屋檐下的听众

外婆说过，夏天的雨是客人，说来就来，不摆架子。那个午后我在屋檐下乘凉，亲眼见这位客人进村。先是村东头的狗叫了两声，不叫了。抬头，一片乌云顺着天顶过来，像有人拿大笔把天空往回涂。接着风进了村，枣树的叶子翻出背面，满树银绿。外婆不慌不忙，从檐下起身去收晾绳上的衣裳，动作和平时收衣裳没有两样，好像雨是约好的。

雨点先落在瓦上，嗒、嗒，像谁在房顶数数。数到一半，雨点齐了，整片瓦响成一片，声音却不难听，密密的，像织布机开动了。檐口垂下一排水线。院里的木盆没扣过来，正好接住一捧雨，盆里的雨声和瓦上的不一样，咚咚的，闷一些，像另一间屋子在敲鼓。我伸出手指去接檐口的水线，雨点砸在指肚上，一颗一颗，有分量。

我蹲在屋檐下看雨。村路成了浅河，雨点在上面扎满小针脚。邻居家的鸡躲进柴垛底下，探一只眼。对门的小卖部檐下站满了人，谁也不说话，一起看雨。没有人带伞，大家都不急，反正雨总会让路。

雨真的让路了。云往东走，光从云缝里斜下来，把湿了的村子照成亮的。院里的水洼各占一角，最大的那个在石榴树下，把屋檐、晾绳、还有站在檐下的外婆，全都装在里面。水洼里的外婆安安静静，比檐下的外婆年轻。我舍不得走，绕着水洼看，直到太阳把她的倒影照得晃眼。

外婆进灶房，端出一盆放凉的酸梅汤。我们坐在檐下喝，檐上还挂着雨，一滴一滴落进水洼，把石榴树下的倒影又敲散一次。那味道我记了很多年，酸里带甜，甜里带着那场雨的凉。

后来我在城里躲过许多雨，写字楼的檐下、公交站的棚下，雨打在玻璃顶和柏油路上，声音都对，就是少点什么。少的是瓦上的嗒嗒、盆里的咚咚，和那个把倒影养在水洼里的午后。城里的雨是路过，外婆家的雨是进门坐下了，一坐就是许多年，还在我心里落着。

The Listener Under the Eaves

Grandmother used to say that summer rain is a guest: it comes the moment it thinks of coming, without ceremony. That afternoon I was cooling off under the eaves when I watched this guest enter the village. First the dog at the east end barked twice, then stopped. I looked up: a black cloud was crossing overhead, as if someone were painting the sky back with a huge brush. Then the wind came into the village; the leaves of the jujube tree turned up their undersides, and the whole tree showed silver-green. Grandmother rose unhurriedly from under the eaves to take in the clothes on the line, her movements no different from any ordinary day, as if the rain had been appointed.

The raindrops landed on the tiles first, tap, tap, like someone counting on the roof. Halfway through the counting, the drops fell all together, the whole roof rang into one sound, pleasant somehow, dense as a loom at work. A row of water threads hung from the eaves. The wooden basin in the yard had been left upside up and caught

a handful of rain; the sound in the basin differed from the sound on the tiles, a duller drum-drum, like another room beating its drum. I reached out a finger under the eaves and the drops struck the pad of my finger, one by one, each with weight.

I squatted under the eaves and watched the rain. The village road became a shallow river, its surface stitched all over with the stitches of drops. The chickens next door hid under the woodpile, one eye peering out. The front of the little shop across the way filled with standing people, none speaking, all watching the rain together. Nobody carried an umbrella; nobody was in a hurry, since the rain would always give way.

The rain really did give way. The clouds moved east, light slanted down through the seams, and the wet village turned bright. The puddles in the yard each held a corner; the largest one under the pomegranate tree took in the eaves, the clothesline, and Grandmother standing under the eaves, all of it. The grandmother inside the puddle was quiet and younger than the one under the eaves. I could not bear to leave, and circled the puddle watching, until the sun made her reflection dazzle.

Grandmother went into the kitchen and brought out a basin of sour plum drink that had cooled. We sat under the eaves and drank, while rain still hung on the eaves above, dripping into the puddles and scattering the reflection under the pomegranate tree once more. I have remembered that taste for years: sour with sweetness, and the sweetness carrying the coolness of that rain.

Later I sheltered from much rain in the city, under the eaves of office towers and the roofs of bus stops. The rain struck glass tops and asphalt, and the sounds were all correct, yet something was missing. What was missing was the tap on the tiles, the drum-drum in the basin, and that afternoon that kept a reflection resting in a puddle. Rain in the city only passes by; rain at the house of my grandmother came in and sat down, and it has been sitting there for years, still falling inside me.