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.

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