那盏没亮的小灯泡

周末的下午，女儿把科学课的实验材料摊了一餐桌：电池盒、小灯泡、灯座、三根带鳄鱼夹的导线。老师布置的任务是让一个小灯泡亮起来。她拼得很快，十分钟就接好了一整条线，然后满怀期待地按下电池盒的卡扣。灯泡没有亮。

她以为是夹子没夹紧，把三个夹子重新夹了一遍，再按。不亮。她开始翻来覆去地摆弄，声音也急了：明明都接上了呀。第三次，她干脆把整个电路推到我面前：爸爸你接，肯定是你教的方法不对。眼圈红了，眼泪在打转。我张了张嘴，把替她接好的冲动咽了回去。

我说：别急着接第二次，我们先当一回侦探。她抹了抹眼睛，不太情愿地坐下。我们从电池开始查。电池装反了没有？没有，正极朝外，对的。电池有电吗？她找来另一台遥控器，把电池塞进去试，遥控器嘀了一声，有电。导线断了吗？我们把三根导线一根一根换到别的接口上试，灯座拧松了没有？拧紧，还是不行。

最后只剩电池盒。我把弹簧那一端翻过来，用手指一按，弹簧瘪下去，半天弹不回来。就是它。弹簧松了，顶不住电池，电路看着接上了，其实中间断着。女儿恍然大悟，跑去厨房翻出备用电池，又找了枚硬币垫在弹簧后面，把电池压紧。她说：这次你退后，我自己来。

她把最后一个鳄鱼夹夹上，手指悬在电池盒上方，不敢按。我说按吧。咔哒一声，灯丝红了，一小团暖黄的光落在她的指尖上。她举着灯座在屋里转圈，喊亮了亮了。那盏小灯泡其实很普通，可在她手里，它比任何一盏灯都亮。

晚上她写实验记录，在失败那一栏里写：第一次不亮，第二次不亮，第三次我哭了。原因：电池盒弹簧松了，电过不去。我站在她背后看，心里有点发酸。她记录的方式，和我小时候完全不一样。我们那代人做砸了实验，只会记住丢脸；她这一代，学会了把丢脸拆开，看看里面装着什么。

后来她遇到麻烦，偶尔会冒出一句我们那天的话：先别急着再来一次，先当侦探。钢琴弹不顺，她不从头硬弹，把卡住的两小节单独拎出来慢练；数学错了一堆，她挑出错得最多的那类题先补。我知道，那盏没亮的小灯泡没有白灭。它教会她的东西，比亮起来那一下多得多。

The Little Bulb That Never Lit Up

On a weekend afternoon, my daughter spread her science class materials all over the dining table: a battery box, a small bulb, a lamp holder, three wires with alligator clips. The assignment was to make one small bulb light up. She worked fast, connected the whole circuit in ten minutes, then pressed the battery box latch with great expectation. The bulb did not light.

She thought the clips were loose, re-clipped all three, and pressed again. Still dark. She began fiddling back and forth, her voice tightening: but everything is connected! On the third try she shoved the whole circuit toward me: Dad, you do it. Your method must be wrong. Her eyes were red, tears about to fall. I opened my mouth

and swallowed the urge to wire it for her.

I said: don't rush to try again. First, let's be detectives for a round. She wiped her eyes and sat down, unwilling. We started with the battery. Was it in backwards? No, positive end out, correct. Did the battery have power? She took the battery to the TV remote in the living room; it beeped. Power was fine. Were the wires broken? We tested the three wires one by one on other sockets. Was the lamp holder loose? We tightened it. Still nothing.

Only the battery box remained. I flipped the spring end over and pressed it with my finger. The spring sank and took forever to spring back. There it was. The spring had gone slack and could not press against the battery. The circuit looked connected, but it was broken in the middle. My daughter's face lit with understanding. She ran to the kitchen for a spare battery, found a coin to pad behind the spring, and pressed the battery tight. She said: this time stand back. I'll do it myself.

She clipped on the last wire, her finger hovering above the latch, afraid to press. I said: press. With a click, the filament glowed red, a small warm yellow light falling on her fingertips. She carried the lamp holder around the room, shouting that it lit. The bulb was an ordinary one, but in her hands it shone brighter than any lamp.

That evening she wrote her lab report. In the failure column she wrote: first try dark, second try dark, third try I cried. Reason: the spring in the battery box was loose, so the current could not pass. I stood behind her reading, my heart a little sore. The way she recorded things was nothing like mine. Our generation, after a failed experiment, remembered only the embarrassment. Hers learned to take the embarrassment apart and see what was inside.

Later, when she ran into trouble, she sometimes came out with a line from that day: don't rush to try again; be a detective first. When a piano piece went badly, she did not hammer it from the start; she pulled out the two broken measures and practiced them slowly. When a math homework had many errors, she first fixed the type she got wrong most. I know the little bulb that never lit did not go dark in vain. What it taught her was far more than the moment it lit up.