

## What I Cook When No One's Watching

When I cook for other people, I usually ask what they want first. Pasta? Pancakes? Something safe. But when I cook just for myself, I always make the same thing: lentil soup.

There is nothing special about it. It is not pretty or complicated. But I like the way it fills the kitchen with warmth, how it simmers slowly, how it asks nothing from me except patience.

I started cooking during middle school. My parents worked late, and my younger brother was picky about anything that was not toast. So I began trying simple things, like scrambled eggs, grilled cheese, boxed rice. Then I started watching YouTube videos, asking questions, and testing out recipes that used whatever we had in the fridge.

I failed more often than not. I remember burning garlic so severely that the whole house smelled like straight smoke. Another time, I pretty much forgot the salt and tried to amend the situation with soy sauce, neither of which made for a very delightful meal. But little by little, the things I cooked began to taste better, and I am sure as a result, something else shifted, too.

I realized that cooking was one of the only things that made me feel fully present. I was not overthinking, scrolling, or worrying about what I should be doing next. I was just standing in the kitchen, tasting broth, adjusting spices, and doing something with care.

Now, I cook whenever I need to slow down. When I feel overwhelmed or restless, I return to the cutting board. I chop onions, toast spices, and stir without rushing. And when I sit down to eat, even if it is just a bowl of soup, I feel like I have taken care of something.

It has also changed how I can show care to the people in my life. When my friend was having a tough day, I brought her fresh bread and a thermos of tea. When my dad got sick, I made him his favorite rice dish, which I had to make from scratch and took about two hours. I don't always have the right words in those moments, but I have learned that if food can speak quietly for me, then all the better.

I do not plan to become a chef. Cooking is not about performance for me. It is about attention. About care. Finding comfort in the small, ordinary process of making something from scratch.

And that, more than any monumental accomplishment, keeps calling me back. A pot on the stove. A spoon in my hand. And a soft joy that feels like home.