第一次独自坐班车去爷爷家

出发那天早上，妈妈往我书包侧袋里塞了一张折好的纸条，说真出事了就打开看。我嘴上嫌她啰嗦，心里其实怦怦跳。我要一个人坐两小时班车，去乡下爷爷家过半个月。这是我头一回没有大人陪着走这么远。

上车比我想的乱。售票员阿姨催着报站点，我攥着车票，手心全是汗。中途有个大叔问我是不是一个人，我点头，他往旁边挪了挪，让我坐靠窗的位置。车过一条河的时候，我忽然想起纸条，掏出来打开，上面只有一行字：到了就打电话，没到也打电话。我看了两遍，把纸条按回侧袋，忽然就不慌了。

车到镇上，爷爷没来。我背着包站在站牌底下，看着人来人往，腿有点软。我记起妈妈说过，找不到人就回站牌等。我等了二十分钟，爷爷骑着三轮车来了，一见面就说记错日子，晚了一天。我上了车，坐在货斗里看两边的玉米地往后退，觉得自己刚才等那二十分钟的样子，也挺像个大人。

在爷爷家的半个月，我包了灶台下的火和一天的三顿饭。头一天生火，烟熏得我眼泪直流，爷爷在门外笑。半个月里我学会了看火苗添柴，学会了把剩饭炒得不糊。有天晚上停电，我一个人点着蜡烛把碗洗了，洗完才发现自己哼着歌。

回家前夜，爷爷送我到村口，说了一句：你这次自己来了，以后就能自己去了。我坐在班车窗边想这句话。长大好像不是哪一天忽然发生的，是上车时攥紧车票、等站牌时没哭、停电时把碗洗完，一件一件攒出来的。那张纸条我夹进了日记本，它上面没有道理，只有一行让我心安的话。

到爷爷家那天傍晚，我借村口小卖部的电话给妈妈打回去，报一句平安。电话两块钱一次，我捡最便宜的那种打，说完就挂。后来半个月里我每周打一次，从两块钱的打到五块钱的，话也多了，会讲今天炒了什么菜。妈妈在电话那头笑，说这钱花得值。

The First Long-Distance Bus Alone

On the morning of the departure, my mother tucked a folded note into the side pocket of my schoolbag, saying to open it if anything really went wrong. I complained she was fussy, but my heart was pounding. I was going alone on a two-hour bus to the countryside to spend half a month at the home of my grandpa. It was the first time I traveled that far without an adult.

Boarding was messier than I expected. The conductor hurried everyone to state their stops, and I gripped my ticket with sweaty palms. A man midway asked if I was alone; I nodded, and he shifted aside to let me take the window seat. When the bus crossed a river, I suddenly remembered the note. I pulled it out: one line only, saying call when you arrive, and call if you do not. I read it twice, tucked it back,

and my nervousness went away.

At the town stop, grandpa was not there. I stood under the sign with my bag, watching people pass, my legs a little weak. I remembered my mother saying: if you cannot find anyone, go back to the sign and wait. After twenty minutes grandpa came on his tricycle, saying he had mixed up the date by one day. I climbed in and sat in the cargo bed watching the cornfields slide backward, thinking that the way I had just waited there looked rather like a grown-up.

During those half a months I took charge of the fire under the stove and three meals a day. On the first day the smoke made me cry, and grandpa laughed outside the door. In fifteen days I learned to feed the flame with firewood and to fry leftover rice without burning it. One night the power went out, and I washed all the bowls by candlelight, only noticing afterward that I had been humming.

The night before I left, grandpa walked me to the village entrance and said: you came by yourself this time, so from now on you can go by yourself. On the bus I sat by the window turning that sentence over. Growing up does not seem to happen on one sudden day. It is saved up piece by piece: gripping the ticket when boarding, not crying while waiting at the sign, finishing the dishes in the dark. I slipped that note into my diary. It holds no lesson, only one line that set my heart at ease.

That evening at the home of my grandpa, I phoned my mother from the payphone at the village shop to say I had arrived safe. The cheapest calls cost two yuan each, and I hung up as soon as I was done. For the rest of those fifteen days I called once a week, upgrading from the two-yuan calls to the five-yuan ones, and I talked more, telling what I had cooked that day. My mother laughed through the receiver and said the money was well spent.

