水桶在回家的路上变轻了

星期六早上，爷爷扛着锄头往园子里去，我抱着小水瓢跟上去。园子在屋后，地头有一口老井。爷爷说，菜苗好几天没喝上雨，得浇。我问怎么浇，爷爷说，先提水。

水桶是铁皮桶，新的，有个提梁。我两只手扣住提梁，弯腰往上一提，哎哟，好沉。水晃出来，洒了我一鞋。我走两步就得放下，桶里的水在边上晃荡，像要跳出来。爷爷不帮我，他拄着锄头站在旁边看，说，把水倒掉一半，走慢些，眼睛看桶。

我照爷爷说的，倒掉一半水，再提。这回轻了些。我两手攥紧提梁，膝盖弯着，一小步一小步往前挪。桶里的水面一会儿往前晃，一会儿往后晃，我就跟着它的晃劲儿走：它往前晃，我就走快半步；它往后晃，我就收住脚。到了菜园，桶里还剩多半桶，我出了一身汗。爷爷冲我竖起大拇指：会提水了，真行。

浇菜苗比提水细。爷爷蹲下来做给我看：桶要放低，贴着根边的土慢慢倒，不能冲叶子，也不能对着根窝猛灌。我照着做，蹲在第三行菜苗边上，把桶沿斜斜地靠向土。水碰到干土，发出沙沙的响声，土的颜色从白变深，一圈一圈洇开，像地上开出一朵深色的花。

浇到第五行，我的腿麻了，一屁股坐到田埂上。爷爷递给我一个小马扎，我坐着接着浇。浇完回头一看，那些菜苗好像比刚才站直了，叶子也更绿了。爷爷眯着眼看了一会儿，说：菜苗喝饱了，会直起身子给你看。

中午奶奶喊我们回家吃饭。我的胳膊又酸又胀，鞋上全是泥脚印，可是心里特别高兴。吃饭的时候，奶奶说我今天比平时多吃了半碗饭。爷爷说，那是干活干的。

晚上我在日记本上写：提水很累，可是回家的路上，水桶好像变轻了。后来我想明白了，不是水桶变轻，是我有劲儿了。干活就是这样，干的时候觉得受不了，干完了却还想再干一次。

The Bucket Grew Lighter on the Way Home

On Saturday morning my grandfather shouldered his hoe and headed for the garden, and I followed with a small water ladle in my arms. The garden lies behind our house, and there is an old well at the edge of the field. Grandfather said the vegetable seedlings had not had rain for many days and needed water. I asked how to water them. He said, first carry the water.

The bucket was a new tin bucket with one handle across the top. I hooked both hands over the handle, bent down, and pulled up. Oh, so heavy. Water sloshed out and soaked my shoes. I managed two steps and had to set it down. The water rocked at the rim, ready to jump out. Grandfather did not help me. He stood by leaning on his hoe and said, pour out half the water, walk slowly, and keep your eyes on the bucket.

I did as he said, poured out half, and lifted again. This time it was lighter. I

gripped the handle with both hands, bent my knees, and moved forward one small step at a time. The water in the bucket rocked forward, then back, so I walked with its rocking. When it rocked forward, I hurried half a step; when it rocked back, I checked my feet. By the time I reached the garden, more than half the bucket was left, and I was covered in sweat. Grandfather raised his thumb to me: now you can carry water, well done.

Watering the seedlings is finer work than carrying. Grandfather crouched to show me: keep the bucket low, pour slowly along the soil beside the roots, do not dash the leaves, and do not flood the root hollow. I did the same, crouching beside the fifth row, tilting the rim of the bucket toward the earth. When the water touched the dry soil it made a hushing sound, and the ground darkened from pale to deep, spreading ring by ring, like a dark flower opening on the ground.

By the fifth row my legs went numb and I sat down on the field ridge. Grandfather handed me a small stool, and I went on watering while seated. When I finished and looked back, the seedlings seemed straighter than before, and their leaves greener. Grandfather squinted at them for a while and said: when seedlings drink their fill, they straighten up to show you.

At noon Grandmother called us home for lunch. My arms ached, my shoes were full of muddy footprints, yet my heart was very glad. At the table Grandmother said I ate half a bowl more than usual. Grandfather said, that is the work talking.

At night I wrote in my diary: carrying water is tiring, but on the way home the bucket seemed to grow lighter. Later I understood. It was not the bucket growing lighter, it was me growing stronger. Labor is like this: while you do it you think you cannot stand it, and when it is done you want to do it once more.

