西瓜、萤火虫和晚睡

孩子的暑假快乐，安排得都很小。冰镇西瓜，院里的萤火虫，破例晚睡。一样一样，都不花钱，一样一样，都让他高兴得打滚。

西瓜是傍晚镇上的。整个按进水盆，搁在穿堂的过风处，等它凉透。他写作业写一半就跑来看一眼，问好了没有。盆里的西瓜纹丝不动，他急，拿勺子敲盆沿，被我说住。吃的时候他挑中间那一口，红得最透，籽还最少。一牙西瓜咬出月牙形的缺口，汁水顺着手肘往下流，他也不擦，仰头哈哈笑，说西瓜汁腌胳膊了。我们家的西瓜账，一个暑假记得比谁都清：第几天吃的，谁切的，最中间那一口归谁。

萤火虫是院角来的。第一只亮起来的时候，他屏住气，招呼我们全家排队看，谁也不许出声。光在草叶上一闪一闪，绿得干净。他问萤火虫的光能不能装进瓶子，我说能，但会把它闷坏。他想了想，说那还是让它亮在草里吧。那一晚他睡前最后一句话是，萤火虫晚安。第二天他又惦记了一整天，傍晚跑去院角看，没看见也不失望，说萤火虫今晚放假。

晚睡是破例的。八月底前的几个晚上，我们允许他过九点。全家搬了竹椅到院里，看星星，认北斗，找牛郎织女星。他仰着头，脖子酸了换一只脚撑地，讲学校的事，讲得眉飞色舞。他妈认星座认错了，被他纠正，他还得意地踮了踮脚。九点半他打了个哈欠，自己说，星星还没数完，人先数困了。

我原本以为陪暑假要带他去远的地方、贵的地方。后来发现他的快乐全在小的地方：西瓜中间那一口，草叶上的一只萤火虫，晚睡多出来的半个钟头。他像一面小镜子，照出我早就丢掉的本事——原来高兴可以这么便宜，这么容易。

开学前夜，他自己收拾书包，忽然说这个暑假高兴。我问高兴到什么程度，他想了想，说，比收到玩具还高兴。我在旁边记账一样记下这句。是这个孩子，教我把夏天重新过了一遍。

Watermelon, Fireflies, and Staying Up Late

The summer joys of my son are all arranged in small sizes: watermelon chilled in water, fireflies in the yard, permission to stay up late. None of them costs money, and each one makes him roll with delight.

The watermelon came from town in the evening. We pressed the whole melon into a basin of water in the draft where the wind passes through the hall, waiting for it to chill through. Halfway through homework he would run to look and ask whether it was ready. The melon sat still in the basin; he grew impatient and tapped the rim of the basin with a spoon, and I told him to stop. When we ate it he chose the bite from the center, the reddest part with the fewest seeds. He bit a crescent gap into a slice, juice running down to his elbow, and he would not wipe it, only threw his head back and laughed, saying the melon juice was pickling his arm. Our household watermelon ledger, kept through one summer, is clearer than anyone could keep it: which day we

ate, who cut it, and who got the very center bite.

The fireflies came to the corner of the yard. When the first one lit up, he held his breath and made the whole family line up to watch, nobody allowed to speak. The light flickered on the grass leaves, green and clean. He asked whether the light of a firefly could be bottled. I said it could, but the bottle would smother it. He thought a moment and said, then let it stay lit in the grass. His last words before sleep that night were, good night, fireflies. The next day he thought about it all day long, ran to the corner of the yard at dusk to look, saw none, was not disappointed, and said the fireflies were on holiday that evening.

Staying up late was the exception we granted. For several nights before the end of August we allowed him past nine. The whole family carried bamboo chairs into the yard to watch the stars, learn the Big Dipper, and hunt for the Herd Boy and the Weaver Girl. He held his face up; when his neck ached he switched to the other foot for support, and told stories from school, glowing as he told them. His mother named a constellation wrongly, he corrected her, and stood up on his toes in triumph. At half past nine he yawned and said by himself, the stars are not finished counting but the person fell asleep first.

I had thought spending summer with him meant taking him to far places and expensive places. In the end I found his joy lives entirely in small places: the center bite of the watermelon, one firefly on a grass leaf, the extra half hour of staying up. He is like a small mirror showing me a skill I had long lost, the knowledge that delight can be this cheap and this easy.

On the eve of school opening he packed his schoolbag by himself and suddenly said this summer was happy. I asked how happy, and he thought a moment and said, happier than receiving a toy. I wrote that sentence down in my mind like an entry in a ledger. It is this child who taught me to live through summer all over again.