Helen's Bolognese

75ml peanut oil
1 onion, finely diced (180g)
1 large carrot, peeled and finely diced (125g)
1 celery stick, finely diced (75g)
2 star anise
1 cinnamon stick
2 bay leaves
1½ tsp Sichuan peppercorns, roughly crushed in a pestle and mortar
1 tsp fennel seeds, roughly crushed in a pestle and mortar
500g minced pork (or beef, or a mixture of both)
3 garlic cloves, crushed
40g ginger, peeled and finely chopped
2 tbsp Shaoxing wine
100g doubanjiang (aka chilli bean paste)
50ml light soy sauce
310ml water
1 tbsp cornflour
7 spring onions, finely sliced (75g)
360g dried pappardelle

Dressed cucumbers
1 large cucumber, cut into thin batons (310g)
2 tbsp rice wine vinegar
1 tsp runny honey
1 tsp sesame oil
salt

To serve
5g coriander leaves, roughly torn
1½ tbsp toasted sesame seeds

Pasta Bolognese: so many of us grow up on a particular version which then becomes the 'normal' against which all others are measured. Anyone whose default is an Italian or Anglophone take on the dish will be delighted by 'Helen's Bolognese'. Adapted from a noodle sauce in Carolyn Phillips' book, *All Under Heaven*, it gets a lot of its depth and deliciousness from doubanjiang – a spicy bean paste made from fermented soya beans, broad beans and chillies. It is a key ingredient in a lot of Sichuanese food and readily available in Asian grocers or online. *Pictured overleaf.*

Serves 4

Put the oil into a medium saucepan, for which you have a lid, and place on a medium-high heat. Once hot, add the onion, carrot, celery, star anise, cinnamon stick and bay leaves. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring frequently, then add the Sichuan peppercorns and fennel seeds. Cook for another 5 minutes, stirring from time to time, until the vegetables take on some colour. Take the pan off the heat and, using a slotted spoon, transfer the vegetables to a plate, leaving behind the oil and any sediments.

Keep the pan on a medium-high heat and add the meat, garlic and ginger. Cook for 5–7 minutes, stirring from time to time, until the meat is lightly browned. Add the Shaoxing wine, cook for a minute, then add the doubanjiang, soy sauce and 250ml of water. Stir to combine, partially cover, and simmer on a medium-low heat for about 25 minutes, stirring from time to time.

While the meat sauce is simmering, mix the cornflour with the remaining 60ml of water and set aside.

Return the cooked vegetables to the sauce, along with the spring onions and the cornflour slurry. Simmer for 5 minutes, uncovered.

Meanwhile, place all the ingredients for the dressed cucumbers in a small bowl. Add ¼ teaspoon of salt, mix to combine and set aside.

Cook the pappardelle in salted boiling water until al dente, then divide between four bowls. Ladle over the meat sauce and top with some of the dressed cucumbers. Finish with the coriander and sesame seeds and serve, with the remaining cucumbers on the side.