

BETWEEN THE  
WORDS,  
BEHIND THE  
RECIPES

A kitchen, a plate of food — they are vessels of personal life. For many, the most defining moment of independent living is learning how to cook.

I have a handwritten recipe book from my grandmother.

Before I left home one time, my grandma carefully transcribed a collection of our family recipes — all her specialties, all the dishes we often ate at home. At the same time, I had finally moved out of homestay houses. For the first time in my life, I had my own kitchen. From making a complete mess at first, I slowly built a steady connection with food and cooking.

During the lockdown period in London, COVID restrictions kept me from going anywhere, and the only way I could feel a sense of home was through phone calls. I sat alone in my room, quickly swallowed by the early darkness of wintertime, surrounded by a seemingly endless loneliness. So I started flipping through the recipe book more often, recreating the taste of home on the days I missed it most. I would feel a burst of joy when I caught a familiar smell, or happiness when I found a substitute ingredient in this foreign land.

Later, I experimented with more recipes. My fridge became packed with supermarket ingredients. As the lockdown lifted and vibrant summer daylight returned, my kitchen began to welcome guests from all kinds of backgrounds and experiences. This recipe book — once filled with my grandma's love and my longing for home — gradually expanded to hold pieces of my own life. It became a record, a witness to my journey.

Braised Pork Ribs



Braised Cuttlefish

## Grandma's Homemade Braised Cuttlefish

"Your childhood favorite."

Clean the cuttlefishes, especially the nose and intestines. Cut them in thick straps.

Add some oil in a cook pan and heat it up. When the oil is heated, add scallion, garlic bulbs and ginger into the pan, then add salt and Chinese five spice.

Now add the cuttlefishes in the pan, add cooking wine and some soy sauce, wait till the sauce is a little bit thicken and the cuttlefish will be ready.

The sauce taste really great with rice.

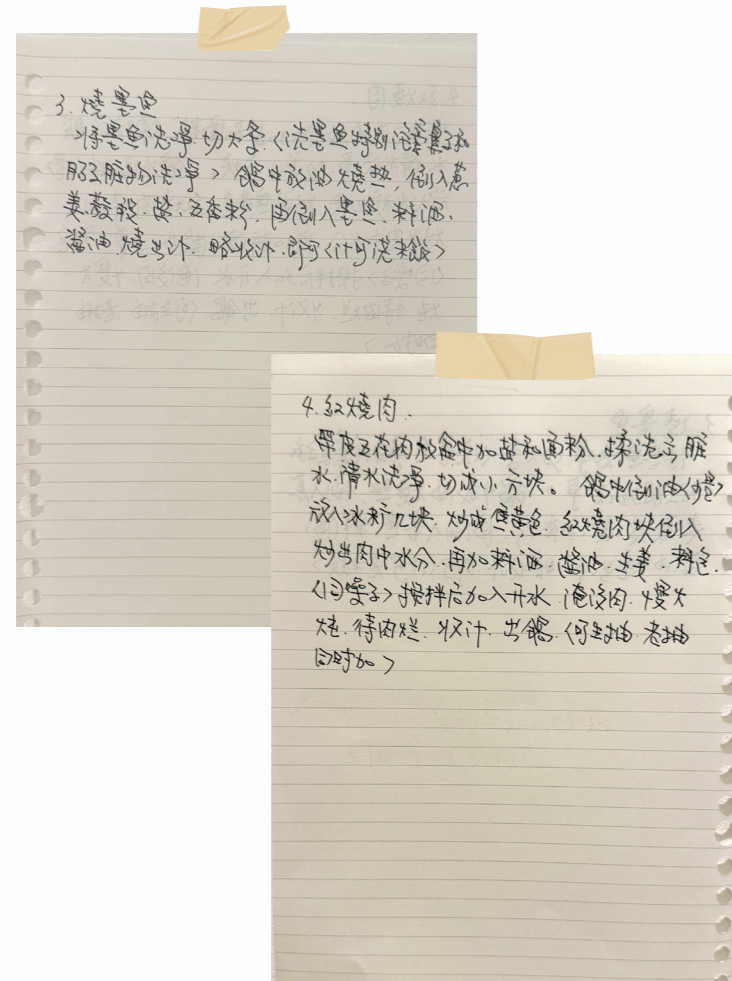


Sept. 2024  
Xi'an, China

Braised cuttlefish was one of my grandmother's signature dishes — something I could only ever eat when I was home.

