塌了三次的帐篷

车停在湖边的草地上，后备箱打开，里面滚出一个鼓鼓的绿色袋子。爸爸说：就它了，搭起来。我和他把袋子倒在草地上，两根杆子、一块顶布、一捆地钉，摊了一地。说明书在袋子最底下，被压得起了皱，图上画得清清楚楚，可手里的杆子怎么也对不上那个图。

头一次，我们把杆子穿进了顶布外侧的环里，帐篷立起来一半，像个驼背的人。第二次，杆子穿对了，顶布却是反的，拉链朝了天。第三次刚拉好最后一根，一阵风从湖面过来，整个帐篷朝我这边扣下来，我钻出来，头发全乱了。隔壁营地的大叔掀开帘子看了一会儿，终于走过来，蹲下，把两根杆子的顺序换了个位置：先长后短，交叉点压住。帐篷第四次立起来，端端正正，像换了个帐篷。

大叔摆摆手走了。我妈把防潮垫铺进帐篷，笑我们爷俩：说明书上画的就是先长后短。爸爸钻进帐篷试了试高度，在里面直起腰，说：比家里客厅矮一点，但是赢在有湖。

夜里睡不着，我掀开帘子，外面比家里黑一百倍。星星不是几颗，是一片，密得让人不敢多看，看久了眼睛会酸。爸爸仰面躺在防潮垫上，手机屏幕还亮着，他关掉屏幕说：别看手机了，看那边，七颗连成勺子的。我眯着眼找，先找到三颗排成一线的，顺着往下，勺子慢慢显出来。我喊：找到了！声音在夜里传得很远，湖对岸有人也应了一声。

风把草吹得沙沙响。一颗星从树梢上面滑过去，很快，我以为是眼睛花了。爸爸说那是流星，许愿来不及，就当它是个记号。我们谁也没许愿，就躺着，数到后来都数不清了，我先睡着了，醒来时爸爸的鼾声很轻，帐篷外天已经有点发灰。

隔天一早收营，帐篷湿的，露水把顶布浸得发沉。按大叔教的反着来：拔地钉、抽杆子、抖掉里面的草屑。卷的时候我跪在布上从一头往前推，空气推不出去，鼓起一个大包，我妈从另一头配合我，两个人把帐篷卷成一条绿色的长条，塞回袋子里，袋子口却怎么也收不拢，最后用背包带捆住。

上车前我回头看了一眼草地，帐篷的位置留下一块压平的印子，草还立不起来。爸爸说明年再来。我抱着装帐篷的袋子，袋子比来的时候鼓，里面多了一夜的星星。我想，下次搭帐篷，我先穿长杆。

The Tent That Collapsed Three Times

The car stopped on the grass by the lake. The trunk opened and out rolled a fat green bag. Dad said: this is it, set it up. He and I emptied the bag onto the grass: two poles, one rain fly, a bundle of stakes, spread all over the ground. The instruction sheet was at the very bottom of the bag, wrinkled from being pressed. The pictures on it looked perfectly clear, but the pole in my hand refused to match anything in the drawing.

The first time, we threaded the poles through the loops on the outside of the fly. The tent rose halfway and looked like a hunched man. The second time, the poles went in right, but the fly was inside out, its zipper facing the sky. The third time, just as we fastened the last pole, a wind came off the lake and the whole tent buckled down toward me. I crawled out with my hair a mess. The man at the next campsite lifted his flap, watched for a while, and finally walked over, squatted down, and swapped the order of the two poles: long one first, short one second, press down the crossing point. The tent stood up on the fourth try, straight and square, as if it were a different tent.

The man waved and left. My mother spread the moisture pads inside the tent, laughing at the two of us: the instruction sheet said long first, short second. Dad crawled in to test the height, stood up inside, and said: a little lower than our living room, but this one wins for having a lake.