厨房归我管的四十天

爸妈去外地照顾外婆的四十天，家里只剩我和妹妹。走的前一晚，爸爸把米面油搬到灶台边，说这个夏天厨房归你管。我嘴上应得痛快，心里想的是没人管我几点睡觉。

头三天就出了洋相。我往番茄炒蛋里放了盐两勺还多，妹妹咬一口就吐了；煮粥睡着了，锅底糊出一层黑壳。妹妹不哭，我也没骂她，两个人蹲在厨房刮锅底，刮到一半都笑了。那天晚上我对着手机查了半小时怎么做一桌能吃的菜。

慢慢地我摸出了门道。妹妹一碗饭、我一碗半；青菜早上买最水灵，晚市打折但蔫；汤里放几片姜，妹妹才肯喝。我开始记账，十块钱的菜钱要转着花样用，月底一算，居然还剩三十几块。妈妈打电话来，我把账念给她听，电话那头安静了一下，她说她没想到。

最难的不是做饭，是那些没人看见的事。洗衣机里的衣服要晾要收，妹妹的家长会要去，屋顶漏水我拿盆接了一夜。有天夜里我躺在床上算下个月的水电费，忽然想起爸妈这些年每个月都在算这些，算了一整个我。我翻了个身，眼睛有点热。

爸妈回来那天，我把钥匙放到爸爸手心，说了句交接完毕。他愣了一下，妹妹在旁边抢着说我做的红烧肉最好吃。四十天前我以为独立就是自由，四十天后我知道，独立是把一屋子人的日子稳稳接住，接得无声无息才算数。

现在偶尔家里还是我做晚饭。我不再查手机了，姜放几片、糖放多少，手比脑子先知道。那口糊过底的锅我留着没换，锅底的印子提醒我：长大不是离开家，是有一天你成了家里托底的人。

妹妹后来跟人提起那四十天，说的不是糊锅，也不是咸的菜，而是有天夜里打雷，我抱着她的作业本去关窗户，回来给她掖了被角。她说那顿雷雨天她睡得香。我听了没接话，心里比哪天都软。

Forty Days in Charge of the Kitchen

For the forty days my parents were away caring for my grandma on the side of my mother, only my little sister and I were home. The night before they left, my father moved the rice, flour, and oil beside the stove and said the kitchen was mine to run this summer. I answered quickly, while what I really liked about the idea was that no one would tell me when to sleep.

Embarrassments came in the first three days. I put two heaping spoons of salt into tomato and eggs, and my sister spat out her first bite; I fell asleep while cooking porridge and the pot bottom grew a black crust. My sister did not cry, and I did not scold her. We squatted in the kitchen scraping the pot, and halfway through we both started laughing. That night I spent half an hour on my phone looking up how to cook a table of edible food.

Little by little I found the knack. One bowl for my sister, one and a half for me; greens are crispest bought in the morning, cheaper at the evening market but wilted; a few slices of ginger in the soup and my sister would drink it. I started keeping accounts, stretching ten yuan of vegetable money into variety, and at the end of the month there were still thirty-some yuan left. When my mother called, I read the accounts to her. There was a short silence on the line, then she said she had not expected that.

The hardest part was not cooking but the things no one sees. The washing machine needed hanging and gathering, the parent meeting of my sister needed attending, and when the roof leaked I caught the drip with a basin all night. One night, lying in bed adding up the water and electric bills for the next month, it struck me that my

parents had been doing this arithmetic every month for an entire childhood of mine. I turned over, and my eyes felt warm.

The day my parents came back, I placed the key into the palm of my father and said, handover complete. He froze for a moment, and my sister rushed in to say my braised pork was the best. Forty days ago I thought independence meant freedom. Forty days later I know it means catching the days of a whole household firmly in your hands, and it only counts when the catching is silent.

Now and then I still cook dinner at home. I no longer check my phone; how much ginger, how much sugar, my hands know before my head does. I kept that scorched pot instead of replacing it. The mark on its bottom reminds me: growing up is not leaving home. It is becoming, one day, the one who holds the family up.

