儿子追蝴蝶，我追童年

父亲的菜园在村脚，半亩大，一畦一畦排得整齐。儿子蹲在畦边玩土，一只粉蝶落进甘蓝地里，他看见了，起身就追，小小的背影在甘蓝棵子中间钻来钻去。我站在畦那头看着，忽然像看见了自己。

小时候我也在这块园子里追过蝴蝶。那时父亲还壮，锄头抡得高，看见我撞进甘蓝地，故意沉下脸喊：甘蓝要让你撞烂了。我绕着畦埂跑，他举着锄头追过来，锄头其实举得很低。母亲拎着篮子在地头笑，笑完骂我们爷俩，一个都管不住。

好笑的是，我小时候怕毛毛虫。甘蓝叶上一条绿的，能让我一蹦后退，回头喊父亲。那天儿子用两根手指托起一条毛毛虫，凑到我眼前：爸爸你看，它有好多脚。我接过来放回叶子上，手一点没抖。我什么时候不怕的？想不起来了。

父亲坐在田边的竹椅上抽烟，开口说：你那时候比他皮多了。我笑，蹲下去问他，我那时候还干过什么。他一样一样数：下沟摸鱼，裤腿卷到膝盖；摘青梅吃，酸得直咧嘴，还接着摘；拔一根萝卜，在衣襟上蹭蹭就啃，啃得满脸汁。我听着，每一件都在心里敲了一下，像有人替我摇了一下小铃。

儿子不知道这块菜园是我小时候的游乐场。他只知道毛毛虫有好多脚，蝴蝶追不上，土可以堆成一座小丘。这就够了。童年没有走远，它藏在菜园里，藏在甘蓝叶子底下、畦沟的土腥气里。人一脚踩进去，它就回来，爬上下一代的背，重新追一遍蝴蝶。

回程车上儿子睡着了，口袋里露出半截甘蓝叶子，是他非要带回来给甘蓝虫做口粮的。我没掏出来。从后视镜里看，父亲站在村口看我们走，竹椅空在他身后，椅面上还留着太阳晒过的温度。

My Son Chases Butterflies, I Chase Childhood

The garden of my father lies at the foot of the village, half a mu, one bed after one bed, laid out straight. The boy squatted by the ridge playing with dirt. A white butterfly landed in the cabbages; he saw it, got up, and chased, his small back darting between the cabbage heads. I stood at the other end of the furrow watching, and suddenly it was like seeing myself.

When I was small, I chased butterflies in this same garden. Father was still strong then, swinging the hoe high. Seeing me crash into the cabbages, he put on a stern face and shouted: you will crush them. I ran around the ridge, and he came after me with the hoe raised, though the hoe was raised quite low. My mother stood at the head of the field with a basket, laughing, then scolded us two, saying neither could be managed.

The funny part: I was afraid of caterpillars back then. One green one on a cabbage leaf could make me jump backward and call for Father. That day my son lifted

one on two fingers and brought it to my eyes: Dad, look, it has so many feet. I took it and put it back on the leaf, and my hand did not shake at all. When did I stop being afraid? I could not remember.

Father sat on the bamboo chair by the field smoking, and said: you were far naughtier than him. I laughed and crouched down to ask what else I had done. He counted one by one: wading into the ditch for fish, trouser legs rolled to the knee; picking green plums, sour enough to twist the mouth, and picking more anyway; pulling a radish, wiping it on the lapel, gnawing it, juice all over the face. I listened, and each item struck something inside me, like someone ringing a small bell for me.

The boy does not know that this garden was my playground when I was small. He only knows that caterpillars have many feet, that butterflies cannot be caught, that dirt can be piled into a little hill. That is enough. Childhood did not go far away; it hides in the garden, under the cabbage leaves, in the earthy smell of the furrow. One step in, and it comes back, climbs onto the back of the next generation, and chases butterflies all over again.

In the car on the way home the boy fell asleep, half a cabbage leaf sticking out of his pocket, the food he insisted on bringing back for the cabbage worm. I did not take it out. In the mirror Father stood at the village entrance watching us leave, the bamboo chair empty behind him, the seat still holding the warmth of the sun.