碗见底之后

十一月二十一日，星期六。傍晚六点半，玻璃碗见了底，最后一勺香蕉被爸爸抢走，他咂着嘴说没吃够。我坐在桌边回想整个下午，觉得该把它记下来。

下午三点，妈妈把一袋子水果倒在餐桌上，宣布今天做水果沙拉，她负责切，我负责一切别的。她切苹果的样子我头一回仔细看：刀贴着果核走，两边各下一刀，核整整齐齐留在中间；削皮时刀尖钩着果皮转，果皮连成一整条螺旋，落在砧板上像卷起来的丝带。我帮不上忙，只扶着接果皮的盆。她让我试着削一个梨，我削得坑坑洼洼，果肉一块深一块浅。她把那个丑梨切成块，放进自己碗里，说丑的也好吃，先吃掉。

三点半到五点是切的时间，餐桌变成了工作台。砧板摆中间，三个白盆一字排开，垃圾袋挂在桌角。妈妈切橙子前先把橙子在桌上滚软，说这样汁水不迸；她切西瓜样的大水果时手腕压着刀背走，切小的就只用指尖搭着刀。我在旁边递水果、数块数，苹果块她要求每块都能一口闷，切大了就用刀背再划一刀。中途她接了个电话，回来发现我把泡盐水的苹果捞出来晾着，问为什么，我说书上说盐水泡久了水塌。她点点头，没夸，只是把那盆苹果全摆在我码的那一层。

切好的水果分盆装着：苹果块泡进淡盐水，橙子切成薄片，香蕉斜切成马牙。摆盘归我，妈妈退到一边擦手。我把碗推到桌子正中，按颜色深浅一层层往上码，高的放中间，她只提醒了这一句。淋沙拉酱的时候我屏着气，怕挤多了，结果她接过去手腕一转就匀了，说这个也要练。摆完她想了想，把两颗歪了的圣女果挪正。

品尝是全家一起的，每人第一勺都先递给我。爸爸评价说刀工不行，摆盘有想法。我记了一下午：挑水果时她拿起来捏一捏再闻一闻；切的时候她手腕不动，小臂带动刀；尝咸淡时她只蘸一点点酱，抹在舌尖上。原来妈妈的手就是这样练出来的，一天一天，切了几百个苹果。我低头看自己的手，指腹上还有梨汁黏过的痕迹。妈妈说明天还做，明天让我主事。

After the Bowl Hit Bottom

November 21st, Saturday. At half past six in the evening the glass bowl hit bottom, and the last spoonful of banana was snatched by Dad, who smacked his lips and said not enough. I sat at the table going over the whole afternoon, and decided to write it down.

At three in the afternoon Mom emptied a bag of fruit onto the table and announced fruit salad for today: she would do the cutting, I would do everything else. It was the first time I really watched her hands on an apple. The knife walked along the core, one cut on each side, leaving the core neat in the middle. Peeling, the knife tip hooked the skin and turned, and the peel came off as one whole spiral ribbon, curling onto the board like a wound-up ribbon. I could not help with the knife, so I held the bowl that caught the peels. She let me try one pear. My pear came out pitted and patchy, the flesh deep here and shallow there. She cut that ugly pear into chunks, dropped them into her own bowl, and said ugly fruit tastes fine, finishing it

first.

From three thirty to five was cutting time, and the dining table became a workbench. The board sat in the middle, three white bowls in a row, the trash bag hung on the table corner. Before cutting oranges Mom rolled them soft on the tabletop, saying that keeps the juice from bursting; on big fruits she pressed the spine of the knife with her wrist, on small ones she rested only her fingertips on the blade. I handed fruit over and counted pieces. Her rule for apple chunks was one bite each, and oversized pieces got another slice from the spine of her knife. Midway she took a phone call, and came back to find me scooping the soaked apples out to drain. She asked why. I said a book told me salt water left too long makes fruit soggy. She nodded, did not praise me, and placed that whole bowl of apples on the layer I had stacked.

The cut fruit sat in separate bowls: apple chunks in light salt water, oranges in thin slices, bananas cut on the bias into horse teeth. Plating was mine, and Mom stepped back to dry her hands. I pushed the bowl to the center of the table and stacked the fruit by color, light to dark, the tall pieces in the middle, her only reminder. When it came to the dressing I held my breath, afraid of squeezing too much, so she took the bottle, gave her wrist one turn, and it spread evenly. That too takes practice, she said. When the plating was done she thought a moment, then straightened two tilted tomato halves.

Tasting was a family event, and every person handed me the first spoon. Dad gave his review: the knife work is weak, the plating has ideas. I had been watching all afternoon: how she picks up a fruit, squeezes it, then sniffs; how her wrist stays still while her forearm drives the knife; how she tastes the dressing by dabbing just a little onto the tip of her tongue. So this is how the hands of my mother were trained, day by day, through hundreds of apples. I looked down at my own hands; my fingertips still felt sticky with pear juice. Mom said we would make it again tomorrow, and tomorrow I would be in charge.

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