装袋的学问：奶奶说装得紧才算装满

八月五日 星期三 晴

今天的任务是把掰下来的玉米装进麻袋，一袋一袋抬到路边，等三轮车来拉。我原以为这是最轻快的一步：玉米都出地了，装进袋子里能有多难？奶奶说，装袋是有学问的。我很快就知道，她说的不是吓唬人。

第一步，撑口袋。奶奶两手抓住袋口，往空中一抖，麻袋砰地张开，像被人从睡梦里叫醒。我照着抖，我的袋子怎么都不开，最后我趴下去对着袋口吹了一口气，它砰地开了，一股陈年的灰腾起来，正扑在我脸上，我连着打了十个喷嚏。奶奶笑：袋里的灰是去年玉米上的，你得先跟它打声招呼。

第二步，装。奶奶的规矩是：先装大棒子，一根一根码平放正，小棒子和断的、掉了粒的，后头见缝插空填进去，像砌墙拿小石子塞大石头缝。我胡乱往里扔，大的压小的，扔满了，袋子鼓出好几个硬角，袋口合不拢。奶奶把我装的倒出来，当着我的面重新码，一根一根放平、转一转、卡一卡。同一只袋子，她装得比我多三分之一还多。我看得嘴都合不上。奶奶说：松松垮垮的不叫装满，装得紧才叫装满。

最难的是扎袋口。奶奶把袋口两个角拢到一起，拧成一股绳，再往回一别，压在上一层玉米底下，一拽，袋子就长死了。我照着做，拧两下就松，我的袋口整个炸开，玉米棒子骨碌碌滚了一地，有几个顺着坡往下跑，我满场去追，地里砰砰响，像下玉米雹子。我耳朵都臊热了，奶奶不骂我，只说：不会就多扎十次，第十一次就会了。我就在那只不听话的袋子上扎了拆、拆了扎。第十一次，袋口咬住了。我站起来冲地里喊了一嗓子，声音传出老远。

一共装了八袋。奶奶蹲下去，胳膊往袋子底下一插，一使劲就上了肩，像拎起一篮空气。我挑了最小的一袋试，扛起来腿先抖，我弓着背走了十步，肩膀又红又烫。奶奶说一袋平常八十斤。八十斤，她从地里扛到路边，再从路边扛回家，她自己腰疼的日子也照扛，一句都不叫。

三轮车来的时候，师傅看看八只袋子，再看看我：大娘，孙子都下地帮你啦，你有福。奶奶笑了，眼角的皱纹挤成两扇合起来的小门。

今晚肩膀疼得握笔都费劲，妈妈给我贴了一片止痛膏。我写得很慢，因为我想把一袋玉米到底有多重记清楚：它不光是一袋玉米，它是奶奶年年扛着它、从来没叫我扛过的那些年。

The Art of Filling the Sacks: Grandma Says a Tight Sack Is a Full Sack

August 5th, Wednesday, Sunny

Today's job was to put the picked corn into sacks and carry the sacks to the roadside, where the tricycle would come to pick them up. I thought this would be the easy part. The corn was already out of the field, so how hard could putting it into a bag be? Grandma told me that filling a sack is a real skill with its own learning

curve, and I quickly found out she was not trying to scare me.

The first step is opening the sack. Grandma grabbed the mouth of the sack with both hands and shook it twice in the air, and the sack popped open like somebody had woken it from a sleep. I tried the same thing, but my sack stayed shut no matter how hard I shook it. Finally I leaned down and blew air into the mouth of it. It opened with a poof, and a cloud of old dust rose straight into my face, and I sneezed ten times in a row. Grandma laughed and said the dust inside the sacks came from last year's corn, so the polite thing was to say hello to it first.

The second step is filling. Grandma's rule: big cobs go in first, laid flat and neat one by one, and the small cobs and the broken ones and the ones that lost some kernels fill the gaps afterwards, the way a mason wedges small stones into the cracks between big rocks. I threw cobs in any which way, big on top of small, and when I thought it was full, the sack bulged with hard corners and the mouth would not come together. Grandma emptied out everything I had done and refilled the sack in front of me, laying each cob down on purpose, turning it, fitting it into place. The same sack, filled her way, held one third more corn than filled my way. I stood there with my mouth hanging open. Grandma said: a loose sack is not a full sack; only a tight sack is a full sack.

The hardest part is tying the mouth. Grandma gathered the two corners of the sack mouth together, twisted them round and round into a rope, folded the rope back, and tucked it under the top layer of corn, and one pull closed the sack as if it had grown shut. I copied her, but my twist kept slipping loose, and then the whole mouth of my sack burst open and cobs rolled everywhere. A few of them started rolling down the slope, and I chased them all over the field, and the ground went thump-thump-thump like it was hailing corn. My ears went hot with embarrassment. Grandma did not scold me. She only said: if you cannot do it, tie it ten more times, and on the eleventh time you will be able to. So on that one stubborn sack I tied and untied, untied and tied. On the eleventh try, the mouth of the sack bit down and held. I stood up and shouted across the field, and my voice carried a long way.

In the end we filled eight sacks. Grandma squatted down, slid her arm under one, and lifted it onto her shoulder in one smooth motion, like lifting a basket of air. I wanted to try, so I chose the smallest sack and got it up, and my legs started shaking before I had even taken a step. I walked bent almost in half, ten steps, and my shoulder turned red and hot under my shirt. Grandma said a normal sack weighs eighty jin. Eighty jin, and she carries it from the field to the road, and from the road back home, and she carries it on days when her own back already hurts, without a single complaint.

When the tricycle arrived, the driver looked at the eight sacks, then looked at

me, and said: Grandma, even your grandson has come down to the field to help you — you are a lucky woman. Grandma laughed so hard that the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes squeezed shut like two little doors closing.

Tonight my shoulders ache so much that holding the pen feels like work by itself, and Mom found a pain patch and stuck it on for me. I am writing this diary slowly on purpose, because I want to remember exactly how heavy one sack of corn is. It is not only a sack of corn. It is all those years Grandma carried it by herself, and never once asked me to carry it for her.