

窗台上的那盆番茄

三月的一个周末，我在窗台上种下三粒番茄种子。科学老师说，种一盆植物，等于请了一位四季的老师。我当时不以为然：一颗种子能教我什么？

种子出芽很快，两周就长出了带绒毛的真叶。我高兴极了，每天浇水，恨不得替它拔节。可到了五月，问题来了：叶子疯长，又密又绿，一个花苞都不肯结。我去问老师，老师看了看说，你给的水和肥太多，它只顾长叶子忘了开花。植物不会撒谎，你怎么待它，它就怎么长。

我照着减了水，把最密的枝叶剪掉一部分。剪的时候我手抖，怕剪坏了。没想到剪完不到一周，枝条上拱出了一串小黄芽，像谁在绿叶间点了五盏小灯。那一刻我蹲在窗台前看了很久，心里又愧又喜：原来爱不是拼命给，是给它真正需要的。

六月开花了，可过了两周，花一朵一朵枯掉，一个果子都没坐住。我查了书才知道，屋里没有风也没有虫子，花没法授粉。我找来棉签，每天傍晚给每一朵花轻轻扫一遍花心。手笨，第一天只扫了三朵，第二天扫了七朵。第三天起，扫过花底下鼓起一粒绿豆大的小果子。

等待果子的日子最难熬。青果挂在枝头，一星期看不出变化。我忍住不去掰它，只是照常浇水。夏天过去的时候，番茄一个一个红了，从肩上一圈红到屁股，像被谁从上面点着了。第一个成熟的番茄我切成四块，全家一人一块。有点酸，可我在心里把它记成了那一年最好吃的东西。

这盆番茄把我上了一年的课讲完了：春天它教我开始，夏天它教我省掉多余的给予，花谢时它教我遇到死结要去找方法，而不是发火或放弃，秋天它教我等待有它自己的速度。我想起自己学数学的样子：以前我一着急就熬夜乱刷题，像拼命浇水，叶子长得旺，果子一个没有。

后来我换了办法，像人工授粉一样，把不会的题一朵一朵过：每天只弄懂两道，弄懂就的本子上打一个勾。半个学期，勾攒到了六十多个，我的数学测验第一次上了九十分。原来功课和果子一样，不会辜负一朵一朵认真扫过的手。

现在那盆番茄的空盆还放在窗台上。我打算明年春天再种一盆，同时把学习计划也重新排一遍：少一点慌乱的给予，多一点对症的方法。四季还会再转一圈，而我已经知道，该怎样陪一粒种子，也陪我自己，慢慢结果。

The Tomato Pot on My Windowsill

One weekend in March, I planted three tomato seeds in a pot on my windowsill. Our science teacher said that keeping a pot of plants is like hiring a teacher named Four Seasons. I did not take it seriously then: what could a single seed teach me?

The seeds sprouted quickly, and in two weeks true leaves covered in fine fuzz appeared. I was thrilled, watered every day, and almost wanted to pull the stem upward for it. But trouble came in May: the leaves grew wildly, dense and green, yet not one flower bud formed. I asked the teacher, who took a look and said I was giving too much water and fertilizer, so the plant only remembered to grow leaves and forgot

to flower. Plants never lie; they grow the way you treat them.

I cut back the water as advised and trimmed away the densest branches. My hands shook while cutting, afraid of ruining it. Yet less than a week later, a string of little yellow buds pushed out along the stem, like someone lighting five small lamps among the green leaves. I squatted in front of the windowsill for a long time, feeling ashamed and delighted at once: so love is not giving desperately; it is giving what is truly needed.

It flowered in June, but two weeks later the flowers withered one by one and not a single fruit set. I looked it up in a book and learned that indoors there was no wind and no insects, so the flowers could not be pollinated. I found cotton swabs and gently brushed the center of every flower each evening. My hands were clumsy: the first day I managed only three flowers, the second day seven. From the third day on, under each brushed flower swelled a tiny fruit the size of a mung bean.

Waiting for the fruit was the hardest part. The green fruits hung on the branch, showing no visible change in a week. I resisted the urge to pick them and simply kept watering. As summer ended, the tomatoes reddened one after another, a ring of red spreading from the shoulder down, as if lit from above. I cut the first ripe tomato into four pieces, one for each of us. It was a little sour, but I filed it away as the best thing I ate that year.

This one pot of tomato finished a year of lessons for me: in spring it taught me to begin, in summer to stop over-giving, when the flowers fell it taught me to hunt for a method at a dead end instead of raging or quitting, and in autumn it taught me that waiting has its own speed. I thought of how I studied math: whenever I panicked I pulled all-nighters and did problem sets blindly, like flooding the pot with water, leaves flourishing, fruitless.

Later I changed my method. Like hand-pollinating, I went through the problems I could not do one flower at a time: understand only two problems a day, and tick the notebook when I did. Half a term later the ticks passed sixty, and my math quiz went above ninety for the first time. Schoolwork and fruit are alike: they never betray hands that tend them flower by flower.

The empty pot still sits on my windowsill. I plan to plant another one next spring and rebuild my study plan at the same time: less panicked giving, more methods aimed at the real problem. The seasons will complete another circle, and I already know how to accompany a seed, and myself, slowly into fruit.