At night I could not sleep and lifted the flap. Outside was a hundred times darker than at home. The stars were not a few but a whole sheet, so thick it made the eyes ache to look too long. Dad lay on his back on the pad, his phone screen still glowing. He switched it off and said: stop looking at the phone, look over there, seven stars joined into a ladle. I squinted and searched, first finding three in a straight line, then following down, and the ladle slowly appeared. I shouted: found it! My voice carried far in the night, and someone on the far shore of the lake answered back.

The wind rasped through the grass. A star slid past above the treetops, very fast; I thought my eyes were playing tricks. Dad said that was a meteor, too late to make a wish, so just treat it as a mark. Neither of us wished. We just lay there counting until counting failed, and I fell asleep first. When I woke, Dads snoring was soft, and the sky outside the tent had begun to gray.

Taking camp the next morning, the tent was wet, dew soaking the fly heavy. We did the mans lesson in reverse: pull the stakes, slide out the poles, shake the grass bits out of the inside. To roll it, I knelt on the fabric and pushed from one end forward, but the air would not come out and swelled into a big balloon, so my mother worked with me from the other end. The two of us rolled the tent into a long green loaf and shoved it back into the bag, but the mouth would not close, and in the end we tied it shut with a strap from my backpack.

Before getting in the car I looked back at the grass. The spot where the tent stood left a flattened mark, the grass still pressed down. Dad said we would come back next year. I hugged the tent bag. It was fatter than when we came, holding a whole night of stars inside. Next time, I thought, I will thread the long pole first.

四个人的营地

出发前一周，我们在群里把计划敲定了三遍：谁带帐篷、谁带炉头、谁负责买食材。真到了山坡下的空地上，才发现计划里最要紧的一条没写：没人搭过帐篷。四个男生围着两顶帐篷的零件，谁也不先伸手。最后还是阿澈把包一放：分头干，一顶一顶来，我和大志一顶，你俩一顶。

我和胖子守着一堆杆子，把说明书翻来覆去看了四遍。杆子从布面的通道里穿过去，穿到第三根，前两根从接口里崩了出来。我们把帐篷按在地上重来，膝盖压着布，手指抠着接口，胖子喊：你拽那头，轻点。帐篷歪歪扭扭立起来的时候，四个人一起鼓掌，像赢了球赛。它确实不漂亮，一边高一边低，门还朝错了方向，可它是我们的。

傍晚我们捡枯枝生火，煮了一锅夹生的面。阿澈说没关系，面汤是咸的，咸的就是好饭。天黑以后，我们把帐篷帘子拉开一条缝，并排躺在防潮垫上。有人关了手电，黑暗一下子压过来，然后星星就出来了，先是几颗，再是一整片，像谁把一把碎银子撒在黑布上。我们都不说话了。

过了很久，胖子开口，声音比平时低：你们说我初三怎么办。没人接话，星星不回答这个问题。倒是阿澈指着天上说：你们看那一片，挤在一起，其实离得远得很，光走了几百年才到咱们眼睛里。我们仨顺着他的手指看，谁也没再说话，可我心里那点堵着的东西，松了一点。原来远处的东西看着近，看着近的东西其实远，这话从一个平时只会斗嘴的人嘴里说出来，比从书上看来管用。

后半夜起风，帐篷布被吹得砰砰响，像有人在外面拍门。我们轮流出去检查地钉。轮到我的时候，风把头发吹成横的，我蹲下去按了按钉子，钉子纹丝不动，倒是我自己差点被风吹跑。回帐篷钻睡袋的时候，我发现自己笑了。

隔天收营，两顶帐篷拆下来，杆子上的泥要一根一根擦。我卷帐篷，大志抖内衬，抖出半口袋草屑和一颗不知哪来的糖。四个人把营地恢复原样，垃圾装袋背下山。走之前，胖子在那片被压平的草地上站了一会儿，说：明年这时候，咱们再来，到时候我肯定没现在这么笨。

下山路上，我手掌上磨出两道红印，握水瓶都疼。胖子看见了，举起他的手，三道。我们比手心的印子，像比谁的勋章多。那顶歪帐篷、那锅夹生面、那片不回答问题的星空，都留在山坡上了，可它们在我身上留下了更结实的东西：原来很多第一次，塌了也能立起来。

The Camp of Four

A week before setting out, we settled the plan in the group chat three times over: who brings the tent, who brings the stove, who buys the food. Only when we reached the clearing below the hill did we notice the one thing the plan never covered: none of us had ever pitched a tent. Four boys stood around the parts of two tents, nobody reaching first. In the end Ache dropped his pack and said: split up, one tent at a time. Dazhi and I take one, you two take the other.

