菜园边的旧竹椅

竹椅是跟着菜园一起进到我们生活里来的。那年开春，爷爷用板车拉回菜籽、锄头和一把竹椅，竹椅搁在篱笆边的空地上，四条腿陷进松土里，像扎了根。

爷爷待竹椅，比对家里那把木椅好。木椅在堂屋里，常年没人坐；竹椅在菜园边，天天有人坐。每天傍晚，爷爷从菜畦里出来，先在井边冲掉鞋上的泥，再坐到竹椅上。他坐下去的时候，竹节咯吱响一声，像跟人打招呼。他坐在椅上卷裤脚、摘手套，把当天锄过的草在椅边墩干净，然后才慢慢走回家。

椅子的扶手断过一次。那年夏天雨大，爷爷搬椅子回屋，一脚踩滑，竹椅磕在门槛上，右边扶手裂了道口子。他没扔，去镇上请人缠了两道竹篾，又自己刷了桐油。新缠的竹篾颜色浅，站在两步外就能看出来。后来很多年，那道浅色的疤一直在，被手磨得越来越亮，比别处还亮。

我小时候坐不上那把椅子。它归爷爷。我只有在他浇水的时候被允许坐一会儿，坐上去，脚够不着地，竹节在身子底下响。椅子太高，我坐在上面看菜园，视角跟爷爷一样高。我看见他提着水壶从畦沟里走，水线又细又稳，落在苗根边上。他浇完一遍，直起腰，朝椅子这边看一眼。夕阳在他背后，把他的影子拉到椅子上，又拉到菜畦那边去。

爷爷生病那年，菜园交给父亲管。有一天傍晚，我看见父亲坐在那把竹椅上，背有点驼，姿势却跟爷爷从前一样。夕阳照着他，也照着篱笆上爷爷搭的丝瓜藤。椅子四条腿底下的土，凹下去一小块，谁坐都是那个高度。

再后来，竹椅空了。父亲把它留在篱笆边，没搬进屋。每年开春，他把它搬到太阳底下晒一晒，刷一遍桐油。椅子还是那把椅子，浅色竹篾的疤还是那道疤。夕阳斜过来的时候，椅面上一道亮一道暗，像有人坐在那里。

去年秋天我回老家，在竹椅上坐了一会儿。竹子被太阳晒得温热，坐下去，竹节咯吱响了一声。菜园里的萝卜刚出土，篱笆边的葱一行一行立着。我坐着没动，看夕阳把整片菜园染成金色，又一点点暗下去。椅子在脚下轻轻响，像爷爷在旁边，刚坐下来的样子。

The Old Bamboo Chair by the Garden

The bamboo chair came into our life together with the garden. That spring, Grandpa hauled in seeds, a hoe and a bamboo chair on a handcart. The chair was set on the bare ground by the fence, its four legs sinking into the loose soil as if it had taken root.

Grandpa treated the bamboo chair better than the wooden one at home. The wooden chair sat in the main room, seldom used; the bamboo chair sat by the garden, occupied every day. Each evening, Grandpa came out of the beds, rinsed the mud off his shoes at the well, then sat down. The bamboo joints creaked once, like a greeting. On the chair he rolled up his trouser cuffs, pulled off his gloves, knocked the fresh weeds clean against the leg, and only then walked home slowly.

The armrest broke once. The summer it rained hard, Grandpa was carrying the chair indoors when his foot slipped, and the chair struck the doorframe, splitting the right armrest. He did not throw it away. He went to town, had it bound with two bands of bamboo strip, then brushed tung oil over it himself. The new binding was pale, visible from two steps away. For years after, that pale scar stayed there, worn shinier than anywhere else on the chair.

When I was small I was not allowed to sit in it. It belonged to Grandpa. Only while he watered could I sit for a moment. My feet did not reach the ground, and the joints creaked under me. The chair was tall; from up there I saw the garden at the same height as Grandpa. I watched him walk along the furrows with his watering can, the stream thin and steady, landing at the roots. When he finished, he straightened his back and glanced toward the chair. The setting sun was behind him, stretching his shadow onto the chair and then across the beds.

The year Grandpa fell ill, Father took over the garden. One evening I saw Father sitting in that bamboo chair, his back a little bent, his posture exactly the way Grandpa used to sit. The setting sun lit him and the luffa vines Grandpa had trained along the fence. The soil under the four legs had pressed into a shallow hollow; whoever sat there sat at the same height.

Later the chair stood empty. Father left it by the fence, never moving it indoors. Every spring he took it out into the sun and brushed on a coat of tung oil. It was still the same chair, and the pale scar of bamboo strip was still there. When the sun slanted low, the seat fell half in light, half in shade, as if someone were sitting in it.

Last autumn I went back to the old house and sat in the bamboo chair for a while. The bamboo was warm from the sun, and the joints creaked once as I sat down. The radishes in the garden had just come out of the ground, and the onions along the fence stood in neat rows. I sat still and watched the sun turn the whole garden gold, then slowly darken it. The chair creaked softly under me, like Grandpa just settling down beside me.

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