奶奶的玉米：院子里铺了一地太阳

八月九日 星期日 晴

玉米全部收完了，现在摊在院子里晒。奶奶把它们在水泥地上铺成一大片金黄，从早到晚拿木锨走过去走过去地翻，把底下的翻上来。她说玉米不翻，底下的会返潮发霉，霉起来一片都毁在两天里。整个院子让太阳照得金亮，像谁把一整块田里的阳光打翻在我们家地上。连鸡都走进来踩两步，又退出去，好像也知道这堆金子不是给它们的。

奶奶今年七十二岁。妈妈接她去城里住过两回，她都待不住，说城里的楼前头没有地，没得种她会闷出病来。这回收玉米，她每天五点多就起。我的手叫玉米叶拉了几道口子，差点哭出来，她说手拉得多了就长茧。她说这话的时候我盯着她的手看：她手心的茧一层压一层，硬得发亮，指关节又粗又大，有两个指头已经伸不直了。那些茧不是装饰，是五十个夏天干完活留下的收据。

傍晚，奶奶把卖不掉的细玉米煮了一锅。白汽从锅里一团一团冒出来，煮玉米的甜味漫满整个院子，一直飘到邻居家那边去。奶奶从锅里挑出两根最粗最饱满的，先放进我碗里，谁都没给，先给我。我掰回去一根给她，她又掰回来给我，说她牙不好，咬不动硬的。我知道不是她牙不好——她年年都这么说，年年自己吃最小的那几根。这一回我吃得特别慢，像吃一样舍不得吃完的东西。那是我吃过最甜的玉米。也可能不是玉米甜，是奶奶先给我的那一下甜。

奶奶把晒好的头一等玉米装袋，给城里的姑姑留了三大袋，剩下的留着喂鸡。她说玉米放不住，趁新鲜赶紧分。我站在旁边看她给姑姑装袋，一袋一袋扎紧，忽然想明白一件事：她一年到头种出来的东西，几乎都送人了——给姑姑，给邻居，给我们，她自己留的那一份最小，还从来不提。

今晚我做了个决定，写进日记里，就算数了：明年暑假，我提前一个星期回来。到那时候，我已经会装紧一袋玉米，会扎住袋口不炸开，会用手腕啪嗒一声掰下棒子。早上我可以替奶奶拿木锨翻院子里的玉米，小袋子我来扛，八十斤不用她一个人扛。奶奶七十二了，背弯得像弓，可她的手还认得那块地里的每一行。她还想让我在地里，我还扛得动袋子——这样的年头，我想一年一年帮下去。

Grandma's Corn: A Courtyard Full of Spilled Sunlight

August 9th, Sunday, Sunny

All the corn is finally harvested, and now it is drying out in our courtyard. Grandma spread it across the concrete ground in one big golden layer, and from morning until evening she walks through it with a wooden shovel, turning the kernels from underneath up to the top. She says if you do not turn the corn, the layer underneath stays damp and grows mold, and once the mold starts, a whole pile is ruined inside two days. The entire courtyard glows gold under the sun, like somebody spilled a whole field of sunlight onto our ground. Even the chickens walk in, take two steps, and back out again, as if they somehow know that this pile of gold is not

for them.

Grandma is seventy-two years old this year. Mom took her to live in the city twice, and both times she could not stand it and came back. She said the apartments in the city have no field in front of them, and if she has nothing to plant she will sicken from boredom. During this corn harvest she got up before five every single morning. My hands got several cuts from the corn leaves and I nearly cried, and she told me that hands which get cut often grow calluses. While she was saying it, I stared at her hands. The calluses on her palms lie in layer upon layer, hard and shiny, her knuckles are thick and swollen, and two of her fingers cannot straighten out all the way anymore. Those calluses are not decoration. They are the receipts that fifty summers of hard work left behind.

In the evening, Grandma boiled a big pot of the thin small cobs that were too skinny to sell. Clouds of white steam rose out of the pot, and the sweet smell of boiled corn filled the whole courtyard and drifted all the way over to the neighbor's yard. Grandma fished out the two biggest, plumpest cobs from the pot and put them straight into my bowl before giving anyone else anything. I broke one off and pushed it back to her, and she broke it back toward me, saying her teeth are not good anymore and she cannot chew hard things. I know it is not her teeth. She says that every single year, and every single year she eats the smallest ones herself. This time I ate mine very slowly, the way you eat something you do not want to finish. It was the sweetest corn I have ever tasted. Or maybe it was not the corn that was sweet — maybe it was the moment when Grandma gave it to me first.

Grandma dried the best of the corn and bagged it up: three big sacks set aside for my aunt's family in the city, and the rest kept for the chickens. She said corn does not keep well, so it is better to share it while it is still fresh. I stood beside her watching her fill the bags for my aunt, tying each one tight, and suddenly one thing became clear to me: everything she grows all year long almost entirely goes to other people — to my aunt, to the neighbors, to us — and the share she keeps for herself is always the smallest one, and she never once mentions it.

Tonight I made a decision, and I am writing it into this diary so that it counts: next summer vacation, I will come back to the village one week earlier. By then I will already know how to fill a sack tight, how to tie its mouth so it never bursts, and how to break a cob off with one snap of the wrist. In the mornings I can take the wooden shovel and turn the corn in the courtyard for Grandma, and I can carry the smaller sacks, so that eighty jin never has to sit on her shoulders alone. Grandma is seventy-two, and her back is bent like a bow, but her hands still know every single row in that field. As long as she still wants me in that field with her, and as long as I am strong enough to carry a sack, I want to help her in that field year after year.