爷爷说，桶要两只手端

星期天，太阳很好，爷爷蹲在菜园门口看地。我跑过去问，爷爷你在看啥。爷爷用手扒开土给我看：土白了，裂了小口，菜苗渴了。爷爷站起来说，今天你帮我提水，我浇。我说好，其实我心里想的是，提水有什么难的。

井边的水桶是爷爷的旧木桶，箍着铁圈。我右手单拎提梁，往上一提，提起来了，可是桶直往一边坠。我走起来，桶晃，我身子也跟着晃。走了没五步，哗啦一下，水泼了半桶，我裤腿也湿了。我站在那儿，脸烫烫的。

爷爷没笑我。他走过来，把桶里的水添上，说，来，换两手。他把提梁摆正，让我左手扣住一边，右手扣住一边，两只手平平地端起来。爷爷说，眼睛别看脚，看前头的路，步子放小，桶

就听话了。

我两手端着走，一开始还是晃。爷爷在旁边扶了一把提梁，又马上松开。他说，我不扶你，你自己找那个稳当的劲儿。我走了三步，忽然找到窍门了：走快一点反而稳，慢下来桶就晃。我就小跑着把水送到了菜园边，桶里还剩大半。

爷爷夸我：头一回两手端桶就能送到，了不起。他边说边把锄头放好，我们俩一起浇菜苗。爷爷提着桶，我拿瓢。爷爷蹲下，把桶歪向菜苗根边的土，我用瓢把水一勺一勺舀出来，顺着土倒。水一浇下去，土面上冒小泡泡，噗噗两下就没了。

浇到一半，我问爷爷，菜苗喝多少才够。爷爷说，浇到水不再往下钻、开始在土上趴着，就够了。我用手背蹭了蹭额头的汗，接着浇。

浇完最后一行，爷爷把瓢接过去，说今天你出力最多。他伸手揉了揉我的脑袋，说，走，回家，爷爷给你煮鸡蛋。回家的路上我两手空空，可胳膊还是酸的，一甩一甩的。

那天我懂得了一件事：提水看着简单，里面有名堂；劳动看着累人，里面有味儿。那个味儿，就是爷爷夸我那一句里头的味儿，也是菜苗喝饱水、叶子发亮的那个味儿。我喜欢帮爷爷浇菜，下回星期天，我还去。

Grandfather Said, Hold the Bucket With Both Hands

On Sunday the sun was bright. My grandfather squatted at the gate of the garden looking at the ground. I ran over and asked what he was looking at. He dug his fingers into the soil and showed me: the earth has turned pale and cracked in little lines, and the seedlings are thirsty. He stood up and said, today you carry the water for me, and I will water. I said all right, though in my heart I was thinking, how hard can carrying water be.

By the well stood the old wooden bucket of my grandfather, banded with iron. I hooked the handle with my right hand alone and lifted. It came up, but the bucket kept dragging to one side. As I walked, the bucket swayed and my body swayed with it. After not quite five steps, splash, half the water spilled, and my trouser legs got wet. I stood there with my face burning.

My grandfather did not laugh at me. He walked over, refilled the bucket, and said, come, switch to two hands. He straightened the handle, had my left hand grip one side and my right hand grip the other, and lift it level with both hands. He said, do not look at your feet, look at the road ahead, take small steps, and the bucket will behave.

I walked holding it with both hands, still swaying at first. My grandfather steadied the handle once with his hand, then let go at once. He said, I will not hold

it for you, find the steady rhythm yourself. After three steps I suddenly hit on the trick: moving a little faster is steadier, and slowing down makes it sway. So I nearly jogged the water to the edge of the garden, with most of it still in the bucket.

My grandfather praised me: for a first time with two hands, delivering it whole, that is fine work. While he spoke he set down his hoe, and we watered the seedlings together. He held the bucket, I held the ladle. He crouched and tilted the bucket toward the soil beside the roots, and I scooped the water out spoon by spoon and poured it along the earth. When the water went down, little bubbles rose on the soil and popped away in two breaths.

Halfway through, I asked my grandfather how much the seedlings should drink. He said, water until the water stops sinking and begins to lie on the soil, and that is enough. I wiped my forehead with the back of my hand and kept watering.

When the last row was done, my grandfather took the ladle from me and said that today I did the most work. He ruffled my hair and said, come home, I will boil you an egg. On the way home my hands were empty, yet my arms still ached and swung with every step.

That day I learned one thing: carrying water looks simple but has its craft, and labor looks tiring but has its flavor. That flavor is in the praise my grandfather gave me, and in the look of seedlings drinking their fill with shining leaves. I love helping my grandfather water the vegetables, and next Sunday I will go again.

