西红柿炒鸡蛋

暑假第一周，我在冰箱上贴了一张清单，一、二、三条写得清楚：每天倒垃圾，饭后擦桌子，给阳台的花浇水。孩子看了清单，问有没有钱。我说没有，这是家里的事，你是家里的一份子。他不服气，但第一天还是把垃圾袋拖到了楼下，拖得像拖一条大尾巴。回来时他两手在裤腿上蹭，说垃圾袋比书包还沉。

安排家务不是临时起意。学期里他放学回家往沙发上一瘫，鞋子踢到门口也不摆一摆。我想，暑假整整两个月，不趁这段时间教他做几样事，我陪他过的算什么日子。清单用吸铁石固定在冰箱上，完成一项他自己用笔打勾。头三天我还提醒，第四天起就不用了，他倒完垃圾会在门口喊一声完喽。清单底下他还自己添了一行，摆鞋，谁踢乱谁摆。

第二周学做饭。我挑的第一课是西红柿炒鸡蛋，因为它难不出格。他打鸡蛋，蛋壳掉进去半片，他用筷子去捞，捞得舌头都伸出来。油热了他往后缩，我扶着他的手腕把蛋液倒进锅，刺啦一声他叫唤，蛋鼓起来他又笑。西红柿切得大小不一，大块小块混在一起，出锅倒也像个菜。

那天晚上他自己把菜端上桌，摆在中席。他爸故意说多吃两口，他把盘子往自己这边推了推，说这是他做的，他说了算。从那以后每个周末归他掌一餐，从煮面开始，到学会凉拌黄瓜，刀工还是歪的，人已经不问答什么，改问我想吃什么。

有天他买菜回来，主动交代西红柿涨价了，比上周贵五毛。我忽然明白这堂劳动课教了他什么。他开始记住日子的尺寸，明白一顿饭、一张桌子、一块干净的地，背后都有人费过劲。他自己掌勺以后，不挑食了，菜不合口也只说下次他来做。

暑假的收获不在清单上。清单只要求他做事，日子教给他的却是另一样：一个人再小，也要能自己喂饱自己，能把自己那一角收拾干净。我想，这才是我真正想布置的暑假作业。

Scrambled Eggs with Tomatoes

In the first week of summer vacation I posted a list on the fridge. Item one, item two, item three: take out the trash every day, wipe the table after meals, water the plants on the balcony. The boy looked at the list and asked whether there was pay. I said no, these are affairs of the household, and you are one member of the household. He was not convinced, yet on the first day he still dragged the trash bag downstairs, dragging it like a big tail behind him. When he came back he wiped both hands on his trouser legs, saying the trash bag is heavier than a schoolbag.

The list of housework was not a sudden idea. During the school term he came home and lay down at once, and his kicked-off shoes were never lined up. I thought, summer vacation is two whole months; if this time is not used to teach him a few things, what am I spending the days with him for. The list was fixed to the fridge with a magnet, and each finished item he checked off with his own pen. For the first three

days I reminded him; from the fourth day he needed no one, and after taking out the trash he would call out that it was done from the doorway. Below the list he added one line of his own, lining up the shoes, and whoever kicks them untidy must set them straight.

The second week was learning to cook. I chose scrambled eggs with tomatoes as the first lesson, because it is hard to ruin. He cracked the eggs, and half a shell fell into the bowl; he fished it out with chopsticks, his tongue sticking out. The hot oil made him shrink back; I held his wrist and guided the egg mixture into the pan. It hissed and he cried out, and when the eggs puffed up he laughed. The tomatoes were cut unevenly, big pieces mixed with small, but out of the pan it was a dish of its own.

That evening he carried the dish to the table and set it in the middle. His father made a show of asking for more, and he pushed the plate toward himself, saying he made it and he decides. From then on, one meal each weekend belonged to him. He began with boiled noodles, then learned cold cucumber salad; the knife work was still crooked, yet he stopped asking what to eat and started asking what we would like.

One day he came back from shopping and reported by himself that the price of tomatoes had gone up, five mao dearer than last week. I suddenly saw what this course of labor had taught him. He had begun to remember the measures of daily life, and to understand that a meal, a table, a clean floor each stand on the effort of someone. Since he cooks for himself, he no longer complains about the food, and when a dish does not suit him he only says he will make it himself next time.

The harvest of the summer was not written on the list. The list only asked him to do things; what life taught him was something else, that a person, however small, should be able to feed himself and keep his own corner clean. I think this was the homework I most wanted to give for the summer vacation.

