一碗面的加蛋

期末最后一节班会，我给全班布置了一份特殊的暑假作业：不用笔写，用双手做。每人认领一样家务，整个暑假天天做，再学会做三顿饭，开学交一个巴掌大的小本，记下做了什么、谁尝了、什么滋味。有孩子哀嚎，说老师这是把暑假过成炊事班。我笑着说，炊事班也是兵。

放假前我把安排家务的要点讲了一遍：家务不在多，在天天做。倒垃圾、择菜、擦桌，一样就够，贵在不断。我还特意交代家长，孩子做得慢做得差，忍住，别接手。这句话我重复了三遍，因为我知道大人最容易犯的错，就是看不得孩子笨手笨脚。

开学收小本。有的本子上画满了正字，一天一格。有个孩子记，八月里他妈妈生病卧床，他给妈妈煮了十四天面，第一天的面煮坨了，妈妈还是吃完。他在本子上写，原来妈妈天天给我做饭，我从来没说过好吃。我在这一页停了很久，页脚写了一行批语：这一页比所有作文都写得好。

分享班会上，学会做饭的孩子轮流讲。有个男孩讲他学煮面，掌握不好水，后来伸出手指量，水没过指第二关节正好。全班笑，他也笑，笑完补了一句，现在我妈加班，我给她留面。后排一个女孩讲她第一次炒青菜，把糖当盐，全家吃了甜的青菜，她急哭了，奶奶说甜青菜也是菜。台下笑成一片，我看见她眼圈红了。

这份作业的收获，开学一个月还在长。教室的黑板每天有人擦得干净，讲台上的粉笔盒没人乱翻，午餐时掉在桌上的米粒有人顺手收。有个家长来信说，孩子现在周末自己安排洗碗，还嫌他洗得不干净。我在回信里说，让他洗，慢就是快。

我教了十几年书，越来越确信一件事：孩子长大的时刻不在课本里。它在厨房里，在洗碗池边，在一个孩子第一次明白一粥一饭都要人费心的晚上。这份暑假作业我明年还会布置，还要加一条，让每个孩子给做饭的人盛一次饭。

The Extra Egg in the Bowl of Noodles

In the last class meeting of the term I gave the whole class a special summer assignment: not to be written with a pen but done with two hands. Each child was to take one chore, do it every day all summer, learn to cook three meals, and hand in a notebook the size of a palm at school opening, recording what was done, who tasted it, and how it tasted. One boy groaned that the teacher was turning summer vacation into a kitchen squad. I laughed and said a kitchen squad is soldiers too.

Before the vacation I went over the points of arranging housework: the point is not many chores but doing them daily. Taking out trash, trimming vegetables, wiping the table, one is enough, and the value lies in never stopping. I also told the parents on purpose, when the child is slow or clumsy, hold back and do not take over. I repeated that sentence three times, because I know the easiest mistake grown-ups make is not bearing to see children fumble.

At school opening I collected the notebooks. Some were filled with tally marks,

one square for each day. One child wrote that in August his mother fell ill and stayed in bed, and he cooked noodles for her for fourteen days; the noodles of the first day were overcooked into a lump, and she still finished the bowl. He wrote in the notebook, mother cooks for me every day and I never once said it was good. I stayed on that page a long while and wrote one line at the foot: this page is better than every composition.

At the sharing meeting, the children who had learned to cook took turns telling. One boy said he learned to boil noodles and could not judge the water, so in the end he measured with his finger, and water up to the second knuckle was just right. The class laughed and he laughed, then added one line: now when his mother works overtime, he keeps a bowl of noodles for her. A girl in the back row told how she stir-fried greens for the first time and used sugar instead of salt; the whole family ate sweet greens, and she cried in frustration, while her grandmother said sweet greens are still greens. The room roared with laughter, and I saw her eyes go red.

The harvest of this assignment kept growing a month after school opened. The blackboard in the classroom got wiped clean every day, nobody rummaged in the chalk box on the platform, and rice grains fallen on the lunch table were picked up by some passing hand. A parent wrote that her child now arranges his own dishwashing on weekends and even scolds her for washing imperfectly. I answered, let him wash; slowness is speed.

I have taught for over ten years, and I am more and more sure of one thing: the moments when children grow up are not inside textbooks. They are in the kitchen, beside the dishwashing sink, on the evening when a child first understands that a bowl of porridge and a bowl of rice each cost someone trouble. I will give this summer assignment again next year, and add one more item, that every child serves a meal once to the person who cooks.