玉米地里的第一天：掰玉米的啪嗒声

八月三日 星期一 晴

今天早上五点多，奶奶就起来了。我起床的时候，听见她在院子里忙活：水桶磕了一下，空麻袋抖得哗啦响。今天要去地里掰玉米。奶奶常说，玉米要赶早掰，太阳一毒，玉米棒子发软，一碰就掉粒。我上六年级了，暑假开始前我就跟自己说好，这回要实实在在帮奶奶干一天，一句苦都不叫。今天早上，我兑现了自己的话。

玉米地在村外的坡上，去的地里那条路很窄，两边的草扫着我的腿。奶奶在前面肩上挎着两个空麻袋，我在后面抱着大水壶。一进地，玉米秆比我还高，叶子又长又利，像一把把立着的剑，边上带细齿，第一下扫过胳膊，就留下一道白印子，火辣辣的。地太密，奶奶往旁边挪两行我就看不见她人了，只听见她的手在响：啪嗒，啪嗒，啪嗒。

奶奶教我掰玉米：手握住棒子中间，往下压，再一拧，啪嗒一声就下来了。我第一个攥住使劲拽，整棵秆子晃来晃去，棒子不下来；第二个拧得太轻，只撕下来一把苞叶；第三个我憋足了劲，差点把整棵玉米连根拔起来。奶奶从两行外走过来，没接我手里的棒子，只把我的手包住，带着我往下压、一拧。啪嗒。棒子干干净净下来了，苞叶翻开一小圈，像给它围了条围巾。她说了句：劲儿在手腕上，不在胳膊上。后头我越掰越顺，每响一声啪嗒，都像赢了一小局。

掰了差不多一个小时，筐就满了。我的手掌让玉米叶和玉米须磨得发涩，指头肚上叫苞叶划了几道小红印，后背痒在一个手够不着的地方，汗顺着下巴滴进土里，眼睛让汗杀得睁不开，眯眼看太阳，眼前全是花。我坐到地埂上，想歇够本再起来。奶奶还在掰，她的背弯得像一张拉满的弓，手却一直没停。我忽然想起来，她在这个坡上弯着腰，一年又一年，多少个夏天了。我站起来：奶奶能接着掰，我也能。

下午我们又掰满两筐。回家路上，筐里的玉米棒子堆成小山，散开的苞叶支棱在四周，像刺猬的背。下坡的时候腿沉，一步是一步，心却轻快，我一路跟奶奶说，哪一行的玉米最大，哪一棵上还有俩没掰。晚饭是青椒炒肉丝，我吃了两碗饭，菜格外香。我想，这就是干过活以后真正的饿吧。

今晚的日记我要写：玉米地里的第一天，我学会了手腕往下压再一拧，学会了听见啪嗒一声就高兴。我还学会了一件课本上没有的事：奶奶的腰疼，不是坐出来的，是替太阳还没出来的每一个早上，一年一年弯出来的。

My First Day in the Cornfield: The Snap of Breaking Off Corn

August 3rd, Monday, Sunny

Before five o’clock this morning, Grandma was already up. When I got out of bed, I could hear her moving around in the courtyard: the water bucket knocking once, the empty sacks being shaken out with a rustle. Today we were going to the field to pick

corn. Grandma always says that corn must be picked early, because once the sun gets strong the cobs turn soft and the kernels crack off at a touch. I am in the sixth grade now, and before this summer vacation started I made up my mind that this time I would help Grandma for one real day and not complain even once. This morning I kept that promise.

The cornfield is on the hillside outside the village. The path to it is narrow, with tall grass brushing against my legs on both sides. Grandma walked in front with two empty sacks over her shoulder, and I walked behind hugging the big water bottle. As soon as I stepped into the field, the corn plants towered above my head. The leaves are long and sharp like upright swords, and their edges carry tiny saw teeth. The first time a leaf swept across my arm it left a thin white line that stung for a while. The plants grow so close together that when Grandma moved two rows sideways I could no longer see her, and all I could hear were her hands working: snap, snap, snap.

Grandma taught me how to pick: grip the cob in the middle, press it down hard, then twist, and it comes off with a snap. For the first one I grabbed the cob and pulled with all my strength, and the whole plant swayed back and forth but the cob stayed on. For the second one I twisted too gently and only tore off a fistful of husk leaves. For the third one I put my whole body into it and nearly uprooted the entire plant. Grandma walked over from two rows away. She did not take the cob out of my hands. She just wrapped her hand around mine, pressed down with me, and twisted. Snap. The cob came off clean, and the husk peeled back in a little ring, like a scarf around its neck. She said one sentence: the strength lives in the wrist, not in the arm. After that I picked faster and faster, and every snap felt like winning one small round.

After about one hour the basket was full. My palms were rough from the corn leaves and the silky corn threads, my fingertips carried several small red cuts from the husks, my back itched in a place my hand could never reach, and sweat ran down my chin and dropped into the soil. The sweat got into my eyes and stung so much I could barely keep them open, and when I squinted at the sun I saw sparks of light everywhere. I sat down on the ridge between the fields and wanted to rest until I had rested enough. Grandma was still picking. Her back was bent like a bow drawn full, but her hands never stopped for a second. Then it suddenly hit me that she has bent over like this on this hillside year after year, summer after summer, for more summers than I can count. I stood up. If Grandma can keep picking, so can I.

In the afternoon we filled two more baskets. On the way home the cobs were piled in the baskets like small mountains, and the loose husk leaves stuck out on every side like the spines of a hedgehog. Going down the slope my legs felt heavy, one step after another, but my heart was light, and the whole way I talked to Grandma about

which row had the biggest corn and which plant still had two cobs left on it. For dinner we had green pepper with shredded pork, and I ate two bowls of rice, and every bite tasted wonderful. I think this must be what real hunger after real work tastes like.

In tonight's diary I want to write this: on my first day in the cornfield, I learned to press down and twist with my wrist, and I learned to feel happy at the sound of a snap. I also learned something that is not in any textbook. Grandma's sore back did not come from sitting around. It came from bending over in the fields on all the mornings when the sun had not even risen yet, one year after another, and nobody ever counted those mornings for her.