豆角又长了一截

七月二十一日，星期一，晴转多云。醒来的时候，爷爷已经挑着两只桶在井台边等我了。

井水凉。爷爷把桶放下去，提上来的时候桶口冒白气。他把两桶水灌满，扁担往肩上一搁，我扶着桶帮走在旁边，水晃出来，湿了鞋。有只蜻蜓停在桶沿上，爷爷说别赶它，它专吃蚊子。菜园离井台有半里路，爷爷走得稳，我走得提心吊胆。爷爷说井水凉，要在畦沟里搁一会儿才能进地，不然苗要惊。他拎着水瓢顺着根脚浇，水直往土里钻。我学着浇，水头溅到叶子上，爷爷用瓢把儿轻轻敲我的手背：浇根，别浇叶，叶子湿一天要生病。浇完，我手心让瓢把儿硌出红印，畦里的土颜色深了一整片。换手提瓢的时候，红印发着烫，心里却比起床那会儿轻快。

晌午日头毒，我们躲进菜园边的草棚。爷爷递给我一顶草帽，我歪歪地扣在头上。四点钟以后去摘豆角。豆角一嘟噜一嘟噜挂在架底下，要掀开藤才看得见，有的长得跟手一样长，掐断时嘎嘣响；有的老了，一掰带出筋。爷爷教我从靠蒂的地方掐，细的留着再长两天。苦瓜扎手，我把手套翻过来戴着去掰。筐装满，我背着走，带子勒肩膀，脚步倒轻快。半路上我回头看了一眼，藤架在日头底下整整齐齐地立着。

傍晚，奶奶在树下铺了席，三个人坐着剥豆角，掐豆角的脆响响了一院子，奶奶把碗举到灯下，挑出漏下的老筋。萤火虫在菜园那边一闪一闪。爷爷说这个豆角品种是早年从镇上集上背回来的，年年留种，就是不锈。我盯着面前剥好的一碗豆角想：家里的饭菜从前看着平常，在菜园里干了一个夏天才明白，每一棵都被人浇过水、除过草、看过虫。

The Cowpeas Grew Another Segment

July 21, Monday, sunny then cloudy. When I woke up, Grandpa was already waiting for me at the well with two buckets on the carrying pole.

The well water is cold. Grandpa lowered the bucket and pulled it up, and white mist rose from the mouth of the bucket. He filled two buckets, put the shoulder pole on his shoulder, and I walked beside him holding the rope of the bucket to steady it. Water sloshed out and soaked my shoes. The garden is half a li from the well. Grandpa walked steadily, and I followed with my heart in my mouth. Grandpa said well water is cold, so it must sit in the ditch for a while before it enters the ridges, or the seedlings will be shocked. He held the water ladle and watered along the base of the stems, and the water sank straight into the soil. I imitated him, and the water jet splashed onto the leaves. Grandpa gently tapped the back of my hand with the handle of the ladle: water the roots, not the leaves, because leaves wet all day bring sickness. When we finished, my palms had red marks from the handle, and the soil of the ridges had darkened by a whole shade.

At noon the sun was fierce, and we hid in the thatched hut at the edge of the garden. Grandpa handed me a hat woven of straw, and I wore it crooked on my head. After four in the afternoon, we picked cowpeas. They hung in clusters under the

trellis and had to be found by lifting the vines; some grew as long as a hand and snapped with a crisp sound, while some were too old and let out fibers when broken. Grandpa taught me to pinch near the stem and to leave the thin ones for two more days. The bitter melons were prickly, so I turned my glove inside out to hold them. When the basket was full, I carried it on my back. The straps dug into my shoulders, but my steps felt light.

At dusk, Grandma spread the mat under the tree, and the three of us sat shelling cowpeas. The snapping sound filled the yard, and fireflies blinked on the far side of the garden. Grandpa said this variety of cowpea was brought back from the town market years ago, and seeds have been saved and replanted every year, so it never turns rusty. I looked at the bowl of shelled cowpeas piled in front of me and thought: the dishes at home once looked ordinary, but only after working in the garden for a summer did I understand that every single plant had been watered, weeded, and watched over.

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