最后一穗玉米

晚上，奶奶在灶台上煮了一锅玉米，满屋子都是甜香。我捧着最大的一穗，先递给了爷爷。爷爷摆摆手，转手塞给了奶奶。奶奶笑骂他老不正经，还是咬了一大口。就是这一口甜香，把我拽回白天的玉米地里。

白天，太阳刚爬到电线杆顶上，爷爷就把我喊进了地。玉米秆干得发白，一碰就哗啦响。爷爷示范掰玉米：左手攥穗，右手往下一压，手腕一拧，咔，棒子到手。我头一穗拧了一半，卡在秆上晃悠，费了好大劲才揪下来，手心勒出两道红印。到后来我摸出窍门，攥、压、拧一气呵成，咔咔的声音跟上了爷爷的节奏。棒子在我脚边越堆越高，金黄一片，须子乱蓬蓬地支棱着。

爷爷不知什么时候开始装麻袋了。他把棒子一根根码进去，码一层踩一踩，装到袋腰就把袋口拢在肩上，喊我搭把手，两人一前一后把麻袋挪到路边。麻袋沉得挪一步喘一口，粗布把我的手心磨得发热。装到第五袋，路边码成一堵矮墙。

爷爷说到田头歇晌。榆树荫底下凉快，他枕着麻袋躺下，草帽盖住脸，呼噜声很快就起来了，一起一伏，跟地里风声一个拍子。我睡不着，就数路边那堵玉米墙，数到二十几袋，又从头数。阳光从树叶缝里漏下来，斑斑点点落在他的鞋上。

醒来时日头偏了，爷孙俩接着收最后一垄。收完最后一穗，爷爷把它掂了掂，扔进袋里说，明天开拖拉机拉回家。回家的路上我满手玉米味儿，指甲缝里都是黄的。

现在，这穗玉米就在我手里，烫得倒来倒去。奶奶又给每人掰了半穗，爷爷的那半穗他没吃，掰成粒喂了院子里的鸡。鸡抢得扑腾翅膀。我嚼着甜玉米想，明天开春，房后头那块地，也该点几粒种子下去了。

The Last Ear of Corn

In the evening, Grandma steamed a pot of corn on the stove, and the whole house filled with its sweet smell. I held the biggest ear and offered it to Grandpa first. He waved it away and passed it straight to Grandma. She laughed and called him silly, then took a big bite. That single bite of sweetness pulled me back to the cornfield in the daylight.

Earlier, when the sun had just climbed to the top of the utility pole, Grandpa called me into the field. The stalks had dried pale and rattled at a touch. Grandpa demonstrated the snap: left hand grips the ear, right hand presses down, wrist twists, crack, the cob is in hand. My first ear half-twisted and dangled from the stalk; I wrenched it off with effort and two red marks appeared across my palm. By and by I found the knack, grip-press-twist in one motion, my cracks keeping time with Grandpa’s. The cobs piled higher at my feet, a golden heap, their silks sticking out in tangles.

At some point Grandpa had started filling sacks. He stacked cobs in layer by

layer, tamping each one down, and when a sack reached his waist he gathered its mouth over his shoulder and called me to lend a hand, the two of us shifting it fore and aft to the roadside. The sacks were so heavy that each step cost a gasp, and the coarse burlap warmed my palms. By the fifth sack the roadside had become a low wall.

Grandpa said it was time to rest at the field head. Under the elm's shade it was cool. He lay down with his head on a sack, straw hat over his face, and his snoring started soon, rising and falling in time with the wind in the field. I could not sleep, so I counted the corn wall at the roadside, got past twenty sacks, and started over. Sunlight leaked through the leaves in dapples, landing on his shoes.

When I woke, the sun had swung west, and the two of us took up the last furrow again. At the last ear, Grandpa weighed it in his hand, tossed it into the bag, and said the tractor would haul it all home tomorrow. On the way home my hands smelled of corn, and my nail crevices were stained yellow.

Now that very ear is in my hands, too hot to hold, tossed from palm to palm. Grandma broke half an ear for each of us; Grandpa did not eat his half but rubbed it into kernels for the chickens in the yard, who fought and flapped over them. Chewing the sweet corn, I thought: next spring, a few seeds should go into the plot behind the house.