As a child, I was obsessed with pouring soup over rice, and I especially loved drizzling the rich sauce from the braised squid onto my bowl. Mixing the squid with the rice made each grain stand out, and the combination of textures was wonderfully harmonious.

I've never found a substitute for this dish in London. I've also never come across anything like it in any Chinese restaurant — perhaps because it's too humble, too ordinary, too home-style. But to me, it's the kind of taste that brings a deep sense of comfort and belonging.



Braised Recipes Written By My Grandma

## Grandma's Homemade Braised Pork and Chicken

"Master this one, and you'll always have something good to eat."

Prepare a seasoning bag filled with bay leaves, Chinese cinnamon sticks and Sichuan peppercorns.



Clean meat with plain flour and salt, rinse and cut into smaller pieces. Make few cuts on the chicken wings.

Add oil in a pan and heat the oil up. Then put some rock sugar into the hot oil, melt them till caramelised colour, add the meat and make sure the sugar wrap those meat nicely in golden colour. Stir fry the meat till no more water come out from the meat.

Stir fry the meat with the seasoning bag, add cooking wine, soy sauce and ginger slices.

Add boiled hot water till the meat is being covered underneath. Stew slowly with a lid for at least one hour, until the meat is soft enough. Before finishing this dish you could also leave the lid open to thicken the sauce if you prefer a heavier taste.

Apr. 2025  
London, UK

Braised pork was the dish my grandma made most often — and the one she was best at.

She taught me how to make it when I was little. I'd stand next to her in the kitchen, watching as the meat slowly changed color and the sauce thickened. Every time she made it, she'd say, "If you know how to make this, you won't go hungry when you leave home."

So in a way, learning this dish became my first step toward living independently. Over time, it's become the dish I'm most confident with — something that always brings me back to her, no matter where I am.



## My Signature Stewed Beef Short Ribs

"When you don't feel like cooking, just throw it in the pot — easy."

Prepare:

Short Ribs	Garlic
Scallion	Sesame
Ginger	Thai Chilli
Bay Leaf	Soy Sauce
Cooking Wine	Vinegar

Cut the short ribs into strips. Prepare slices of ginger, sections of scallion, and a few bay leaves.

Add cold water to a stew pot, place in the cleaned beef short ribs, and add cooking wine and ginger. Bring to a boil over high heat, then skim off the foam from the surface.

Next, add the bay leaves and scallion sections. Simmer over medium-low heat for at least one hour.

Sauce: Slice some garlic and Thai chili, then add vinegar and a splash of soy sauce. Mix in sesame seeds, sesame oil, and honey. Stir well to combine.

Once the meat is fully cooked, remove the aromatics. Sprinkle the meat with salt and enjoy it dipped in the sauce.

Mar. 2025  
London, UK

Short ribs became my hidden gem at British supermarkets. For less than the price of a steak, I could get a big, beautifully marbled piece of beef — and it quickly became the ingredient I cook with more than 70% of the time.

When I'm feeling physically and mentally drained, too tired to make a proper meal, something simple and mild like clear-stewed short ribs becomes my go-to. I was obsessed with how everything in this dish can be cut into neat, uniform pieces. There's something deeply satisfying about that order and the quiet sense of control and calm that comes from such a simple way of cooking.



## Grandma's Dumpling Recipe

"You're out there making your own dumplings — that's pretty impressive!"

### Pork Dumplings:

Cut the meat into small pieces and mix it with minced ginger, soy sauce, cooking wine, five-spice powder, sesame oil, and salt. Stir to marinate.

Boil some Sichuan peppercorn water, let it cool, then gradually add it to the meat filling while stirring to make it juicier.

Finally, before wrapping, mix in chopped scallions to enhance the aroma.

