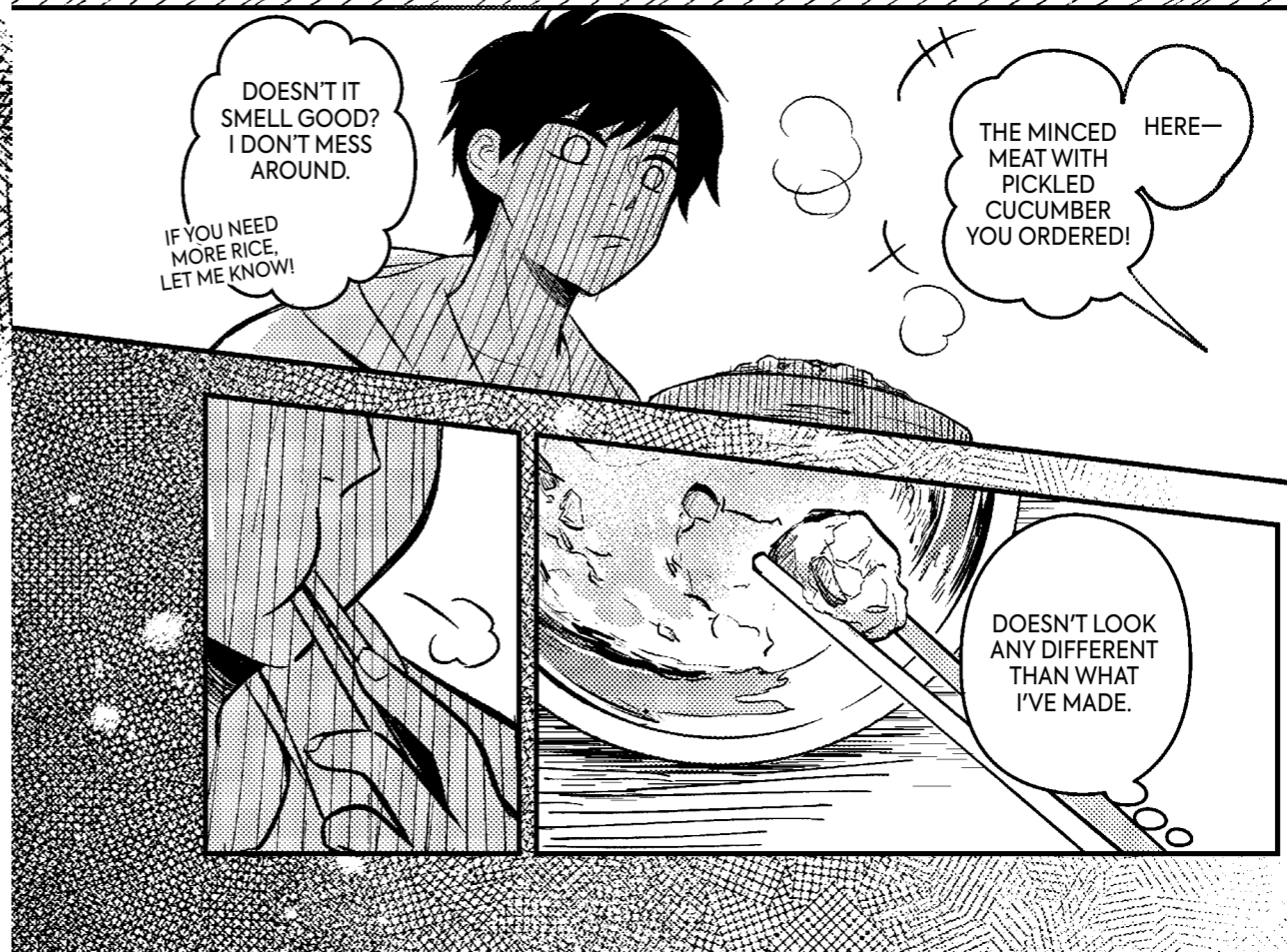
TO SHOW MY MOM THAT I WAS GOOD AT SOMETHING.

I JUST WANTED TO PROVE MYSELF—



FRAGRANT

香氣



DOESN'T IT SMELL GOOD? I DON'T MESS AROUND. IF YOU NEED MORE RICE, LET ME KNOW!

HERE— THE MINCED MEAT WITH PICKLED CUCUMBER YOU ORDERED!

DOESN'T LOOK ANY DIFFERENT THAN WHAT I'VE MADE.

