

养蜂人的春天是数出来的

父亲放蜂的地方在河湾那片油菜花田边。跟他去的那天，天刚蒙蒙亮，露水把草尖压弯了。蜂箱一排摆在田埂内侧，箱口的小板上已经挤满了蜜蜂，一层踩着一层，往外爬。它们出工比人还早，天一亮就排队，像村口等车的人。

父亲掀开一个箱盖一角，让我看里面的巢脾。蜜蜂爬成一片，中间留出空路，一条一条，整整齐齐。他说蜂不认人，只认花，哪片田先开，它们就往哪片去，拦是拦不住的。说话间他手上全是蜂，也不慌，把盖子放回去。我蹲在箱口看它们起飞，后腿带着一团黄，起飞前先抖两下身子，露水从绒毛上飞出去，在低处亮了一下。

田里的花上全是露水。蜜蜂钻进一朵，花瓣被压得往下弯，出来时头上顶着一颗水珠，它也不管，接着钻下一朵。有的花露太重，蜜蜂站在边上等，等风把那颗水吹走，再进去。父亲说这样的早晨蜂采得慢，但蜜干净。他不催它们。他坐在田埂的石头上抽烟，看蜂进出，一坐一上午。我以前觉得他闲，现在才知道，他的安静是另一种忙，替几万只蜂看着路。

中午太阳上来了，露水没了，蜂一下子多起来，嗡嗡声盖过了河水的声音。我顺着他的目光往远处看，河对岸的坡上，花从水边一直开到坡顶，黄的中间夹着白的梨树，再远处是灰蓝的山。那片花海大得没有边，风过去，颜色就起一层一层浪。父亲说今年这片够蜂吃半个月。他说这话的时候语气很平，像在说一件早就知道的事。

回去的路上我问父亲，花谢了怎么办。他说花谢了还有别处开，蜂跟着花走，人跟着蜂走，一年到头都在路上。我忽然觉得，春天在父亲那里不是风景，是一箱一箱数出来的日子。那天晚上我梦见自己站在花海中间，四周全是嗡嗡声，不吵，反而静。醒来天没亮，窗外也有蜂在叫，比闹钟早。

The Beekeeper Counts His Spring

My father keeps his hives beside the rapeseed field at the river bend. The day I went with him, the sky was barely light. Dew bent the tips of the grass. The hives stood in a row inside the ridge path, their entrance boards already crowded with bees climbing out, one layer on another. They clock in earlier than people, lining up at first light like villagers waiting for the bus at the village entrance.

Father lifted one corner of a hive lid and showed me the combs inside. Bees covered the surface in a living sheet, leaving neat empty lanes between them. He said bees recognize flowers, not people. Whichever field opens first is where they go, and no one can stop them. As he spoke, his hands were covered with bees, and he was not flustered. He set the lid back. I crouched at the entrance and watched them take off, balls of yellow on their hind legs, shaking their bodies twice before lifting. Dew flew off their fuzz and sparkled once at a low point.

Every flower in the field held dew. A bee dove into one, the petal bending down

under its weight, and came out with a bead of water on its head, ignoring it, diving into the next. Some flowers carried too much dew, and bees waited at the edge until the wind blew the bead away, then went in. Father said bees gather slowly on mornings like this, but the honey is clean. He does not hurry them. He sits on a stone by the field smoking, watching bees come and go, a whole morning through. I used to think he was idle. Now I know his stillness is another kind of busy, standing watch over the roads of tens of thousands of bees.

By noon the sun was up, the dew gone, and the bees multiplied in an instant, their humming drowning out the river. Following his gaze, I looked into the distance. On the slope across the river, flowers ran from the water all the way to the top, white pear trees set among the yellow, gray-blue mountains beyond. That sea of flowers had no edge. When wind crossed it, the color rose in wave after wave. Father said this field would feed the bees for half a month this year. He said it in a flat voice, like something he had known long in advance.

On the way home I asked him what happens when the flowers fade. He said when these fade, others are opening somewhere else. Bees follow the flowers, people follow the bees, and everyone is on the road all year. It struck me then that spring, for my father, is not scenery. It is days counted hive by hive. That night I dreamed I stood in the middle of a sea of flowers, humming on every side, not noisy but quiet. I woke before dawn. Outside the window bees were already calling, earlier than the alarm.