### Chive Dumplings:

Finely chop the chives and mix them with sesame oil and scrambled egg crumbles. Separately, add dried shrimp, five-spice powder, and salt.

Chop the fresh shrimp into small pieces and add them to the filling.

If you're making vegetarian dumplings, you can wrap them directly.

If you prefer meat and vegetable dumplings, simply add some of the seasoned pork filling.

Note: Be sure to mix the chives with oil first — otherwise, they'll release too much water and make the dumplings hard to wrap.

Jan. 2025  
London, UK

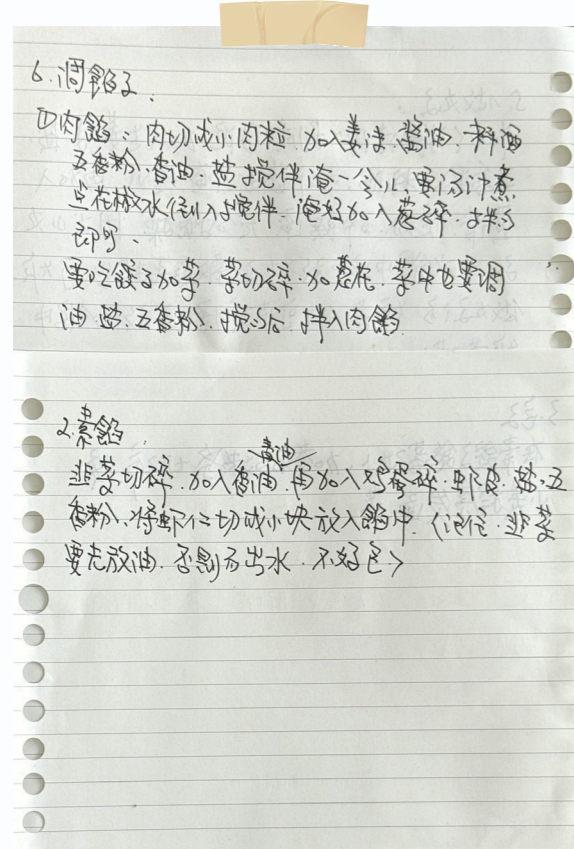
In the memories of any child who grew up in northern China, there's always that image: the whole family gathered around, mixing dough, rolling out wrappers, and making dumplings together.

Pork and chive was the most common filling in my home. Sometimes we made fragrant vegetarian dumplings with chives and egg, and other times we mixed the chives with pork for a richer, meatier taste.

Because of these dumpling memories, on nights when I miss home while living alone, I often find myself really craving dumplings. And the next day, I'll go all in — starting from scratch, kneading the dough, rolling each wrapper, and folding every single dumpling by hand.

I've never liked the frozen dumplings from Chinese supermarkets in London, and I don't use store-bought wrappers either. What matters to me most is not just the taste, but the act itself — a way to relive those comforting memories that have always carried me, and always brought me back to home.





Dumplings Recipes Written By My Grandma

## My Dumpling Recipe

"Still experimenting and learning."

Chives are only available in a few Chinese supermarkets, so when I suddenly crave dumplings, I substitute them with celery. I finely chop the celery and mix it with the pork filling.

Sometimes I also make steamed dumplings using zucchini and shrimp. The steps and seasonings are similar to my grandma's method, but with one key difference: the zucchini needs to be grated, mixed with salt, and then the excess water should be squeezed out before mixing it into the filling.

Jan. 2025  
London, UK

Even though, as you can see in the photo, my dumplings come out all different sizes — some big, some small — and they never stand up as neatly as the ones my grandma used to make, I'm still completely devoted to dumplings.

Since moving to London, Chinese chives have become much harder to find. Making chive dumplings turned into something a bit troublesome — even a little bit of a luxury



## My Friend's Huoshaoyun Braised Chicken recipe

"This is the one dish I can actually cook."

600g chicken thigh meat  
3–4 tomatoes (or canned tomatoes)  
3 potatoes  
Cilantro  
Garlic, ginger, scallions

Wash and cut the chicken thighs into chunks. Place them in a bowl and add light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, oil, cornstarch, black pepper, sugar, and cooking wine.

