The Wisdom of An Egg

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President Zaki, members of the College, and guests:

Good afternoon. Four years ago, when I arrived at Bowdoin, I didn’t know what to expect. Would I do well academically? Would I survive the infamous Maine winter? Would I finally understand what lacrosse is? (Spoiler: No.) But there was one thing I knew for certain about Bowdoin: I would eat well here.

Virginia Woolf once said, “One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.” If that’s true, then Bowdoin dining has been fueling some of the finest thinking, loving, and sleeping in this country. The spacious dining halls transform meals into conversations, professors into lunch companions, and strangers into lifelong friends. But beyond just good food, Bowdoin has provided us with the opportunities, resources, and care that allow us to thrive. It has challenged us without starving us of opportunities, nourishing not just our bodies but what Woolf calls the “lamp of our spine.”

And yet, if I had to distill my Bowdoin experience into one image, I wouldn’t choose the lobster bake or the delicious double chocolate chip cookies. No, I would choose the humble egg. I have spent my entire life adapting to new diets. Growing up in southern China, I ate eggs with congee on cold mornings; at my boarding school in the Midwest, eggs come scrambled with bacon. Yet at Bowdoin, eggs—like the students here—take on wondrous, ever-changing forms: fried, soft-boiled, poached, frittatas, quiche, and, of course, the legendary Egg McMoulton, a dish so revered it deserves its own honorary degree. Bowdoin gathers people from all around the world, each of our stomachs carrying a different memory of what raised us. And yet, in the dining halls, we set aside our dietary differences and many other differences. Over the past four years, we sat together, ate together. Chatted and laughed together. It was at these dining tables, over eggs Benedict or those divine mozz sticks at Supers, that I truly understood what it means to truly belong somewhere.

Eggs have also been central to my academic journey. I spent a year studying how modern women writers repurpose disgust, vegetarianism, and fasting as bodily resistance. What I found is that eggs, like language, are endlessly adaptable. They absorb new meanings and shift to fit new contexts. In a diary I read from the 1940s London, a housewife compared soldiers falling from the sky to eggs crashing to the ground. Across these narratives, eggs become the most accessible metaphor to makes sense of the war's violence and the breaking of bodies.

I mention this not just to flex my research (well, maybe a little), but also to highlight the egg's versatility and resilience as a metaphor. My journey as a first-generation immigrant has mirrored the fate of an egg—fragile, often invisible as an ingredient, constantly adapting to hold its shape in unfamiliar surroundings. But Bowdoin has taught me to extend that metaphor: only through the breakage of an egg, could something nourishing and delicious emerge. My displacement is not just loss; it can also be transformation.

And why does this matter to you? Because eggs, like the education we've received, are fundamental. As we leave Bowdoin, we step into a world full of broken systems—ones that ration opportunity, compassion, and even our right to speak our truth. Even now, the rising cost of eggs reminds us that breakfast is never just food, but a part of a larger global system of power, access, and inequality. If Bowdoin has taught us anything at all, it's *how* to be a good egg—how to be versatile, resilient, and unafraid of breaking sometimes. We have learned how to make meanings out of the ordinary, how to nourish not just ourselves but each other, so let's take that with us. Let's question the structures that leave people hungry—not just for food, but for justice, for dignity, for safety, for belonging. Let's not just be good eggs; let's go crack open some new ones.

Thank you.