Chubby and I faced our pile of poles, turning the instruction sheet over four times. Poles slid through the sleeves in the fabric; when we threaded the third, the first two popped out of their joints. We pressed the tent flat on the ground and started again, knees pinning the fabric, fingers clawing at the joints, Chubby shouting: pull that end, gently. When the tent finally stood, crooked and listing, all four of us applauded as if we had won a match. It was not beautiful, one side higher than the other, its door facing the wrong way, but it was ours.

At dusk we gathered dry branches, lit a fire, and boiled a pot of underdone noodles. Ache said it did not matter: the broth was salty, and salty broth is a good meal. After dark we cracked the tent flaps open and lay side by side on the pads. Someone switched off the flashlight, darkness pressed in all at once, and then the stars came out, first a few, then a whole field, like someone scattering silver bits across black cloth. None of us talked.

After a long while Chubby spoke, his voice lower than usual: what do you all think I should do about my final year. Nobody answered; stars do not answer that question. Instead Ache pointed at the sky: look at that cluster. Packed together, but actually miles apart. Their light took centuries just to reach our eyes. The three of us followed his finger, and nobody said more, yet the tight knot in my chest loosened a little. So distant things look close, and close things are actually far. Hearing it from a boy who normally only bickers worked better than reading it in a book.

After midnight the wind rose, and the tent fabric banged like someone knocking on a door. We took turns going out to check the stakes. When my turn came, the wind blew my hair sideways. I squatted and pressed a stake; it did not budge, while I nearly blew away myself. Climbing back into my sleeping bag, I found I was smiling.

Taking camp the next morning, we broke the tents down and wiped the mud off each pole one by one. I rolled the fabric while Dazhi shook out the inner layer, which released half a pocketful of grass bits and one candy from who knows where. The four of us restored the clearing, bagged our trash, and carried it down. Before leaving, Chubby stood a moment on the flattened grass and said: same time next year, and by then I will not be as clumsy as I am now.

On the way down, my palms showed two red scrapes; even gripping a water bottle hurt. Chubby saw them and raised his hands: three. We compared the marks on our palms like medals. The crooked tent, the underdone noodles, and the star field that answered nothing all stayed on that hillside, but they left something sturdier behind in us: many first times, once collapsed, can still stand back up.

www.vv99.net

收营那天，我先想起星星

收营那天早上，我右手虎口被地钉磨出一块方方的红印。下山的时候握着水瓶，那里一阵一阵地疼。我边走边想，疼得好，这是这趟露营留在我身上的记号，别的都会忘，这个忘不了。其实最先想起来不是搭帐篷的狼狈，是后半夜那片星星。

那晚十一点多，我被帐篷外一种低沉的呼呼声弄醒，一声一顿，像有人在很远的地方拉风箱。我屏住呼吸听，爸爸在睡袋里翻了个身，含含糊糊说：猫头鹰，叫它的，睡你的。我掀开帘子一角，月亮偏西，湖面上铺着一层薄薄的白，星星落在水里，被波纹揉成一条条银线。头顶的星星和水里的星星连成一片，我分不清哪边是天。那一刻我忽然觉得自己很小，但不是害怕的那种小，是轻的那种小，像一片叶子落在很大很大的水面上。

白天的事想起来就滑稽了。下午三点到的营地，太阳把草地晒得发白。爸爸把帐篷袋甩在肩上，说搭帐篷是他的强项。结果两根主杆在他手里拧成了麻花，插不进底座；妈妈按说明书念，念到地钉与地面成六十度，我们仨蹲在那儿比划角度，谁也说不出六十度在哪儿。最后是旁边遛狗的老太太看不下去，让孙子过来帮忙，一个初中生模样的哥哥，三分钟把帐篷按立起来，拍拍手上的土走了。我爸爸站在自家立起来的帐篷前，表情复杂，说：回家我练。

