移栽的辣椒死了，我重栽了一回

初二下学期的月考，数学我考砸了，六十八分。卷子发下来那天，我把它塞进书包最底层，一路上想着怎么跟我妈开口。回到家，正好赶上五一放假，我跟着爷爷去菜园移栽辣椒苗，心里乱成一团，手上的活也敷衍。

爷爷头天晚上把苗起了，根上带着土坨，让我栽。我嫌蹲着累，栽得又浅又直，土也不压实，一炷香的功夫栽完三十棵，站起来腿麻得差点摔倒。爷爷蹲下去挨个看，没说我，只是把我栽的苗一棵棵拔出来，重新挖坑，把土坨坐实，浇上定根水。他在后头重栽，我在前头看着，半天问一句：都活了？他说：有一半悬，根没坐实，苗自己缓不过来。

结果真让他说中了。过了一个星期，我栽的那三十棵蔫了二十多棵，地里东倒西歪一片。我蹲在地边，又懊恼又委屈：明明是我栽的，怎么全死了？爷爷递给我一把小锄：死掉的拔了，坑重新晒一晒，再栽一茬。我抬头：还来得及？他说：辣椒生长期长，现在补栽，秋天照样摘。就是这一茬要你自己从头管到尾。

那半个月我天天往地里跑。补栽的苗我照着爷爷的样子栽，坑挖深，土坨坐实，定根水浇透，傍晚再去看一眼。有一场倒春寒似的冷雨，我半夜想起来没盖膜，跑出去跟爷爷一起给苗盖上旧塑料布。慢慢地，新栽的苗一棵棵立起来了，叶心冒出嫩绿的新叶。我数过，补栽的二十八棵，活了二十六棵。

那天蹲在活过来的辣椒地边，我忽然想起书包底层那张六十八分的卷子。辣椒死了能补栽，只要季节没过去；我这才初二，一次月考算什么季节？我死掉的只是几道二次函数的题，根子没坐实——概念没吃透，练习浮在面上。爷爷种地从不骂死掉的苗，他只问：坑挖够了没有，土压实了没有。

回家我把那张卷子从书包底层抽出来，平铺在桌上，一道一道重做，错的题把概念翻回课本重新啃。期中考到八十四分，不算多好，但每一分都坐得实。现在每当我想放弃哪件事，就想起菜园里那二十六棵辣椒。它们用一整个夏天的挂果告诉我：死掉不可怕，怕的是不敢重栽。

The Transplanted Peppers Died, and I Planted Them Again

In the monthly exam of the second term of eighth grade, I failed math badly: sixty-eight points. The day the paper came back, I stuffed it at the bottom of my schoolbag and all the way home kept wondering how to bring it up to my mother. It happened to be the May Day holiday, and I followed grandpa to the garden to transplant pepper seedlings, my mind in a mess, my hands going through the motions.

Grandpa had lifted the seedlings the night before, soil clumps hugging their roots, and let me plant. Hating to squat, I planted shallow and straight, tamping nothing down, finishing thirty seedlings in the time of an incense stick, then nearly falling over as my numb legs stood up. Grandpa crouched and inspected them one by one. He said nothing to me, only pulled up each seedling I had set, redug the holes,

settled the soil clumps firm, and watered them in with rooting water. He replanted behind me while I watched ahead, and after a while I asked: will they all live? He said: half of them are doubtful; roots not settled, the seedlings cannot recover on their own.

He proved right. A week later, more than twenty of my thirty seedlings had wilted, a field of them leaning every which way. I crouched at the edge, torn between regret and grievance: I planted them with my own hands, why did they all die? Grandpa handed me a small hoe: pull the dead ones, let the holes sun a while, and plant another round. I looked up: is it still in time? He said: peppers have a long growing season; replant now and you still pick in autumn. Only this round you manage yourself from start to finish.

For half a month I ran to the plot every day. I planted the replacements the way grandpa showed: holes deep, clumps settled, rooting water soaked through, and one more look in the evening. One cold spring rain came like a late frost; at midnight I remembered the film was not on and ran out to cover the seedlings with an old plastic sheet alongside grandpa. Slowly, the new seedlings stood up one by one, tender green young leaves emerging at their hearts. I counted: of the twenty-eight replanted, twenty-six lived.

Crouching beside the revived pepper patch that day, the sixty-eight-point paper at the bottom of my schoolbag suddenly came back to me. Dead peppers can be replanted as long as the season has not passed; I am only in eighth grade, what season is one monthly exam? What died were a few quadratic function problems, and the roots were not settled: concepts not chewed through, practice floating on the surface. Grandpa never scolds a dead seedling; he only asks whether the hole was dug deep enough and the soil tamped firm enough.

Back home I pulled that sixty-eight-point paper out of the bottom of the bag, spread it flat on the desk, and redid problem after problem, going back to the textbook to gnaw at the concepts behind each error. I got eighty-four on the midterms, not outstanding, but every point sat on firm ground. Now whenever I feel like giving up on something, I think of those twenty-six pepper plants in the garden. Through a whole summer of fruit, they told me: dying is not what to fear; what to fear is not daring to replant.