Use a fork to poke holes in the meat to help it absorb the flavors. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Peel and dice the potatoes, then boil until soft and mash into potato puree.

Boil the tomatoes and peel the skin, then crush them (or use canned tomatoes).

Cut scallions and cilantro into short sections.

Mash garlic and chili together into a paste.

Once marinated, heat a generous amount of oil in a pan. When the oil is hot, stir-fry the chili-garlic paste until fragrant. Add the chicken and cook until it changes color.

May, 2025  
London, UK

One of my closest friends from university came back to London for her graduation, and for one joyful week, she stayed at my place.

One evening, as a thank-you, she cooked us her signature dish — Huoshaoyun braised chicken. She told us it was the only dish she knew how to make, but also the most delicious.

Since then, her recipe has found its way into my kitchen too. I cook it from time to time, and whenever I do, I can't help but think of those moments — cooking together, living together — and it always makes me smile.

Add all of the scallion (reserve some green parts for garnish), pour in the tomato sauce and mashed potatoes, and stir to combine. Adjust thickness by adding a bit of hot water. Season with light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, salt, black pepper, and sugar. Cover and let simmer for 3–5 minutes.

Uncover and stir in oyster sauce. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed. Add cilantro, stir briefly, and serve. Garnish with scallion greens (for looks) and sesame seeds (for flavor).



#### 火烧云油焖鸡

准备材料：600g 鸡腿肉，西红柿 3-4 个或西红柿罐头，土豆三个，香菜，蒜，姜，葱

1. 鸡腿肉洗净切块，放至碗中腌制，加入适量生抽，老抽，蚝油，油，淀粉，黑胡椒，糖，料酒，用叉子在肉上扎洞，放入冰箱腌制一小时以上
2. 备菜：土豆削皮切小块，放入锅里煮至软绵捣成土豆泥，西红柿煮熟去皮捣烂（或西红柿罐头），葱、香菜切成小段，辣椒、蒜捣成泥状
3. 肉腌制好后，热锅加多点油，至适宜温度后倒入辣椒和蒜炒香，加入鸡腿肉翻炒均匀炒至变色
4. 加入所有葱段，可以保留一些葱叶，倒入西红柿汁、土豆泥翻炒，看干稠程度加入适量开水，倒生抽、老抽、盐、黑胡椒粉、糖，盖上盖子焖 3-5 分钟
5. 开盖加蚝油翻炒均匀，尝味咸淡看加料，加入香菜翻炒后出锅，加入葱叶（好看）和芝麻（好吃）



## Grandma's Shaanxi Tofu with Hot Chili Oil Splash

"Smells good, right?"

Take one block of silken (or soft) tofu, cut it into thick slices, and briefly boil it in a pot. Remove and place the slices on a plate. Top the tofu with minced garlic, salt, and chili flakes.

Pour some oil into a pan, add a few Sichuan peppercorns, and heat until the oil is hot and fragrant. Carefully pour the hot oil over the tofu, then drizzle with soy sauce — and it's ready to serve.