My little sister later told others about those forty days, and what she picked was not the scorched pot or the salty dishes. It was one stormy night when I carried her homework over to close the windows and came back to tuck her blanket in. She said she slept soundly through that thunder. I did not answer, but something inside me went softer than on any other day.

床尾的那本记录本

放暑假第一天，我给自己弄了个记录本，牛皮纸封面，打算这个夏天记点东西。开学前翻它，前头几页字大而飘，后头几页越写越稳，像另一个人一路走过来。

七月里最厚的一页，记的是我一个人去县城看展览的半天。本子上写着：七点四十的班车，票九块；展览馆空调很足，恐龙化石比照片高；中午在面馆吃了一碗牛肉面，八块，汤太咸；回程车上睡着了，坐过了一站，走回来四十分钟。结尾我写：坐过站不慌，认得往回走的路就行。这行字现在看还是烫的。

八月的页脚记着家务。我包了这个夏天的衣服，本子上记着水费从六十几块涨到八十四块，又降回七十一块，因为我把两天的衣服并成一天洗。还记着第一次拖完整个屋子，腰直不起来，在沙发上躺了半小时。那页边上我写了一句：妈天天干这些。写完这句我没再往下写，那天的本子只有一行。

最末一页记的是八月二十七号的晚上。爸妈在灯下对账，我过去帮忙按计算器，听见妈妈说下个月要给爷爷寄多少，听见爸爸说你最近瘦了。我在本子背面写：他们也会累，也会算错，算错了就划掉重算。写完我把本子合上，在床尾放好。

这个暑假我做了两样以前不做的事：动手，和回想。动手让我知道自己能行，回想让我知道自己为什么能行。记录本不贵，两块五，可它替我记住了长大是一天一天记出来的，不是某一天忽然发生的。

本子的牛皮纸封面卷了角，中间撕掉过一页，是八月里赌气撕的，那天展览的门票还夹在后面没掉。开学前一晚我把撕下的页找回来，压在玻璃板底下，没再粘回去。缺的那页我不补，留着它，好让我记得自己也有过不想记的一天。

The Notebook at the Foot of My Bed

On the first day of summer vacation I got myself a notebook, kraft-paper cover, planning to record something this summer. Before school opened I flipped through it: the early pages had big, drifting handwriting, the later ones grew steadier and steadier, like another person walking all the way up to me.

The thickest page of July records the half day I spent alone at the exhibition hall in the county town. The notebook says: bus at seven forty, ticket nine yuan; the air conditioning inside was strong; the dinosaur fossils stood taller than the photos; lunch was a bowl of beef noodles at a noodle shop, eight yuan, broth too salty; I fell asleep on the ride back and passed one stop, then walked forty minutes home. I ended the page with: do not panic when you pass your stop; just know the road back. That line still feels hot to read now.

The footnotes of August record housework. I took over the family laundry, and the notebook shows the water bill rising from the sixties to eighty-four yuan, then falling back to seventy-one, because I merged two days of washing into one. It also records the first time I mopped the whole house: my back would not straighten, and I lay on the sofa for half an hour. In the margin of that page I wrote one line: Mom does this every single day. After writing it I wrote nothing more; the entry of that day was a single line.

The last page records the evening of August twenty seventh. My parents were reconciling accounts under the lamp, and I went over to work the calculator for them. I heard my mother say how much to send grandpa next month, and my father say she had lost weight lately. On the back of the notebook I wrote: they get tired too, they miscalculate too, and when they do they cross it out and start over. I closed the notebook and set it at the foot of my bed.

This summer I did two things I never did before: worked with my hands, and looked back. Working with my hands taught me I am capable; looking back taught me why. The notebook cost two yuan fifty cents, but it keeps the memory that growing up is recorded day by day, not something that happens all at once on a single day.

The kraft paper cover of the notebook has curled corners, and one page in the middle was once torn out. I tore it in a fit of pique one day in August, and the ticket from the exhibition stayed tucked behind it without falling out. On the night

before school opened I found the torn page back and pressed it under the glass plate of my desk, without gluing it in. I leave the missing page missing, so that it can remind me I too once had a day I did not want to record.