一只竹篮的自述

我是一只竹篮，编得细，刷过三遍清漆，蹲在菜园门口的石墩上。我的主人是个老头，手上有老茧，摸过我每一道篾缝。他不用我装土，不用我装草，只在星期六的清晨把我拎起来，那时候露水还没干。

采摘那天，我是被一层一层喂饱的。黄瓜最先来，凉的，肚脐上还顶着一朵快干的小黄花。西红柿第二个来，热的，是被太阳晒熟的，一个挨一个躺下，不敢挤，主人怕我装太满压坏它们。小葱最后来，根上还带着黑泥，搭在我身上当被子。我满到篮沿，心口发胀，这是我一年里最神气的时刻。

然后我被挂在一个男孩的胳膊上。他个子刚到我耳朵，走路却稳，绕开水洼，绕开砖头。风从我篾缝里穿过去，黄瓜们轻轻碰头，发出很闷的笃笃声，像它们在说悄悄话。我们穿过两幢楼中间那条小路，路两边的窗子一扇扇打开，有人探头，有人打招呼：哟，老陈家的菜又出门啦。

三号楼，三下敲门。门开了，一位老奶奶把我们接过去。她摸黄瓜的时候手很轻，像摸小孩的脸。她说了一串话，我记不全，只记住她说这篮菜是整幢楼最好的。后来我的肚子里换了东西，换成一只碗，碗底热热的，热得我心里也发烫。他们管这个叫回礼。

回去的路上，男孩一手抱我一手端碗，走得比来时更慢。我空了，轻了，可我不知道为什么，反而觉得自己比装满的时候沉。后来那个老头把我放回石墩，用拇指蹭了蹭我的篮沿，像擦汗。

我在太阳底下蹲着，闻见自己身上又是黄瓜味又是绿豆味，两种味道混在一起，说不上好闻，但是暖。我忽然明白，我这只篮子，装菜的时候是满的，倒空了去装回礼，也是满的。原来有些东西越分越多，我身上就装着这个理。

Confessions of a Bamboo Basket

I am a bamboo basket, woven fine, varnished three times, squatting on a stone block at the garden gate. My owner is an old man with hard calluses on his hands that have stroked every seam of my bamboo strips. He never uses me for soil or weeds. He only lifts me on Saturday dawns, while the dew is still wet.

On picking day I am fed layer by layer. The cucumbers come first, cool, a small yellow flower about to dry still on their navel. The tomatoes come second, warm, ripened by the sun, lying shoulder to shoulder, careful not to crowd, for my master fears overfilling me will bruise them. The scallions come last, black soil still on their roots, draped over me like a quilt. I am filled level with the rim, my chest swollen. It is my proudest moment of the year.

Then I am hung on the arm of a boy. He is barely as tall as my handle, yet he walks steadily, around the puddles, around the bricks. Wind passes through my bamboo seams, the cucumbers bump heads softly, making a muffled knock-knock sound, like whispers. We cross the little path between two buildings. Windows open one by one,

people lean out, people call: oh, the vegetables of the Chen family are out again.

Building Three, three knocks. The door opens, and an old grandmother takes us over. Her hand is very light when she touches the cucumbers, like touching the cheek of a child. She says a string of words; I cannot remember them all, only that she called this basket the best in the whole building. Later what fills my belly changes, replaced by a bowl, hot at the bottom, so hot my insides glow too. They call this a return gift.

On the way back the boy holds me with one arm and the bowl with the other, walking slower than before. I am empty, I am light, yet somehow I feel heavier than when I was full. Later the old man sets me back on the stone block and rubs my rim with his thumb, like wiping away sweat.

I squat in the sun, smelling of both cucumbers and mung bean soup, the two smells mixed together, not exactly pleasant, but warm. I suddenly understand: this basket of mine is full when holding vegetables, and still full when emptied to carry a return gift. Some things really do grow more the more they are shared, and I carry that truth in my seams.

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