我在菜园里把韭菜和小麦认全了

要说这个暑假最让我脸红的事，就是在爷爷的菜园里认错了菜。那件事过去两个月了，现在想起来耳朵还会热，可它教会我的东西，比课堂上一整单元都多。

暑假头一个星期，爷爷在菜园里间苗，我蹲在地边帮忙。爷爷递给我一把草让我扔掉，我顺手扯了几棵叶子细长、绿得发亮的，爷爷一看急了：那是我的蒜苗！我扔的是他留作种的好蒜。我噘嘴：这不就是葱吗？爷爷把蒜苗和葱并排放在我手心：你闻。葱是辣的冲的，蒜苗一搓，是那股熟悉的蒜味。我凑近一闻，还真是，两种味道差得远，我以前根本没闻过。

更糗的还在后头。村口田边一片麦苗，我指着喊：爷爷你看你家韭菜长到别人地里了！爷爷笑得直不起腰，拉我蹲下，让我摸叶子的边：麦苗叶子上有细细的绒毛，摸上去涩涩的；韭菜光溜溜，还扁扁的。他又掐断一根韭菜给我看断口，再掐一根麦苗：你看茬口不一样，闻也不一样，韭菜一掐满手都是它的味。

从那天起，爷爷每天带我认三样。香菜和芹菜怎么分——叶子形状和搓一搓的味道；莴笋叶和油麦菜怎么分——一个叶厚带白霜，一个叶薄水灵；萝卜缨和雪里蕻怎么分。我不光看，还按爷爷说的搓叶子、闻断口、摸叶边。一个星期下来，我成了菜园里的认菜小老师，奶奶在灶下喊要根葱，我隔着菜园都能给她指在哪垄。

有天晚上我趴在桌上想，为什么课本上学过植物的叶、茎、根，我却认不出眼前的蒜苗和葱？因为书上的图是死的，菜是活的，味道、手感、断口，图片里全没有。爷爷种了一辈子地，他不识字几本，可他认识每一棵菜，菜一蔫他就知道渴了还是病了。他的本事，是一双手在泥里摸出来的。

开学自然课考到植物的叶和茎，我答得又快又准。可我心里最得意的不是答对题，而是我在菜园里学会了用手摸、用鼻子闻、用眼睛比。书本上的字要落到地上才算数。这个暑假我晒黑了一圈，认全了二十几种菜，还明白一个理：地里的学问也是学问，劳动本身就是学习。

In the Garden I Finally Told Chives From Wheat

The most embarrassing thing of that summer vacation, I would say, was misidentifying vegetables in grandpa garden. Two months have passed, my ears still go hot remembering it, yet what it taught me outweighed a whole textbook unit.

In the first week of vacation, grandpa was thinning seedlings in the garden and I crouched at the edge helping. He handed me a handful of weeds to toss away, and I pulled out a few plants with long slender shining leaves. One look and grandpa panicked: those are my garlic sprouts! What I threw away were the best garlic plants he had kept for seed. I talked back: is not this just scallion? Grandpa laid a garlic sprout and a scallion side by side in my palm: smell them. The scallion is sharp and pungent; rub the garlic sprout and there is that familiar garlic scent. I leaned in and sniffed. He was right; the two smells differ greatly, and I had simply never

smelled either closely.

The worse was still to come. By the village road stood a field of young wheat, and I pointed and shouted: grandpa look, your chives have grown into someone else field! Grandpa laughed so hard he could not straighten up. He pulled me down to squat and made me feel the leaf edges: wheat leaves carry fine fuzz and feel rough; chive leaves are smooth and flat. He pinched off one chive to show me the break, then pinched a wheat leaf: see, the broken ends differ, the smells differ; pinch a chive and your hand reeks of it for a while.

From that day grandpa taught me three vegetables a day. How to tell cilantro from celery: leaf shape plus a rub and a sniff. How to tell lettuce leaves from oil wheat greens: one leaf is thick with white bloom, the other thin and watery. How to tell radish tops from mustard greens. I did not just look; following grandpa I rubbed leaves, sniffed broken ends, and felt leaf edges. After a week I was the little vegetable expert of the garden. When grandma called from the kitchen needing a scallion, I could point out which row it grew in across the whole garden.

One evening I lay on the desk wondering: I had learned leaf, stem, and root in class, so why could I not tell garlic sprout from scallion in front of my eyes? Because the pictures in books are still, while vegetables are alive; scent, touch, and the look of a broken end are all missing from a photograph. Grandpa farmed all his life and had little schooling, yet he knew every plant; a leaf wilting told him whether it was thirsty or sick. His skill was made by hands feeling their way in the mud.

On the natural science test about leaves and stems after school started, I answered fast and right. But what I am proudest of is not the answers; it is that in the garden I learned to touch with hands, smell with the nose, and compare with the eyes. Words in a book only count once they touch the ground. That summer I tanned a shade darker, learned to name over twenty vegetables, and understood one principle: knowledge in the field is knowledge too, and labor itself is learning.