夕阳把竹椅照热的时候

夕阳落到西边屋顶的时候，菜园里的光就变了颜色。丝瓜架的影子拉长，横过整条畦沟；竹椅立在篱笆边，椅面被最后一段阳光照得发亮。这时候爷爷还在地里，竹椅是空的。它得等。

爷爷手上的活不写完，他不坐。夕阳先照到竹椅，再照到爷爷弯着的背。他给新栽的茄苗培土，一锹一锹，土块在指间捏碎。影子越来越长，从菜畦这头爬到那头，把他整个人罩住。他浑然不觉，直到水壶见底，才提着空壶往井边走。

井水冲过鞋，爷爷走向竹椅。竹节咯吱一响，他坐下了。他从椅边拿起蒲扇，不扇风，只把裤脚上的泥条捻掉。他看菜园。目光从东头的葱畦起，一行一行往西过：葱立得齐，蒜苗拱出了土，萝卜畦里那处缺了五棵的位置，他打算周末补上。看一遍，他在心里记一遍。竹椅承着他，一声不响。

我放学回来，书包都没放下，先跑到菜园边。爷爷在椅上坐着，我在椅前蹲着。他递给我一根刚摘的黄瓜，在井水里涮两下，脆生生咬下去，籽还是嫩的。我们一个坐一个蹲，谁也不说话。夕阳从丝瓜架的缝里漏下来，落在我们身上，落在空水壶上。蝉在这时候换了个调子，叫得更密了。

天再暗一点，爷爷站起来，把竹椅挪进篱笆门里头，怕夜里露水重。椅子靠墙立着，四条腿还带着白天的太阳味。他锁上篱笆门，提着黄瓜和一把小葱回家。菜园暗下去，竹椅在黑暗里立着，等第二天的太阳。

那些傍晚，竹椅比谁都清楚：哪天丝瓜爬上了架，哪天第一根辣椒转了色，哪天爷爷坐在椅上的时间比平时长。有一回他坐了很久，久到夕阳都落了，我以为他睡着了，走近一看，他在看那畦补过苗的萝卜，嘴角有一点笑。

如今菜园还在，竹椅还在篱笆边。夕阳仍旧每天斜过来，先照椅面，再照菜畦。椅是空的，地里没有人弯腰。可光走过菜园的样子没变，从东头的葱畦走到西头的架子，像有人坐在椅上，从头看一遍。

When the Setting Sun Warmed the Chair

When the sun dropped to the roof on the west, the light in the garden changed color. The shadow of the luffa trellis stretched long across the whole furrow; the bamboo chair stood by the fence, its seat shining in the last of the sunlight. At that hour Grandpa was still in the ground. The chair was empty. It had to wait.

He did not sit until the work in his hands was done. The sun lit the chair first, then his bent back. He earthed up the young eggplant seedlings, shovelful by shovelful, crumbling the clods between his fingers. The shadow grew longer, crawling from one end of the bed to the other, covering him entirely. He never noticed, until the can ran dry and he carried it empty to the well.

After rinsing his shoes in well water, Grandpa walked to the bamboo chair. The joints creaked, and he sat down. He picked up the palm-leaf fan from beside the chair, not to fan himself but to twist the streaks of mud off his trouser cuffs. He looked over the garden. His gaze started at the onion beds on the east and moved row by row to the west: the onions stood straight, the garlic shoots had pushed through, and the gap of five missing hills in the radish bed he would fill on the weekend. He looked once and kept score once. The chair held him without a sound.

When I came home from school, I dropped nothing and ran first to the garden edge. Grandpa sat in the chair; I crouched in front of it. He handed me a cucumber just picked, rinsed twice in well water, bitten through while still crisp, its seeds tender. One sat, one crouched, neither speaking. The sun leaked through the gaps in the luffa trellis onto us, onto the empty can. The cicadas changed their tune then, calling thicker.

A little darker, Grandpa stood and moved the chair inside the fence gate, afraid of the night dew. The chair leaned against the wall, its legs still holding the warmth of the day. He latched the gate and carried the cucumber and a handful of scallions home. The garden went dark; the chair stood in the darkness, waiting for the sun of the next day.

Those evenings, the chair knew better than anyone: which day the luffa climbed the trellis, which day the first pepper turned color, which day Grandpa sat in it longer than usual. Once he sat so long that the sun was gone before he rose. I thought he had fallen asleep; coming closer, I saw him looking at the radish bed where the seedlings had been replanted, a small smile at the corner of his mouth.

The garden is still there now, and the bamboo chair still stands by the fence. The sun still slants in every day, lighting the seat first, then the beds. The chair is empty; no one bends over the ground. But the way the light walks across the garden has not changed, from the onion beds on the east to the trellis on the west, as if someone sat in the chair, watching it all over again.

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