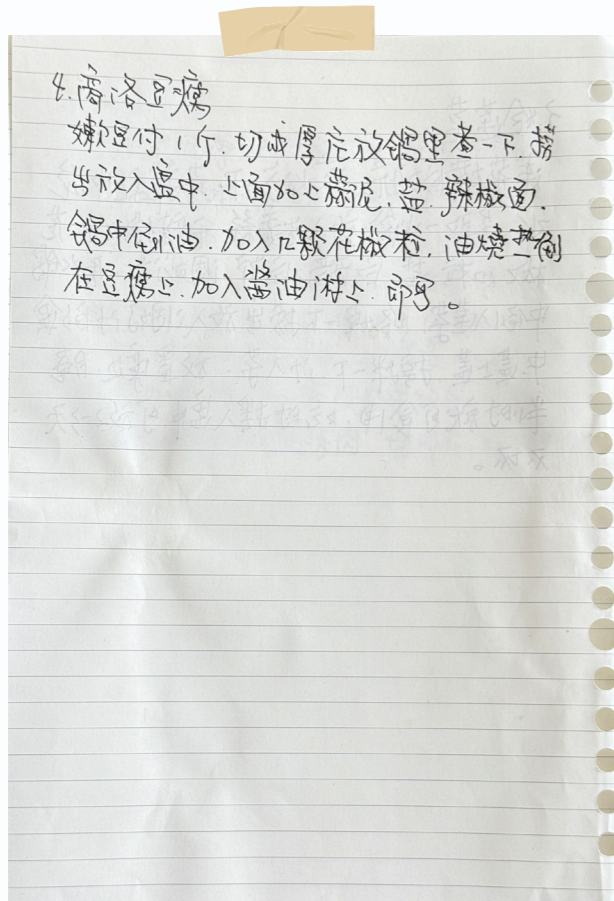
Nov. 2024  
London, UK

Two months after returning to London, I started missing the flavors of home.

Chili Oil Tofu (Yóupō Làzi Dòufu) is a rustic dish from my hometown, Xi'an. My grandma adapted the recipe to suit our family's taste.

The key is in the chili oil — made by pouring smoking-hot oil over crushed special chili flakes, then stirring quickly while it's still sizzling. That's what releases the deep, toasty aroma that only chilies from Xi'an can truly create.

Before I left home, my mom gave me a small jar of our local chili powder. I use it sparingly, treating each spoonful like something precious. A little secret — I only make this dish on days when I'm really happy or when I'm cooking for important friends, as a quiet way of showing love.



Tofu Recipe Written By My Grandma

## Grandma's Chinese New Year Tradition Pork Skin Jelly (Ròupí Dòng)

"We make a big batch of this every year."

Grandma taught me this recipe over a video call one day before Chinese New Year's eve in the year of snake:

Clean the pork skin thoroughly. Add cooking wine and blanch it. Then use a knife to scrape off the inner fat. Blanch it again and rinse repeatedly—about 5 to 6 times—until clean. After that cut the pork skin into thin strips.

Add the cleaned pork skin to 2–3 times its volume of water. Add a spice pouch and simmer for about an hour.

Once cooked, let it cool slightly. Remove all the spices, keeping only the pork skin. Season with light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, and salt.

Pour the pork skin and broth into a container. Let it cool at room temperature. During this process, stir occasionally to prevent the pork skin from settling at the bottom — this helps create a better texture.

Finally, cover the container with a lid and place it in the fridge overnight. By the next morning, the pork skin jelly will have set — and the dish is ready to enjoy.

Feb. 2025  
London, UK

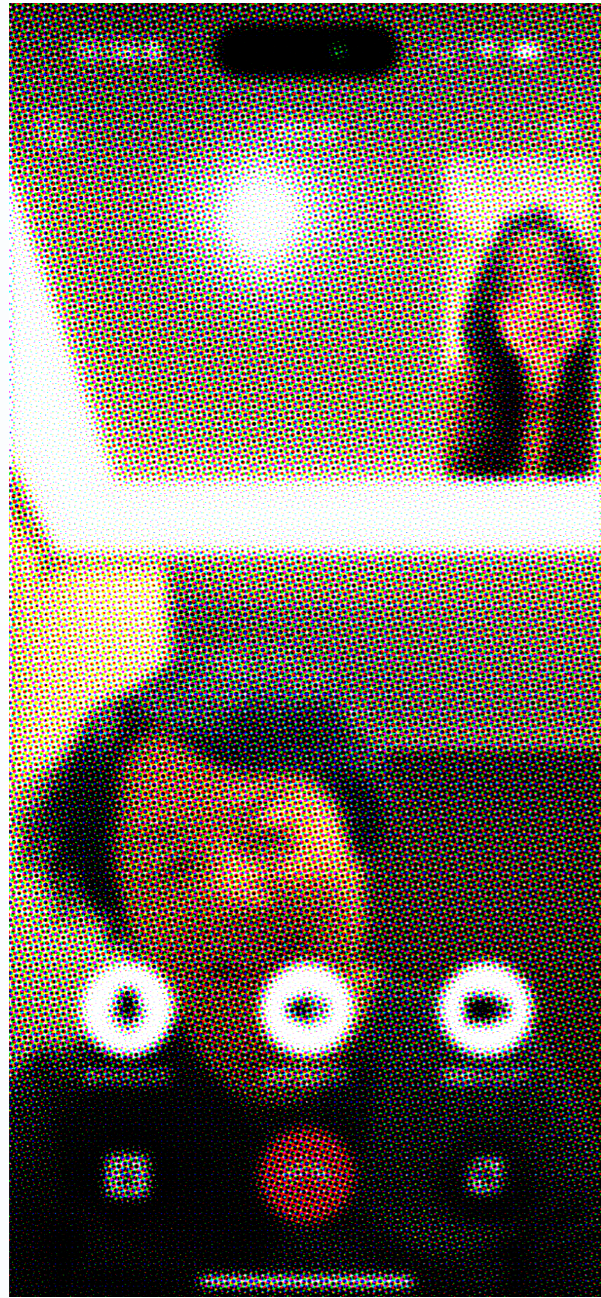
Chinese New Year is approaching, this will be the first time I'm celebrating with a group of friends. It's also the first time I'm attempting to recreate the dishes from my childhood New Year's Eve dinner, right here in London.