帐篷立起来以后，事情顺了。我们支折叠桌，烧水，泡了三桶方便面，就着火腿肠，吃得比家里任何一顿都香。妈妈拍照，镜头里有帐篷、湖、我们三个满头汗的脸。她说明天发朋友圈，配文都想好了：第一次，及格。

清晨五点半，鸟叫先把妈妈吵醒，她拉开帘子，尖叫一声，把我和爸爸都惊坐起来。湖上浮着齐腰高的白雾，远处的山只剩一个尖，像水墨画没干。我们仨谁也没说话，怕说话把雾吹散。后来还是爸爸先动，烧水，煮挂面，锅里的热气跟湖上的白雾接在一起，分不出哪股是家里的，哪股是野外的。

所以现在，红印还在虎口上，帐篷在后备箱里滚着，沾了一夜露水的袋子还没晾干。妈妈问下次还去吗。我说去。我想的不是方便面和滑稽的爸爸，是那片分不清上下天的星星，是齐腰的白雾。有些东西没试过就永远只是课本上的名词，试过一次，它们就长进你身上，往后抬头低头，都带着那晚的湖光。

Breaking Camp, I Thought of the Stars First

On the morning we broke camp, the web of my right hand showed a square red scrape from the tent stakes. Walking down the mountain with a water bottle, it throbbed in waves. I thought: good, let it hurt. This is the mark this trip left on me; everything else may fade, but this will not. What came back to me first was not the clumsy tent pitching but the stars after midnight.

A little past eleven that night, I woke to a low hooting outside the tent, one note, a pause, another, like someone far away working a bellows. I held my breath and

listened. Dad turned over in his sleeping bag and mumbled: an owl, let it call, you sleep. I lifted a corner of the flap. The moon had leaned west, a thin white film lay over the lake, and stars had fallen into the water, rubbed by the ripples into long silver threads. The stars overhead and the stars in the lake joined into one field, and I could not tell which side was sky. In that moment I suddenly felt very small, but not the frightened kind of small, the light kind, like a leaf resting on a very, very wide sheet of water.

The daytime parts were funny to remember. We reached the camp at three in the afternoon, the sun bleaching the grass pale. Dad slung the tent bag over his shoulder and announced that pitching tents was his strong point. In the end he twisted the two main poles into a knot in his hands, unable to seat them in the base; Mother read from the manual, reaching the line about stakes at sixty degrees to the ground, and the three of us crouched there gesturing at angles, none of us able to say where sixty degrees was. Finally an old woman walking her dog next door took pity and sent her grandson over, a boy who looked like a high schooler, who had the tent standing in three minutes, dusted off his hands, and left. My father stood before our own upright tent with a complicated face and said: I will practice at home.

Once the tent stood, everything went smoothly. We set up the folding table, boiled water, made three tubs of instant noodles, ate them with sausages, and it tasted better than any meal at home. Mother took photos: the tent, the lake, our three sweat-soaked faces in the frame. She said she would post them tomorrow, caption already chosen: first attempt, passing grade.

At five thirty in the morning, birds woke Mother first. She opened the flap and screamed, startling Dad and me upright. Waist-high white fog floated on the lake, and the far mountain kept only its peak, like ink wash not yet dry. None of us spoke, afraid words would blow the fog away. In the end Dad moved first, boiled water, cooked thin noodles, and the steam from the pot joined the white fog on the lake until you could not tell which breath was from home and which was from the wild.

So now the red mark is still on my hand, the tent tumbles around in the trunk, and the dew-soaked bag has not dried. Mother asked if we would go again. I said yes. What I am thinking of is not the instant noodles or my ridiculous father, but that field of stars with no top or bottom, and the waist-high white fog. Things you never try remain nouns in a textbook forever; try them once and they grow into you, and afterward, looking up or down, you carry that nights lake-light with you.