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.