ZHIYUAN SI

China

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The Sweetest Honey

Dear Yuanbao,

A light rain is falling in Wuxi, and the cold wind slips down my collar. I carefully take out the jar of honey you gave me and scoop a spoonful into warm water. As that distinct sweetness melts on my tongue, I am instantly carried back to the sun-drenched threshing ground in Ningxia.

Our teacher asked us to write about "connection", and you were the very first person I thought of—the story of how we, separated by 2, 000 kilometers, became so close because of one holiday.

I could hardly believe my eyes when our car finally drove into your village last National Day—the sky was as blue as freshly washed denim, and the threshing ground was big enough to park dozens of cars! As a child who grew up in Wuxi, I had only read about "waves of wheat" in textbooks. But when you pulled me along as we ran wildly across the field, the wind lifting our laughter high, I realized real wheat holds the sun's warmth, and the straw pricks softly underfoot—something no photos taken on a phone can convey.

We "tailed" the speckled hens to find their eggs, creeping around in what must have been a very comical way. You whispered, "Sis, the eggs in city supermarkets just lie in boxes like they're asleep, but ours are 'treasures' hidden by the mother hens."

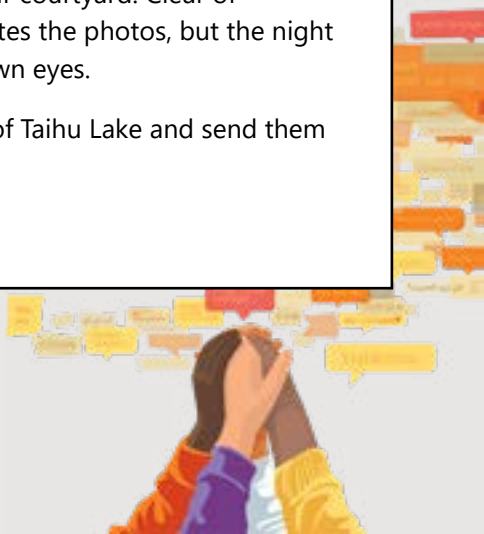
When I touched that still-warm egg, I suddenly understood why Mom always says "seeing is believing"—a video can show me what an egg looks like, but it can never make me feel its gentle weight in my palm or the heart-pounding excitement of discovering a "treasure". It's like the snowfall video you sent me later. I could watch the flakes fall, but not feel them touch my eyelashes—cool for a second, then gone.

On the morning I left, you blushed as you pressed four jars of honey into my hands and said, "Sis, our bees made this from buckwheat flowers. It's sweeter than anything you can buy in the city."

The honey became the most magical link between us.

Now, every time I make honey water, I think of the star-filled sky above your courtyard. Clear of streetlights, the Milky Way looked like a river of stars. I showed my classmates the photos, but the night sky looked much less impressive, nothing like the vastness I saw with my own eyes.

When the cherry blossoms bloom in spring, I'll pick some from the shores of Taihu Lake and send them to you, together with the refreshing southern breeze and my longing.



Still, I have to thank this digital age. Without it, the 2, 000 km between us could have slowly driven us apart. Instead, you taught me to recognize buckwheat flowers, and I checked your essays for mistakes. And the everyday greetings tie us closely together. Even though we can't meet in person, it still feels like we are by each other's side and growing up together.

Thank you for the honey, and even more for showing me that the truest connection is keeping someone close in your heart, no matter the distance.

Your cousin,
Si Zhiyuan