一碗剩饭引发的劳动课

那天中午，我在碗里剩了小半碗饭。妈妈让我吃完，我嫌饭硬，趁她转身，把饭倒进了泔水桶。这一切被爷爷看见了。我以为他要骂我，他没有。他只是放下筷子说，走，跟我去菜园。

七月的菜园像个蒸笼。爷爷交给我一只水桶，让我从井里打水浇那三畦刚移栽的青菜。第一桶，我摇摇晃晃提进菜园，水泼掉小半，浇在菜苗脚边。第二桶，胳膊开始发酸，肩膀被桶梁勒出一道白印。第三桶，我几乎是拖着走的，两条腿像灌了铅。三桶水浇完，我瘫坐在南瓜架底下，衣服湿透，像刚从河里捞出来。

爷爷又让我去拔草。青菜畦里的草和菜苗长得像双胞胎，我蹲下去，揪一把，再蹲下去，再揪一把。日头爬到头顶，草叶上的刺划着手，锄头把磨着虎口。收工的时候，我右手虎口磨得通红，中间还鼓起一个亮晶晶的水泡。爷爷用针帮我把水泡挑破，涂上药，什么也没说。

晚上，他把中午那碗饭重新盛了出来——不，是重新蒸的一碗，摆在我面前。米粒白白胖胖，冒着热气。爷爷说，饿了一天了吧，吃。我端起碗，第一口下去，我愣住了：平常寡淡的白米饭，那天甜得像糯米。我一口一口把那碗饭吃得干干净净，连碗底的几粒都用筷子追着送进嘴里。吃的时候，我想起井边的三桶水，想起通红的水泡，想起爷爷那双裂了口子的手。原来我们倒掉的每一口饭，都是别人这样一桶水一桶水、一锄头一锄头换来的。

那天晚上我在日记本上写：以前背锄禾日当午，只觉得顺口；今天背它，嗓子发紧。粮食来之不易，这六个字以前是作文里的，今天长在我的手上了。手磨红的地方一碰就疼，每疼一次，我就想起那三桶水，想起泔水桶里我那半碗白白胖胖的饭。

后来我再也没倒过一口饭。在学校食堂，同学把咬了一口的馒头扔掉，我看见了，心里像被针扎一下。我鼓起勇气对他说，这个还能吃，我帮你吃了吧。同学瞪大眼睛，我的脸也红了，可我不觉得难为情。爷爷听说以后，笑了，只说了一句，菜园没白去。

现在每当有人问我，什么是珍惜。我会伸出右手，给他看虎口上那块淡淡的印子。它不疼了，但它一直在提醒我：一碗饭很轻，可把它种出来、浇出来、收回来，很重。珍惜粮食，不用讲大道理，从把碗里的最后一口饭吃干净开始，就从今天这一口开始。

A Labor Lesson Started by a Bowl of Leftover Rice

At noon that day I left half a bowl of rice in my bowl. Mother told me to finish it, but I found the rice too hard, and while she turned away I poured it into the swill bucket. Grandfather saw all of it. I expected him to scold me. He did not. He only set down his chopsticks and said, come, go with me to the garden.

The garden in July was like a steamer. Grandfather handed me a bucket and told me to draw water from the well and water the three beds of greens just transplanted. With the first bucket I staggered into the garden, sloshing away nearly half, watering the feet of the seedlings. With the second, my arms began to ache, and the bail of the bucket carved a white line across my shoulder. With the third I almost

dragged it along, my legs filled with lead. After three buckets I collapsed under the pumpkin trellis, soaked through, as if just pulled out of a river.

Then grandfather set me to pulling weeds. The weeds in the cabbage beds looked like twins of the seedlings. I squatted, pulled a handful, squatted again, pulled again. The sun climbed overhead; the burrs of grass scratched my hands, and the hoe handle rubbed the web of my thumb. At quitting time the web of my right hand was rubbed bright red, with a shiny blister swelling in the middle. Grandfather pricked the blister with a needle, applied medicine, and said nothing.

At night he served out a bowl of rice — no, a bowl freshly steamed — and set it before me. The grains were white and plump, breathing steam. Grandfather said, you have been hungry all day, eat. I lifted the bowl, and at the first mouthful I froze: the plain white rice of ordinary days tasted that day as sweet as glutinous rice. Bite by bite I cleaned the whole bowl, chasing the last few grains at the bottom into my mouth with my chopsticks. As I ate, I thought of the three buckets at the well, the red blister, the cracked hands of grandfather. So every mouthful of rice we throw away was bought by someone with bucket after bucket of water, stroke after stroke of the hoe.

That night I wrote in my diary: before, reciting the poem about hoeing at noon felt only smooth on the tongue; today reciting it tightened my throat. Grain comes hard, six characters that used to belong to compositions, today grown onto my own hands. The rubbed-red spot aches at a touch, and each ache reminds me of those three buckets, and of my half bowl of white plump rice in the swill bucket.

Since then I have never poured out a single mouthful of rice. At the school canteen, when a classmate threw away a steamed bun with one bite taken, my heart pricked as if by a needle. I mustered courage and said to him, this is still edible, let me finish it for you. He stared at me, my face went red too, but I did not feel ashamed. When grandfather heard about it, he smiled and said only one line: the garden trip was not wasted.

Now whenever someone asks me what cherishing means, I hold out my right hand and show them the faint mark on the web of my thumb. It no longer hurts, but it keeps reminding me: a bowl of rice is light, yet growing it, watering it, and harvesting it is heavy. To cherish grain needs no grand reasoning; begin by finishing the last mouthful in your bowl, begin with this mouthful today.

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