田头的绿豆汤

小雁头天夜里就把绿豆泡上了。第二天鸡叫头遍她起来熬汤，熬得豆皮全开了花，晾在两只木桶里。她爹下地参赛，她妈走不开，送水这差事她揽了。她说自己是六年级的大孩子了，拎两桶水不在话下。

赶到田头时，割稻比赛正赛到第二轮。八个人的镰刀在地里排开，唰唰声连成一片，稻子一排排伏下去。田埂上挤着看热闹的孩子和老人，加油声一浪盖过一浪。小雁挤不进去，就站在老槐树底下等，看哪个身影是她爹。她爹割稻有个记号：镰刀使得快，稻茬留得矮，远看那一行最齐。

歇晌的哨子一响，小雁提着桶就过去了。木桶晃得厉害，绿豆汤泼出来几星，洇湿了她的鞋面。她把桶墩在田埂下，拿瓢挨个舀。叔伯们排着队，有人开玩笑，说小雁这汤熬得稠，瓢都立得住。小雁脸一红，说熬糊了别怪她。众人灌完汤，抹抹嘴又下了地，哨子再响，唰唰声又连起来。

她爹那行跟老陈家的扯了个平。第二轮到后半，她爹的镰刀忽然快起来，一把接一把，稻把子码成人字靠满半条田埂。老陈叔在后头喊：年轻人悠着点，闪了腰没人背你回家。田埂上的人笑成一片，小雁也笑，笑完才想起来喊加油，扯着嗓子喊她爹，声音混在人声里，她自己都听不清。

比赛在日头偏西时收了场。她爹赢了小半行，得了村长一句明年备奖品的许诺，众人又是一阵笑。人们三三两两往村里走，镰刀扛在肩上，稻茬地里的气味一路跟着。

小雁挑着空桶走在最后。桶轻，她偏要让它一晃一晃地响，木柄磕在桶沿上，笃、笃。夕阳把田埂照成金色，她影子在前头跑。走到村口，她妈迎出来接桶，问她汤都喝光了没有。她说一滴不剩。她妈说那就好，回家她爹新米蒸饭，管够。小雁嗯了一声，脚步比来时还快。

Mung Bean Soup at the Field Head

Xiao Yan soaked the mung beans the night before. She got up at the first cockcrow to boil them, boiled until every bean skin burst open, and let the soup cool in two wooden buckets. Her father was in the contest and her mother could not leave home, so she took the job of carrying water herself. She said she was a sixth-grader now, a big kid, and two buckets of water were no trouble.

When she reached the field head, the contest was in its second round. Eight sickles were spread across the field, their swishing running into one sound, rice falling row after row. Children and old people crowded the ridge, and the cheering came in waves. Xiao Yan could not squeeze in, so she waited under the old locust tree, looking for her father’s figure. Her cutting had a mark: fast sickle, low stubble, and from far off his row was the neatest.

At the whistle for the break, she carried her buckets over. The buckets sloshed;

a few splashes of soup wet the tops of her shoes. She set them down at the foot of the ridge and ladled out cup by cup. The uncles lined up, and one joked that her soup was so thick a ladle would stand in it. Xiao Yan blushed and said do not blame her if it burned. They gulped, wiped their mouths, went back to work, and at the second whistle the swishing joined up again.

Her father's row ran even with old Chen's for a while. In the second half of the round his sickle suddenly sped up, handful after handful, bundles propped in leaning rows along half the ridge. Old Chen shouted from behind: take it easy, young man, no one will carry you home if you throw out your back. The crowd on the ridge roared, and Xiao Yan roared with them, then remembered to cheer and shouted for her father, her voice lost in the crowd, inaudible even to herself.

The contest ended as the sun tilted west. Her father won by less than half a row and earned the village head's promise of a prize next year, and the crowd laughed again. People drifted back toward the village in twos and threes, sickles on their shoulders, the smell of fresh stubble following them all the way.

Xiao Yan carried the empty buckets at the rear of the crowd. The buckets were light, but she made them sway and knock anyway, the wooden handles tapping the rims, tok, tok. The setting sun gilded the ridge, and her shadow ran ahead of her. At the village entrance her mother came out to take the buckets and asked if all the soup was gone. She said not a drop. Her mother said good, then: your father will steam dinner from the new rice, enough for everyone. Xiao Yan said mm, and her steps were faster than on the way out.

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