留种的手

《爷爷的菜园》里有个细节，别人都夸爷爷的番茄好，爷爷却挑最大最红的那几个不卖，剖开，把籽掏出来，摊在纸上晒干，装进一个玻璃瓶。孙子问为什么不卖，卖不上价钱吗。爷爷把瓶子拧上，说今年的番茄好吃，是这些籽的功劳，把它们留下，明年它们还这么好吃。书里写，那个玻璃瓶放在窗台上，瓶身让太阳晒得发白。

我读到这里，从抽屉里摸出一个牛皮纸包。纸包上是妈妈的字：豇豆种，爷爷让带的。去年秋天，爷爷在自家菜园里挑了几根最长的豇豆，不吃了，挂在屋檐下风干，豆荚干透后剥开，豆子花花绿绿的，装进这个纸包，塞给我，说开学种在阳台，出了苗给他打电话。我在阳台的泡沫箱里种下十二粒，出了九棵，夏天真的结了四根豇豆，我拍了照片打给他，他在电话那头笑，说我的土肥，随他。

书里的爷爷说，留种的人不慌，因为他的明年已经在瓶子里了。我以前不懂这句话。我做事总想要马上见结果，字练三天就想好看，花种下去第二天就想开花。爷爷留种的时候从不问明天能不能吃，他知道种子在土里要黑上一整个冬天，才肯发芽。去年那九棵豇豆出土之前，泡沫箱里安静了整整十二天，我差点挖开看。是妈妈拦住我，说种子在干活呢，别打扰它。

读完这本书，我把那个玻璃瓶似的东西想明白了：留种，是把今天最好的部分存起来，交给明年。爷爷的手翻过土、摘过菜、递过菜，原来还做过第三样顶要紧的事：挑出最好的，留下。今年暑假回去，我要跟爷爷学剖番茄取籽，也晒一个纸包。书里那个晒白的玻璃瓶，我想在我们家窗台上再放一个。明年春天，让爷爷的番茄在我们楼下的花坛里结果，让他尝一口，认不认得自己的味道。

The Hands That Save Seed

There is a detail in the book The Garden of Grandpa. Everyone praises the tomatoes of the grandfather, yet he picks out the biggest, reddest few and will not sell them. He cuts them open, scoops out the seeds, spreads them on paper to dry in the sun, and stores them in a glass jar. His grandson asks why he does not sell them, whether they fetch a poor price. The grandfather screws the lid on the jar and says the tomatoes of this year taste good thanks to these seeds; keep them, and next year they will taste just as good. The book says the glass jar sits on the windowsill, its body bleached pale by the sun.

Reading this far, I reached into my drawer and took out a kraft-paper packet. On the packet is the handwriting of my mother: long bean seeds, from Grandpa. Last autumn, in his own garden, Grandpa chose several of the longest long beans, did not eat them, and hung them under the eaves to air-dry. When the pods dried through, he shelled them, revealing beans mottled in many colors, packed them into this paper packet, and pressed it on me, saying plant them on the balcony after school starts and phone him when the sprouts come up. I planted twelve seeds in the foam box on our balcony; nine came up, and in summer they truly bore four long beans. I took a

photograph and phoned him; he laughed on the line and said my soil was rich, just like his.

The grandfather in the book says that a man who saves seed does not panic, because his next year is already in the jar. I did not understand that line before. I always want results at once: three days of pen practice and I want beautiful handwriting, plant a seed and by the next day I want flowers. When Grandpa saved seed he never asked whether it could be eaten tomorrow; he knew a seed must spend a whole dark winter in the soil before it consents to sprout. Before those nine long beans broke ground last year, the foam box stayed silent for twelve full days, and I nearly dug it open to look. Mother stopped me, saying the seeds were at work and I should not disturb them.

After finishing this book, I understood that jar-like thing at last: saving seed means setting aside the best of today and handing it to next year. The hands of Grandpa have turned soil, picked vegetables, and passed vegetables over, and it turns out they did a third thing that matters most: choose the best, and keep it. When I go back this summer vacation, I want to learn from Grandpa how to cut a tomato open for its seeds, and dry a paper packet of my own. That sun-bleached glass jar in the book, I would like to see another one on the windowsill of our home. Next spring, let the tomatoes of Grandpa bear fruit in the flower bed below our building, and let him take a bite and see whether he recognizes his own flavor.