一碗面的加蛋

期末最后一节班会，我给全班布置了一份特殊的暑假作业：不用笔写，用双手做。每人认领一样家务，整个暑假天天做，再学会做三顿饭，开学交一个巴掌大的小本，记下做了什么、谁尝了、什么滋味。有孩子哀嚎，说老师这是把暑假过成炊事班。我笑着说，炊事班也是兵。

放假前我把安排家务的要点讲了一遍：家务不在多，在天天做。倒垃圾、择菜、擦桌，一样就够，贵在不断。我还特意交代家长，孩子做得慢做得差，忍住，别接手。这句话我重复了三遍，因为我知道大人最容易犯的错，就是看不得孩子笨手笨脚。

开学收小本。有的本子上画满了正字，一天一格。有个孩子记，八月里他妈妈生病卧床，他给妈妈煮了十四天面，第一天的面煮坨了，妈妈还是吃完。他在本子上写，原来妈妈天天给我做饭，我从来没说过好吃。我在这一页停了很久，页脚写了一行批语：这一页比所有作文都写得好。

分享班会上，学会做饭的孩子轮流讲。有个男孩讲他学煮面，掌握不好水，后来伸出手指量，水没过指第二关节正好。全班笑，他也笑，笑完补了一句，现在我妈加班，我给她留面。后排一个女孩讲她第一次炒青菜，把糖当盐，全家吃了甜的青菜，她急哭了，奶奶说甜青菜也是菜。台下笑成一片，我看见她眼圈红了。

这份作业的收获，开学一个月还在长。教室的黑板每天有人擦得干净，讲台上的粉笔盒没人乱翻，午餐时掉在桌上的米粒有人顺手收。有个家长来信说，孩子现在周末自己安排洗碗，还嫌他洗得不干净。我在回信里说，让他洗，慢就是快。

我教了十几年书，越来越确信一件事：孩子长大的时刻不在课本里。它在厨房里，在洗碗池边，在一个孩子第一次明白一粥一饭都要人费心的晚上。这份暑假作业我明年还会布置，还要加一条，让每个孩子给做饭的人盛一次饭。

The Extra Egg in the Bowl of Noodles

In the last class meeting of the term I gave the whole class a special summer assignment: not to be written with a pen but done with two hands. Each child was to take one chore, do it every day all summer, learn to cook three meals, and hand in a notebook the size of a palm at school opening, recording what was done, who tasted it, and how it tasted. One boy groaned that the teacher was turning summer vacation into a kitchen squad. I laughed and said a kitchen squad is soldiers too.

Before the vacation I went over the points of arranging housework: the point is not many chores but doing them daily. Taking out trash, trimming vegetables, wiping the table, one is enough, and the value lies in never stopping. I also told the parents on purpose, when the child is slow or clumsy, hold back and do not take over. I repeated that sentence three times, because I know the easiest mistake grown-ups make is not bearing to see children fumble.

At school opening I collected the notebooks. Some were filled with tally marks, one square for each day. One child wrote that in August his mother fell ill and stayed in bed, and he cooked noodles for her for fourteen days; the noodles of the first day were overcooked into a lump, and she still finished the bowl. He wrote in the notebook, mother cooks for me every day and I never once said it was good. I stayed on that page a long while and wrote one line at the foot: this page is better than every composition.

At the sharing meeting, the children who had learned to cook took turns telling.

One boy said he learned to boil noodles and could not judge the water, so in the end he measured with his finger, and water up to the second knuckle was just right. The class laughed and he laughed, then added one line: now when his mother works overtime, he keeps a bowl of noodles for her. A girl in the back row told how she stir-fried greens for the first time and used sugar instead of salt; the whole family ate sweet greens, and she cried in frustration, while her grandmother said sweet greens are still greens. The room roared with laughter, and I saw her eyes go red.

The harvest of this assignment kept growing a month after school opened. The blackboard in the classroom got wiped clean every day, nobody rummaged in the chalk box on the platform, and rice grains fallen on the lunch table were picked up by some passing hand. A parent wrote that her child now arranges his own dishwashing on weekends and even scolds her for washing imperfectly. I answered, let him wash; slowness is speed.

I have taught for over ten years, and I am more and more sure of one thing: the moments when children grow up are not inside textbooks. They are in the kitchen, beside the dishwashing sink, on the evening when a child first understands that a bowl of porridge and a bowl of rice each cost someone trouble. I will give this summer assignment again next year, and add one more item, that every child serves a meal once to the person who cooks.

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.