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.

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