When I was little, there were always a few dishes on our table that never changed from year to year. They were usually time-consuming to make, and preparation would begin days in advance — long before the New Year arrived. These special dishes would then appear at every meal from New Year's Eve through to the fifth day of the new year.

To me, these once-a-year dishes are the most vivid symbols of reunion and the Chinese New Year. No matter where I am in the world, it doesn't feel like a real New Year unless they are on the table.

This year, I've decided to bring those dishes back — to cook them for my friends, and to share a little piece of home with the people around me.

I called my grandma on video and carefully asked her about every recipe and detail. Step by step, I followed her instructions — excited and filled with joy — as I set out on my big plan to bring our family's New Year's Eve dinner to my table here in London.



*Pork Skin Jelly In Progress*



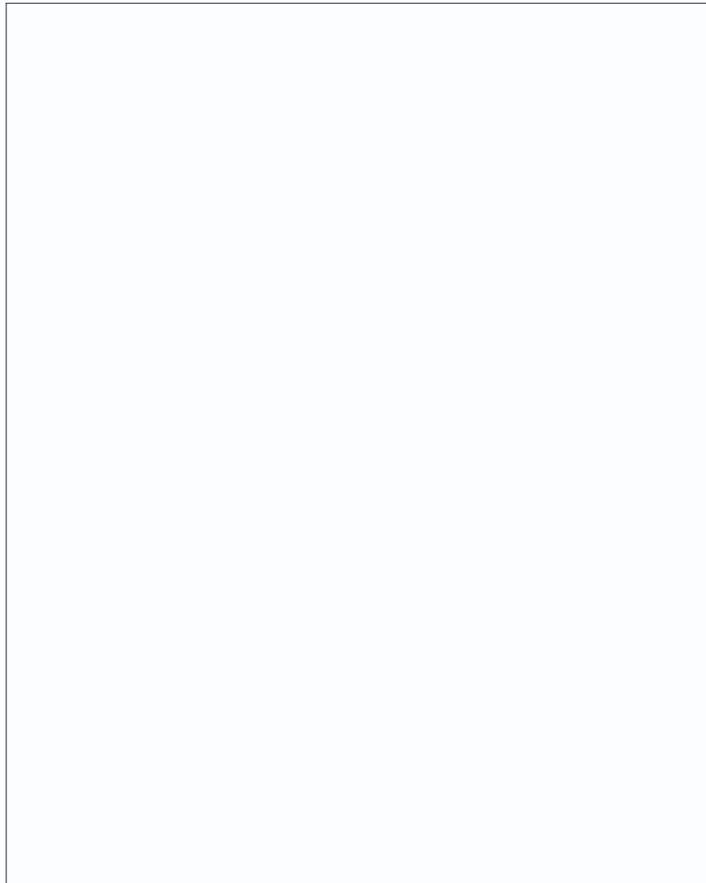
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## Recipe

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You're invited to share your own recipe here, draw an image of the dish, tell the story behind it, and become part of this journey of recipes, food, identity, culture, and memory.

