掰玉米的手

玉米地里的叶子全卷了边，秆子还直挺挺地站着，比我还高半头。爷爷递给我一只手套，说今天你掰，我装。我学着他的样子，左手攥住玉米穗，右手握住穗子往下一压一拧，咔的一声，玉米掉了，掌心被硬壳硌得生疼。掰下来的玉米棒子比我的手腕还粗，须子黄黄的，一缕一缕贴在壳上。

我越掰越快，胳膊却越来越酸。玉米秆划过后颈，火辣辣的。地里的空气又闷又干，吸一口，嗓子眼发痒。我掰的玉米堆成小山，爷爷把它们一个一个码进麻袋，码得整整齐齐，像给麻袋装砖头。装到半袋，爷爷把袋口一提，喊我拽另一头，两人合力把麻袋拖到田埂边。麻袋在地上拖出一道浅沟。

中途我还掰断了一根嫩秆，汁水洇出来，黏黏的。我有点慌，回头看爷爷，他蹲在地头，拿根树枝把那截断秆插回土里，说插深点，缓两天它能自己立起来。我记住了这个动作，后来再掰断的秆，都照他的样子插回去。

爷爷说歇会儿。我们坐到田头的大榆树下。爷爷把草帽摘下来盖在脸上，靠着树干，不出声了。我听见他的呼噜声一起一伏，混着地里叶子碰叶子的沙沙声。树上有只知了有气无力地叫了两声，又不叫了。我盯着爷爷的手看，那手背上青筋一条条鼓着，指头粗得像老玉米秆，虎口的老茧黄亮黄的。

歇够了，爷爷站起来拍拍屁股上的土，问我累不累。我摇头，其实腿有点软。下午我们装了第四袋，爷爷扛上一袋往路边走，腰弯得像一张弓，步子却稳。我跟在后头抱着两个散棒子，玉米粒在袋口哗啦哗啦地响。

回家路上，夕阳把玉米地照得金红。我回头看，地里还剩一小片没收，风一吹，秆子齐齐点头。爷爷说明天接着收。我把最后一根玉米棒子搂得紧紧的，壳上的须子扫着我的下巴，痒痒的。

Hands That Snap Corn Ears

The leaves in the cornfield had all curled at the edges, but the stalks still stood straight, half a head taller than me. Grandpa handed me a glove and said: you snap today, I bag. I copied him, left hand gripping the ear, right hand closing over it and pressing down and twisting with a crack, and the ear came off, its hard husk digging a ache into my palm. The snapped ear was thicker than my wrist, its silk yellow, strand after strand clinging to the husk.

I snapped faster and faster, and my arms ached more and more. Corn leaves slashed the back of my neck, stinging. The air in the field was stuffy and dry; one breath and my throat itched. My snapped ears piled into a little hill, and Grandpa stacked them into the sack one by one, neatly, like loading bricks. When the sack was half full, he lifted its mouth and called me to pull the other end, and together we dragged it to the field ridge, the sack plowing a shallow furrow in the dirt.

Along the way I snapped a young stalk by accident, its juice seeping out, sticky. I panicked and looked back at Grandpa. He crouched at the field edge, took a twig, and pushed the broken stalk back into the soil, saying: plant it deep, give it two days, it will stand up on its own. I remembered that move, and every stalk I broke after that I planted back the same way.

Grandpa said let us rest. We sat under the big elm at the head of the field. He took off his straw hat and laid it over his face, leaned against the trunk, and went quiet. I heard his snoring rise and fall, mixed with the rustle of leaves brushing leaves in the field. A cicada on the tree called twice, weakly, then stopped. I stared at Grandpa’s hands. The veins on their backs swelled in ridges, the fingers thick as old cornstalks, the callus at the tiger’s mouth of his palm yellow and shiny.

When the rest was done, Grandpa stood and patted the dirt off, and asked if I was tired. I shook my head, though my legs felt soft. In the afternoon we filled the fourth sack. Grandpa shouldered one and walked toward the road, his back bent like a drawn bow but his steps steady. I followed hugging two loose ears, the kernels rattling at the sack’s mouth.

On the way home, the setting sun lit the cornfield gold-red. I looked back. A small patch was still unharvested, and when wind blew, the stalks all nodded together. Grandpa said we would finish tomorrow. I hugged the last ear tight, its silk brushing my chin, ticklish.

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