旱天的菜苗，喝上了第一口水

我们这儿十几天没下雨了。地干得发白，一锄头下去，土块哗啦散开。爷爷天天往菜园跑，回来都摇头：菜苗撑不了几天了。

周六一早，爷爷在井边放好两只桶，一只大的他自己提，一只小的归我。小桶是塑料的，爷爷只让它装半桶，说你能提稳就行。我提起来试了试，晃两下，没洒，就挺起胸往前走。爷爷在大后头，一步一步都不快，他说，别跑，跑起来水比人先洒。

从井到菜园有一百来步。我走到一半，胳膊就沉了，换了一次手。到地头时，我的手掌被提梁勒出两道红印。爷爷看见了，抓起我的手看，说，疼不疼。我说不疼。爷爷没说话，把大桶里的水匀了一瓢到我的小桶旁边，让我先浇这一桶。

菜苗一行一行排着，叶子都打了卷，边上发黄，趴在地上没精神。我学着爷爷的样子蹲下来，把桶放低，水贴着土倒。第一口水浇下去，干土咕的一声，像吸了一口气。水洇开，菜苗的叶子边上沾了水，亮了一下。

爷爷浇大桶，我浇小桶，我们俩从东头往西头浇。浇到中间，我发现一个怪事：刚浇过的行，叶子好像立起来一点了。我问爷爷是不是看错了。爷爷摘下一片打卷的叶子，摊在手心里，说，你看，卷边松了。我也学着摘一片摊开，真的，卷着的边慢慢松开了，像攥着的拳头慢慢张开。

浇完最后一行，两只桶都空了。爷爷把空桶摞起来，看了看天，说，今晚要是能下场雨，这些苗就能挺过去。我说，咱们浇的水能顶几天？爷爷说，顶三五天，剩下的，看天。

回家路上，我的胳膊一抬一抬都疼，可我一边走一边回头看菜园。那些菜苗一行一行站在那儿，比早上精神多了。爷爷在旁边说：今天你提的水，它们都喝到了。我听了这句话，胳膊好像没那么疼了。

那天我体会到，劳动的快乐不是玩的那种快乐。它有点累，手上有印子，可它让你惦记一样东西。现在我每天放学都先去菜园看一眼，看那些菜苗一天比一天高。它们喝过我提的水，我觉得它们也有我一份。

The Thirsty Seedlings Got Their First Drink

It had not rained where we live for more than ten days. The fields had dried to a pale white, and one stroke of the hoe sent clods crashing apart. My grandfather went to the garden every day and came back shaking his head: the seedlings will not hold out many more days.

Early on Saturday morning my grandfather set two buckets by the well, a large one for himself and a small one for me. The small one was plastic, and he let it hold only half a bucket, saying you just need to carry it steady. I lifted it to try, it rocked twice, nothing spilled, and I straightened my chest and walked on. My grandfather came slowly behind me, and he said, do not run, when you run the water spills before you do.

It was about a hundred steps from the well to the garden. Halfway there my arms grew heavy, and I switched hands once. At the edge of the field, the handle had pressed two red lines into my palms. My grandfather saw it, took my hand to look, and asked, does it hurt. I said no. He said nothing, but poured one ladle from his big bucket beside my small one, so that I could water with this one first.

The seedlings stood row by row, their leaves curled, their edges yellow, lying flat and spiritless on the ground. I crouched the way my grandfather did, set the bucket low, and poured the water along the soil. At the first drink the dry earth made a gulping sound, like drawing in a breath. The water spread, the edges of the seedling leaves caught wetness, and gleamed once.

He watered with the big bucket, I with the small, and we worked from the east end to the west. Halfway through I noticed a strange thing: in the rows we had just

watered, the leaves seemed to lift a little. I asked my grandfather if my eyes were wrong. He picked one curled leaf and spread it in his palm. Look, he said, the curled edge has loosened. I picked one too and spread it out. Truly, the curled edge was easing open, like a fist slowly unclenching.

When the last row was done, both buckets were empty. My grandfather stacked them, looked at the sky, and said, if a rain comes tonight, these seedlings will pull through. I asked how long our water would last. He said, three or five days, and the rest is up to the sky.

On the way home it hurt to lift my arms, yet I kept turning to look back at the garden. The seedlings stood row by row, much more alive than in the morning. My grandfather said beside me: everything you carried today, they drank. After that sentence my arms seemed to hurt less.

That day I came to know that the joy of labor is not the joy of play. It comes with tiredness and marks on the hands, but it makes you care about something. Now after school I stop at the garden every day to watch those seedlings grow taller day by day. They drank water I carried, and I feel that a part of me is in them too.