菜园开学礼：我当了一回小园丁

开学前半个月，爷爷的菜园给我留了一畦菜，十二棵白菜苗，归我管。爷爷说，这就是你的作业，每天浇一次水，开学那天验收。我拍着胸脯答应了，心想，浇水还不简单。

头三天，我浇得兴致勃勃。第四天开始，麻烦来了。水在井里，畦在坡下，来回一趟二十多分钟。水桶越来越沉，我的胳膊越来越酸。第七天早上，我提着水走在畦沟里，脚下一滑，半桶水扣进了沟里，我摔了个屁股墩，裤腿全是泥。我坐在泥里，差点哭出来，又想起自己拍过的胸脯，爬起来接着浇。

浇水还要讲究。爷爷教我，水要浇在根边上，不能劈头盖脸往叶子上冲；傍晚浇比中午浇好，中午的水会把菜苗烫坏。我拿锄头松土时，虎口被锄头把磨得通红，晚上拿筷子都打颤。妈妈心疼，让我别干了。我把手伸给她看：红是红了，可白菜苗已经到我的膝盖了。妈妈没再说话，只是每晚给我手上抹药。

最难的是坚持。有一天下大雨，我想今天不用浇了吧。爷爷说，去看看吧，雨大的天，畦里积水反而要排水。我披着雨衣去，把畦沟的出水口挖开，水哗哗流走，白菜苗在雨里晃叶子，像在跟我道谢。那天我浑身湿透，心里却热乎乎的。原来照顾一棵菜，就像照顾一个朋友，不能天气好才想起它。

开学前一天，爷爷来验收。他蹲在那畦白菜前，一棵一棵地看，看完点点头：叶子绿，帮子厚，根扎得深，是个好园丁种出来的。他亲手砍下最外面的一棵，递给奶奶：晚上炒了，给咱们的小园丁加菜。那盘菜端上桌，我特意坐在它前面，一棵一棵慢慢地吃，舍不得一口吞掉。

吃饭的时候，爷爷慢悠悠地说，你这才管了十二棵菜、半个月，手就磨成这样。农民管的是几十亩、一整年。米从秧苗到饭碗，要过多少双手，晒多少太阳，流多少汗，你这回见着开头了。我低头扒饭，把那碗饭吃得一粒不剩。粮食来之不易，这六个字，我这回不是写在作文里，是种在那畦白菜里，长在磨红的虎口上。

开学那天，我书包里装着爷爷摘的两棵青菜，准备带给食堂的师傅，让厨房晚上加菜。我还跟爷爷拉了钩，寒假回来，那畦地还归我。我想好了，下次不仅要种好，还要学插秧、学打谷，把粮食走的路，一段一段都亲自走一遍。因为只有走过的人，才真正把珍惜两个字，放在碗底，也放在心里。

The Garden Opening Gift: I Was a Little Gardener for a While

Half a month before school opened, grandfather of the garden kept aside one bed for me: twelve cabbage seedlings, under my care. Grandfather said, this is your homework, water them once a day, and there will be an inspection on the first day of school. I thumped my chest and agreed, thinking, watering cannot be simple.

For the first three days I watered with great enthusiasm. From the fourth day,

trouble began. The water was in the well, the bed was down the slope, and one round trip took over twenty minutes. The bucket grew heavier and heavier, my arms more and more sore. On the morning of the seventh day, carrying water along the furrow, my foot slipped, half the bucket dumped into the ditch, and I sat down hard in the mud, trouser legs covered. I sat there almost crying, then remembered the chest I had thumped, got up, and went on watering.

Watering has its rules too. Grandfather taught me: pour at the edge of the roots, do not drench the leaves head-first; evening is better than noon, for noon water will scald the seedlings. When I loosened soil with the hoe, the web of my thumb was rubbed bright red, and my hands trembled even holding chopsticks at night. Mother worried and told me to stop. I showed her my hands: red indeed, but the cabbage seedlings already reached my knee. She said no more, only applying medicine to my hands every evening.

The hardest part was persistence. One day it rained hard, and I thought no watering was needed today. Grandfather said, go and take a look; in heavy rain, standing water in the bed must be drained instead. I went in a raincoat, dug open the outlet of the furrow, and the water rushed away; the cabbages shook their leaves in the rain, as if thanking me. That day I was soaked, yet my heart was warm. So tending a vegetable is like tending a friend: you cannot think of it only when the weather is fine.

The day before school opened, grandfather came for the inspection. He squatted before that bed of cabbages, looking at one plant after another, then nodded: leaves green, stems thick, roots deep — grown by a good gardener. He cut the outermost plant himself and handed it to grandmother: stir-fry it tonight, a special dish for our little gardener. When the plate came to the table, I made a point of sitting right in front of it, eating plant by plant slowly, unwilling to swallow in a hurry.

While we ate, grandfather said slowly: you managed only twelve plants for half a month, and your hands are rubbed like this. Farmers manage tens of acres for a whole year. How many pairs of hands, how much sun, how much sweat a grain of rice passes through from seedling to rice bowl — you have now seen the beginning of that road. I lowered my head and ate, leaving not a single grain. Grain comes hard: this time those six characters were not written in a composition but planted in that bed of cabbages, grown on the rubbed-red web of my thumb.

On the first day of school, my schoolbag held two heads of greens picked by grandfather, to bring to the canteen cooks for the evening dish. I also pinky-pinked with grandfather: when I come back for winter vacation, that bed is still mine. I have decided that next time I will not only grow well but learn to transplant rice and thresh grain, walking the road of grain stretch by stretch myself. For only one

who has walked it can truly place the word cherish at the bottom of the bowl, and in the heart.