瓜棚里的那个雷雨夜

那年暑假，我缠着爷爷去瓜地看瓜。瓜地位于河滩，看瓜的就是田头一个棚：四根木桩，几层茅草，一张木板床，床腿泡在浅水里防蚂蚁。爷爷起初不肯带我去，说夜里雷打得地皮颤，你受不住。我拍着胸脯保证，结果保证只撑到天黑。

前半夜还好。爷孙俩躺在木板床上，听青蛙叫，听河水响，爷爷给我讲哪只瓜是头茬、哪只是压秧的，讲着讲着他先睡着了，鼾声跟河水一个节奏。后半夜，一道白光把棚里照得透亮，紧接着雷就在头顶炸开，雨不是落下来的，是倒下来的，棚顶四处漏，水顺着茅草的筋往下淌，正好淌在我脚边。

我吓得坐起来，爷爷一骨碌翻身下床，比白天还利索。他让我挪到棚角，把唯一的塑料布展开压在床板上接水，又摸出铁丝和半卷旧麻袋，钻出棚去压迎风那面的草。我在棚里举着手电给他照，手抖，光圈在棚柱上跳来跳去，爷爷喊：照稳些。我咬着牙把光圈稳住，才发现自己不怕了。

折腾到后半夜，雨停了。爷爷掀开帘子看瓜地，招手叫我过去。雨后的月亮从云缝里漏出来，满地西瓜卧在垄沟里，一个个湿淋淋的，被月光照得发亮，像一地没睡醒的月亮。爷爷蹲下去看泥地，手电一照，一串梅花样的小脚印从垄沟头一直进来，又原路出去。他说这是獾，专吃蝗虫和地老鼠，不偷瓜。他捏起一坨泥闻了闻，又补一句：今晚它替咱看了半宿瓜。

天亮回家，我困得在自行车后座上点头，一路梦见獾排着队给瓜盖被子。奶奶问看瓜好玩吗，我说好玩，就是雷不好玩。爷爷在旁边笑，说棚顶的草他上午就去割新的，下回你还来不来。我说来。这回我没拍胸脯，我就是应了一声，声音不大，但是是真的。

开学以后，同学问我最长的一个暑假经历是什么，我说是给西瓜守了一夜。他们问偷瓜的来了吗，我说没有，来了一只獾，它替我们看了半宿。同学说獾怎么会看瓜，我说它不吃瓜，它吃蝗虫，蝗虫要是多了，叶子就完了，瓜也长不成。这话是爷爷教的。说的时候我自己都愣了一下：原来那个雨夜我学到的，比胆子多。

The Thunderstorm Night in the Melon Shed

That summer I kept pestering grandpa to let me watch the melon field with him. The field lay on the riverbank, and the watch post was a shed at the head of the field: four wooden posts, layers of thatch, a plank bed whose legs stood in shallow water to keep off ants. Grandpa refused at first, saying the thunder at night shakes the ground and I could not take it. I thumped my chest and swore, and the oath lasted until dark.

The first half of the night was fine. We lay on the plank bed listening to frogs and to the river, and grandpa told me which melons were the first set and which came from pinned vines. He fell asleep before his story ended, his snoring keeping time with the river. In the second half of the night, a white flash lit the shed through

and through, and the next moment thunder burst overhead. The rain did not fall, it poured down. The roof leaked everywhere, water running down the ribs of the thatch, right to my feet.

I sat up frightened, and grandpa rolled off the bed in one motion, quicker than in daylight. He moved me to the corner of the shed, spread the only plastic sheet over the bed board to catch water, then found wire and half a roll of old sacking and crawled out to weigh down the windward thatch. I held the flashlight inside to light him, my hand shaking, the circle of light jumping from post to post. Grandpa called out: hold it steady. I clenched my teeth and steadied the light, and only then noticed I was no longer afraid.

We worked until the rain stopped near dawn. Grandpa lifted the curtain, looked at the field, and waved me over. The moon leaked out between the clouds, and melons lay in the furrows all over the field, wet and shining under the moonlight, like a field of moons that had not woken up. Grandpa crouched over the mud and shone the light: a string of small plum-blossom footprints came in along the furrow and went back out the same way. It is a badger, he said, it eats locusts and field rats, it does not steal melons. He pinched up a lump of mud, sniffed it, and added: tonight it stood watch for us for half the night.

Going home at daybreak, I kept nodding off on the back seat of the bicycle, dreaming all the way of badgers tucking blankets over melons. Grandma asked whether watching the field was fun. I said it was, only the thunder was not. Grandpa laughed from beside us and said he would cut new thatch for the roof that morning, and would I come again. I said yes. This time I did not thump my chest; I just answered, quietly, but truly.

After school started, classmates asked about the longest thing I did that summer, and I said I guarded watermelons for a night. They asked whether melon thieves came. I said no, a badger came, and it stood watch for half the night. They said how could a badger stand watch. I said it does not eat melons, it eats locusts, and if locusts multiply, the leaves are finished and the melons never grow. That line was grandpas. Saying it, I paused myself: that rainy night had taught me more than just courage.