井水浇过的夏天

放假那天，爸爸把我放在爷爷家门口，车走了，我对着院子喊了一声也没人应。爷爷从菜园回来，裤腿卷到膝盖，鞋是湿的。他看了我一眼，说正好，明早跟我下地。

清早五点半，天刚亮，爷爷已经在水井边放下两只桶。他压了几下压杆，水哗地涌上来，先灌满浇菜的大桶，再灌我的小半桶。他挑担走在前头，我提着自己的半桶，走十步洒一半。到了地里，他把我桶里的水浇到番茄根上，说水要浇在根边上，不能泼叶子，叶子晒了水珠会烧出洞。

那几天他总给我讲春天。他指着篱笆边一道浅浅的印子，说四月他就在这儿点过豆角，芽现在都爬过他腰了。又说南头那畦是三月撒的白菜籽，一粒一粒，他弯着腰撒的，撒完腰疼得半天没直起来。我蹲在那畦边，白菜已经大得能包成一颗颗实心的球，我很难把眼前这一畦和他嘴里那把细小的籽对上。

七月的日头毒。上午十点以后叶子全耷下来，爷爷说晌午浇水会烫根，得等傍晚。傍晚他浇，我跟着拎壶，一垄一垄走过去，水渗进土里冒小泡。黄瓜架下他摘两根顶花带刺的，在井水里镇过，递给我。那根黄瓜咬下去是甜的，我后来在城市里再没吃到过那种甜。

八月中，一场大雨下了整夜。清早爷爷站在檐下看菜园，水从垄沟里流过，他不去管，只说这样的雨比十担井水都值钱。雨停以后菜疯长，豆角一早上架，他让我帮着摘，掐的时候要有响声，他说响了才是嫩的。

开学前三天，爷爷开始收。玉米掰了堆在院里，辣椒摘满三只筐，他挑最小的那筐留给我。南瓜他挑了两个扁圆的，说这个面，蒸着吃。他往车上搬东西的时候，腰弯下去要顿一下才能直起来，我在旁边看着，没敢出声，赶紧去托住另一个南瓜的底。

车装好，爷爷站在院门口，手上还有泥。他说下学期期末考完就回来，园里冬天种菠菜，我来了正好看见雪盖着绿叶子。车开出村口，我从后窗看见他还站着，身后是他那一园子收完的地，空着，正等下一场雨。

The Watered Summer

On the first day of vacation, my father left me at the house where Grandpa lives. The car left, and I shouted once into the yard with no answer. Grandpa came back from the garden, trousers rolled to his knees, shoes wet. He glanced at me and said good, I would go to the fields with him tomorrow morning.

At half past five, the sky barely light, he had already set two buckets by the well. He worked the pump handle a few times, water gushed up, and he filled the big bucket for the garden first, then my half bucket. He carried the yoke in front while I lugged my own half bucket, spilling half of it every ten steps. In the field he poured my water at the tomato roots, saying water must go to the edge of the roots, never splashed on the leaves, because droplets on leaves burn holes under the sun.

Those days he kept telling me about spring. He pointed at a faint line along the fence and said he had dotted beans there in April, and now the vines had climbed past his waist. The south bed, he said, came from bok choy seeds sown in March, seed by seed, sown bent over, and his back ached so badly he could not straighten up for half a day. I squatted by that bed. The bok choy had grown into firm round heads, and I could hardly match this bed with the handful of tiny seeds in his story.

The July sun was brutal. After ten in the morning the leaves all hung down. Grandpa said noon watering would scorch the roots, so we waited for evening. He watered at dusk and I followed with the can, row by row, the water sinking into the soil with tiny bubbles. Under the cucumber trellis he picked two still flowered and prickly, chilled them in well water, and handed one to me. Bitten, that cucumber was sweet, and I have never tasted that sweetness again in the city.

Mid-August brought a whole night of heavy rain. In the morning Grandpa stood under the eaves watching the garden, water running through the furrows, and he did not interfere, saying such rain was worth more than ten loads from the well. After it stopped the vegetables grew wildly, beans reached the trellis overnight, and he had me help pick them, snapping with a sound, because a snap means the bean is tender.

Three days before school reopened, Grandpa began the harvest. Corn piled in the yard, peppers filled three baskets, and he set aside the smallest basket for me. He chose two flat round pumpkins, saying these were mealy and good steamed. As he loaded the car, he had to pause at the bottom of each bend before straightening. I watched without a sound, then hurried to hold up the bottom of another pumpkin.

With the car loaded, Grandpa stood at the gate, mud still on his hands. He said come back after the final exam next term, spinach would be planted in the garden in winter, and I would arrive in time to see snow lying over green leaves. As the car left the village, I saw him still standing in the rear window, and behind him the harvested garden, empty, waiting for the next rain.

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