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You are invited to tell the story behind your recipe here:



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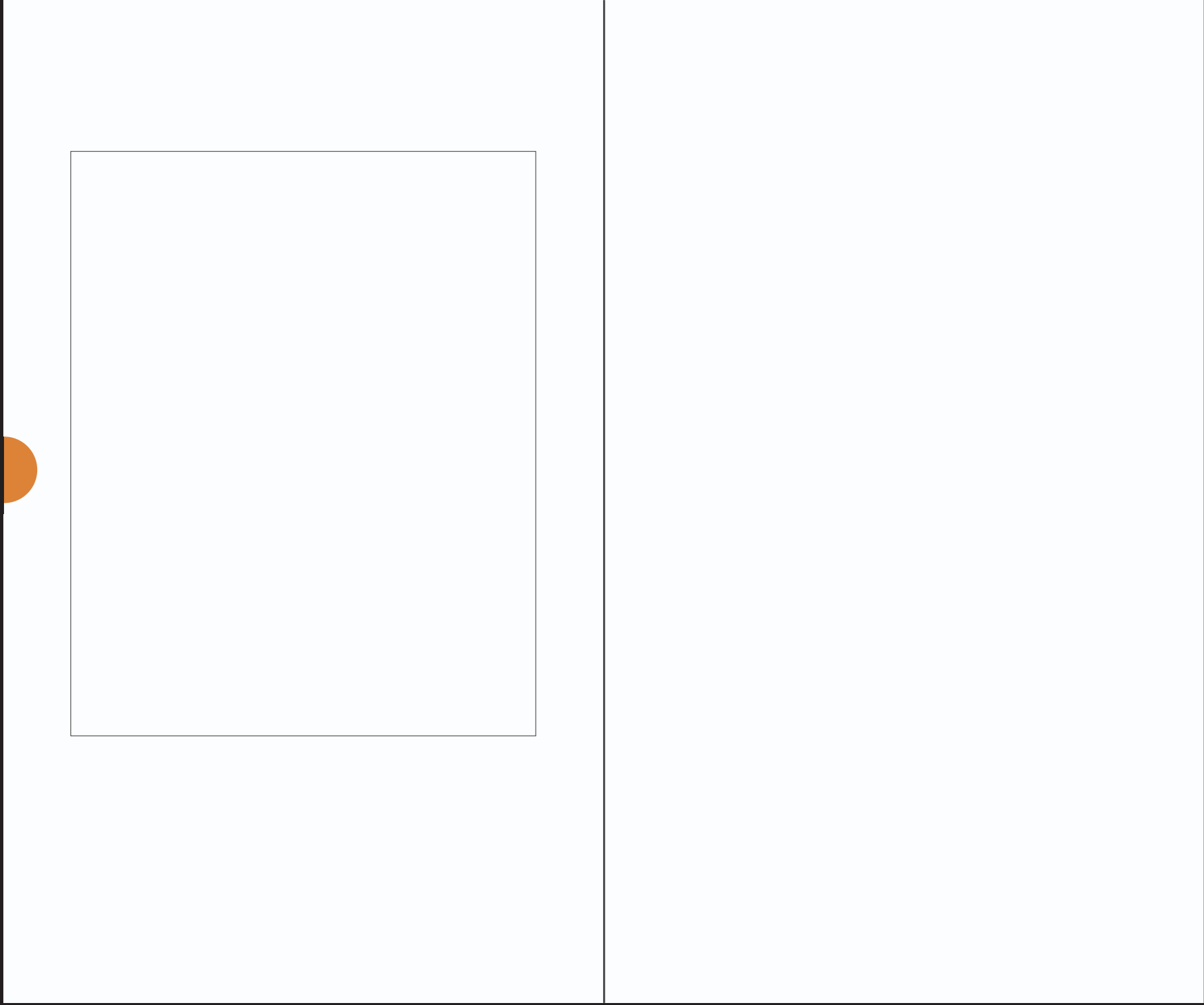
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