筐里的秋天，沟里的春天

秋分刚过，爷爷的院子里堆满了东西。玉米剥了皮晾在绳上，辣椒装进竹筐，南瓜靠墙排成一排。我提着筐帮他把辣椒从园里拎回来，半路换了一次手。爷爷走在前面，肩上挑着两桶水，还要回头叮嘱我别把辣椒颠出去。那一刻我觉得，这一园子的秋天，是他用肩膀挑回来的。

可是十个月前，这块地还什么都没有。清明前后，爷爷在地头烧过一堆去年的枯秧，烟散了，他拿起锄头开始翻地。土块被他敲碎，碎得像捏得散的沙。然后他蹲下去，用锄柄划沟，从东划到西，再蹲着退回来撒籽。我在旁边学着蹲，蹲了十分钟腿就麻了，他蹲了整整一上午，中间只直起腰捶过几次背。

籽下进去那几天，天天不下雨。爷爷每天早上去看一回，回来都说还没拱。我问他是不是籽死了，他说籽在攒劲儿。等到苗出来的那天，他站在畦边看，谁也不让碰，连我也只能站在三步外看。一排排嫩绿从黑土里顶出来，叶尖上还顶着小半块土渣。

入伏以后，爷爷一天两趟水。井在坡下，他先挑到地头，再一壶一壶分。傍晚他浇完最后一垄，蹲在架下掐掉发黄的老叶，顺手把歪了的瓜扶正，垫上一块瓦片，说瓜贴着湿地会烂。夜里下雷阵雨，他披着雨衣出去看排水沟，回来裤腿全是泥。我睡眼惺忪问他为什么不睡觉，他说菜在水里泡一宿，根就烂了，一年的功夫就白搭。

节气在他嘴里比在课本里准。他说头伏萝卜二伏菜，说处暑以后白菜才包心，说霜降前的辣椒最辣，因为冷一下辣一下。我原先背这些只当顺口溜，后来蹲在地里看，发现白菜真的到日子才包，萝卜真的入伏后才粗，他像背着一本看不见的日历。

收完那天傍晚，爷爷把最后一筐辣椒提到院门口，给邻居留了两兜。他坐在门槛上抽烟，看着空了一半的地。我问他明年还种吗。他把烟头摁灭，说明天就翻地，撒菠菜籽。我忽然明白，他的菜园没有结束的时候，秋天收走的，春天又会从同一道沟里长回来。

回城的车上，那筐辣椒在我脚边，辣味隔着纸都往鼻子里钻。我想起三月他蹲着退着撒籽的背影，想起夏天他挑着水回头叮嘱的样子。原来一筐秋天里，装的全是春天挖的沟和夏天流的水。

Autumn in the Basket, Spring in the Furrow

Just after the Autumn Equinox, the yard was piled high with harvest. Corn, peeled of its husks, hung on ropes; peppers went into bamboo baskets; pumpkins lined the wall in a row. I carried a basket to help him bring peppers back from the garden and switched hands halfway. Grandpa walked ahead with two water buckets on his shoulder yoke, still turning back to tell me not to jostle the peppers out. In that moment it felt as if he had carried this autumn of the garden home on his shoulders.

Yet ten months earlier the plot had held nothing. Around Clear Brightness, Grandpa burned a pile of dead vines from last year at the edge of the field. When the smoke cleared, he took up the hoe and turned the soil. He broke the clods fine, fine enough to scatter through fingers. Then he crouched and drew furrows with the hoe

handle, east to west, then sowed backward as he went, still crouching. I tried crouching beside him and my legs went numb in ten minutes; he crouched the whole morning, straightening only a few times to punch his back.

For days after sowing there was no rain. Grandpa walked out to look every morning and came back saying nothing had pushed up yet. I asked whether the seeds had died. He said the seeds were gathering their strength. On the day the sprouts finally came, he stood at the edge of the bed watching and let no one touch them; even I could only stand three steps away. Rows of tender green had shouldered out of the black soil, bits of dirt still balanced on the leaf tips.

After the dog days began, Grandpa made two water trips a day. The well sat down the slope; he carried water to the headland first, then distributed it can by can. After watering the last row at dusk, he squatted under the trellis to pinch off yellowed old leaves, straightened a crooked melon, and slid a tile under it, saying a melon lying on wet ground will rot. When a thunderstorm came at night, he put on his raincoat to check the drainage ditch and came back with muddy trouser legs. Half asleep, I asked why he did not stay in bed. He said vegetables soaked overnight would rot at the roots, and the work of a whole year would go for nothing.

The solar terms in his mouth ran truer than in our textbooks. He said radishes in the first dog days and greens in the second; that cabbage hearts only close after the End of Heat; that peppers before Frost Fall bite hardest, because the cold sharpens them. I used to recite these as rhymes. Watching in the field, I found the cabbage really did heart on schedule and the radishes really did swell after the dog days began, as if he carried a calendar no one else could see.

On the evening the harvest ended, Grandpa set the last basket of peppers by the gate and left two bags for the neighbors. He sat on the threshold smoking, looking at the half-empty field. I asked if he would plant again next year. He stubbed out the cigarette and said he would turn the soil tomorrow and sow spinach. It struck me then that his garden never has an ending: what autumn takes away grows back from the same furrow in spring.

On the bus back to the city, that basket of peppers sat at my feet, its heat stinging through the paper. I saw again his back in March, crouching and backing as he sowed, and him in summer with water buckets, turning to warn me. A basket of autumn, it turns out, is packed entirely with furrows dug in spring and water carried through summer.

www.vv99.net