周六的掌勺人

暑假第一个周六，家里立了一条新规：每周六的晚饭归孩子。从想菜单、买菜、做饭到洗碗，全程他自己，大人只许动嘴指挥，不许伸手。他把新规抄了一遍贴在灶台边，末尾还加了四个字，谁也不帮。

菜单他憋了半个钟头，最后定了一荤一素一汤，青椒肉丝、拍黄瓜、紫菜汤。我给他一百块，让他自己去菜场。他攥着钱出门，回来时钱花了九十三，找回的七块捏成一团。路上他还绕去看了鱼，站在缸前看了十分钟，回来自己承认耽误了买葱。他汇报账目一样一样报，青椒三块五，肉丝十八块，说到肉丝时咂了一下嘴，说肉比想象中贵。

那天下午厨房归他。黄瓜拍得满案板都是，他单膝跪下去追一块蹦远的黄瓜。肉丝下锅前他先问肉要不要洗，我说要，他洗了，洗得肉都发白。青椒肉丝咸了，黄瓜倒正好，汤里的紫菜放多了，捞了半天。他爸把三样都吃完，说下周六还轮他，他点头，眼里没有委屈，只有盘算，盘算下周六怎么把汤救回来。

洗碗也归他。洗碗池前的凳子是他自己搬来的，他站在凳子上，围裙拖到地上。洗到一半他忽然回头问，妈妈，你洗了多少年碗了。我说从他记事起就在洗，往上数还有他姥姥。他哦了一声，转回去接着洗，水声停了半拍，又响起来。

一个暑假过完，周六的晚饭他承包了十二顿。菜价他记得比我清楚，哪家的豆腐嫩、哪里的葱便宜，他如数家珍。连卖豆腐的阿姨都记得他，说他每周六都来，从不还价。有天他算出一盘青椒肉丝的成本，加上水电和洗洁精，比外头一盘便宜得多。他说以后不点这道菜了，自己做的自己知道值几个钱。

收获是慢慢显出来的。他开始把剩饭装盒标记，明天热了吃；买菜会看日期；吃完饭先收碗再离桌。最要紧的是那句洗碗池边的问话。他走过了买菜、做饭、洗碗的整条链，才明白一顿平常的晚饭要过多少双手。感激不是教出来的，是走过一遍以后自己长出来的。

The Saturday Supper Shift

On the first Saturday of summer vacation the household made a new rule: supper on every Saturday belongs to the child. From planning the menu and buying groceries to cooking and washing the dishes, the whole chain is his; the grown-ups may use their mouths to advise but must not lend a hand. He copied the rule once and posted it beside the stove, and added four characters at the end, meaning nobody helps.

He stewed over the menu for half an hour and settled on one meat dish, one vegetable, and one soup, shredded pork with green peppers, smashed cucumber, and seaweed soup. I gave him one hundred yuan and sent him to the market alone. He left with the money clenched in his fist and came back having spent ninety-three, the change crumpled into a ball. On the way he made a detour to look at the fish, stood before the tank for ten minutes, and admitted on returning that he had missed buying

scallions. He reported the accounts item by item, green peppers three yuan fifty, shredded pork eighteen, and clicked his tongue at the pork, saying meat is dearer than he had imagined.

That afternoon the kitchen was his. He smashed cucumbers all over the cutting board and went down on one knee to chase a piece that jumped away. Before the pork went into the pan he asked whether meat should be washed; I said yes, and he washed it until the meat turned pale. The pork with peppers came out too salty, the cucumber was just right, and the seaweed in the soup was too much, so he fished for a long while. His father finished all three dishes and said next Saturday is still his turn. He nodded, and there was no grievance in his eyes, only planning, planning how to redeem the soup next Saturday.

Dishwashing was his too. The stool in front of the sink he carried himself, stood on it with his apron dragging on the floor. Halfway through he suddenly turned his head and asked, mother, how many years have you been washing dishes. I said since he could remember, and above that his grandmother before me. He made one sound of understanding, turned back, and the sound of water paused for half a beat and started again.

When the summer was over, he had taken charge of twelve Saturday suppers. He knew the prices of vegetables better than I did, which tofu is tender and which scallions are cheap, and he could name them all. Even the auntie who sells tofu remembers him, saying he comes every Saturday and never haggles. One day he worked out the cost of a plate of shredded pork with peppers, counting water, electricity, and detergent, and it came out far cheaper than a plate outside. He said he would not order that dish anymore, since one who cooks it himself knows what it is worth.

The harvest showed itself slowly. He began to box the leftover rice and mark it, to eat it warm the next day; when buying groceries he looks at dates; after a meal he clears the bowls before leaving the table. Most important was that question beside the sink. He had walked the whole chain of buying, cooking, and washing, and only then understood how many hands a plain supper passes through. Gratitude is not taught; it grows by itself after a person walks the road once.

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