淀粉遇到了碘酒

碘酒碰到马铃薯的那一秒，那块黄色的肉上直接开出一朵蓝黑色的花。我举着滴管愣住，第一反应不是高兴，是心疼——那是晚饭要用的一个马铃薯。我妈在厨房门口喊：你拿土豆玩什么？我说我在做实验，她说明天你爸切土豆的时候你就知道了。

实验是从馒头开始的。晚饭前我掰了一小块白馒头，把药店买的碘酒滴上去，一滴，浅黄；两滴，馒头表面慢慢洇出一块蓝紫色，像有人隔着布在馒头后面打了一拳。我立刻在本子上记：馒头，遇碘酒，变蓝。然后我滴向第二样东西，白菜叶。蓝颜色没有来。碘酒干了以后只留了一点淡黄，白菜还是白菜。我又滴了自来水，什么变化也没有。

变蓝的会是谁呢？我列了张单子：馒头、马铃薯、面条、藕粉、白糖、盐。前四样都变，后两样都不变。我把单子拿给我妈看，她正在削土豆，瞟了一眼说：变蓝的这四样，你想想它们是什么做的。馒头是面粉，面条是面粉，藕粉是藕里的粉，马铃薯也是粉。我盯着单子，忽然明白了：碘酒在找同一样东西，粉。

晚上我翻科学书，才看到那个词叫淀粉。书上说，碘钻进淀粉分子的圈里，抱在一起，颜色就变了。我不太确定自己懂没懂，第二天一早又做了一次。这次我用奶奶冲藕粉的藕粉，调一小碗，滴一滴碘酒，蓝黑色来得比马铃薯还快，整碗藕粉水像泼了墨。我拿筷子搅，颜色不消失；我往碗里兑清水，颜色变浅，但还在。我把碗举到窗户前，蓝黑色透着光，像一小片傍晚的天。

奶奶在旁边看着，说她小时候肚子疼，大人拿碘酒抹肚子，抹完皮肤上也发青，是不是同一个道理。我答不上来，因为皮肤里有没有淀粉我不知道。这个问题我记在本子上，留着一个问号。它跟前面那些已经找到答案的问题不一样，它是我自己撞上的新问题。

那顿晚饭，马铃薯被切成了块，被碘酒染过的那一面削掉了，剩下的还是照炒不误。我爸说这块土豆颜色有点怪，我妈说，做实验的孩子家的土豆，能一样吗。我嚼着马铃薯，忽然想到一件事：我刚才吃下去的，正是碘酒满世界要找的那种东西。原来我的早餐、午饭和晚饭，全是它的猎物。那天起我学会了一个习惯：看见一样东西，先问它是由什么做的。这个问题比实验本身有用，因为它没有做完的那一天。

When Starch Met Iodine

The second the iodine touched the potato, a blue-black flower bloomed right on the yellow flesh. I stood there holding the dropper, and my first feeling was not joy but regret. That potato was for dinner. My mother called from the kitchen door: what are you doing with the potato? I said I was running an experiment. She said your father will have something to say about it when he cuts tomorrow's potato.

The experiment started with a steamed bun. Before dinner I broke off a small piece of white bun and dropped on the iodine I had bought at the pharmacy. One drop: pale yellow. Two drops: a blue-purple bruise slowly spread across the surface, as if someone had punched the bun from behind a cloth. I wrote at once in my notebook: bun,

iodine, turns blue. Then I moved to the second item, a cabbage leaf. No blue came. When the iodine dried it left only a faint yellow. The cabbage stayed cabbage. I dropped some on tap water. Nothing.

So what was the blue chasing? I made a list: bun, potato, noodles, lotus-root starch, sugar, salt. The first four turned blue. The last two did not. I carried the list to my mother, who was peeling potatoes and barely glanced at it. She said: look at those four that changed. What are they made of? The bun is flour. The noodles are flour. Lotus-root starch comes from the lotus root. The potato is starch too. I stared at the list and understood: the iodine was hunting one single thing. Powder. Starch.

That night I opened the science book and finally saw the word: starch. The book said iodine slips inside the rings of starch molecules, they hold each other, and the color changes. I was not sure I truly understood, so the next morning I ran it again. This time I used the lotus-root starch my grandmother mixes for breakfast. I stirred a small bowl, added one drop of iodine, and the blue-black came faster than on the potato. The whole bowl looked like spilled ink. I stirred with chopsticks; the color stayed. I added clear water; it faded, but it stayed. I held the bowl up to the window, and the blue-black glowed in the light like a small piece of evening sky.

My grandmother watched and said that when she had a stomachache as a girl, the grown-ups rubbed iodine on her belly, and the skin turned bluish too. Was that the same thing? I could not answer. I did not know whether skin holds starch. I wrote the question in my notebook with a question mark on it. It was different from the questions I had already answered. It was a new one I had bumped into on my own.

At dinner that night the potato was cut into chunks, the iodine-stained face peeled off, and the rest went into the wok as usual. My father said this potato looked a little strange. My mother said: what do you expect from the potato of a kid who does experiments? I chewed, and it struck me: what I was swallowing was exactly the thing the iodine had been hunting all over the kitchen. My breakfast, my lunch, my dinner, all of it was the prey. Since that day I have kept one habit. When I see a thing, I first ask what it is made of. That question is more useful than the experiment, because it never has a last day.

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