弯成问号的背

《爷爷的菜园》里有一个画面，合上书我还看得见。书里的爷爷蹲在豆垄里锄草，从早蹲到晚，起来的时候扶着锄头柄，背弯得像一个大问号。孙子劝他歇，他摇摇头，说草不等人，豆也不等人。他把锄掉的草拢成一堆，说是沤了肥下一畦还能用。连一把草，他都不肯浪费。

去年暑假，我帮爷爷锄过一上午豆地的草。日头刚上来还好，到了晌午，汗顺着下巴滴进土里，腰直起来又落下去，像有一根线拽着。中午坐在树荫里吃饭，我捏自己的后腰，捏出了眼泪。爷爷看见了，没说话，把他那半瓶水递给我。他上午锄的那几垄，比我的多一倍。他手上的茧磨着锄头柄，一下一下，稳得很。我那时才明白书里那个问号是怎么来的。那不是累出来的形状，是年月压出来的。他给这个家弯了几十年，从田里弯到灶台，从我的幼儿园门口弯到我小学教室的后门。

书里的孙子后来在城里想起那片菜园，想起的全是爷爷的背影。我不用以后才想起，我天天都见得到。放学路过菜地，爷爷在里头，我在外头，他直起腰冲我摆手，让我回家吃饭。那个腰直起来的样子很慢，像一页被水压湿的书，要晾一晾才能翻过去。我站在篱笆外头看了好久，直到他进屋关门。

合上书我给自己定了两件事，都不大。第一，从下个星期起，傍晚浇菜的事归我，爷爷坐在畦边石头上看着就行，他看着的时候最高兴。第二，把书里那个孙子换成我：他进城才懂的事，我现在就懂，所以我要把书读好，让爷爷锄草的时候心里不惦记我。书里说，一畦菜，一份情。我想让这份情轮到我这一头。爷爷弯下去的，我替他直起来。

The Back Bent Like a Question Mark

There is a scene in the book The Garden of Grandpa that I still see after closing the cover. The grandfather in the book squats in the bean furrows weeding, from dawn till dusk, and when he rises he leans on the hoe handle, his back bent like a big question mark. His grandson urges him to rest, and he shakes his head, saying the weeds will not wait, and neither will the beans. He gathers the pulled weeds into a pile, saying they will rot into fertilizer for the next bed. Even a handful of grass, he refuses to waste.

Last summer vacation I helped Grandpa weed the bean field for one morning. The sun was gentle at first, but by noon sweat dropped from my chin into the soil, and my back rose and fell as if a string were pulling it down. At noon, eating in the shade, I pinched the small of my own back and pinched out tears. Grandpa saw it and said nothing; he handed me the half bottle of water that was his. The furrows he had weeded that morning were twice as many as mine. The calluses on his hands rubbed against the hoe handle, stroke after stroke, steady as stone. Only then did I understand how that question mark in the book was made. It is not a shape born of tiredness; it is pressed out by years. He has bent for this family for decades, bending from the field to the kitchen, from the gate of my kindergarten to the back

door of my primary school classroom.

The grandson in the book remembers the garden only later, in the city, and what he remembers is all the back of Grandpa. I do not have to wait until later; I see it every day. Passing the vegetable plot after school, Grandpa inside, I outside, he straightens up and waves me home for dinner. That straightening is slow, like a page wet through by water, needing a while in the air before it can turn.

When I closed the book I set myself two tasks, both small. First, starting next week the evening watering belongs to me; Grandpa only needs to sit on the stone by the bed and watch, and watching makes him happiest. Second, to swap the grandson in the book for myself: what he understood only after leaving for the city, I understand now, so I will study well and let Grandpa weed without worry in his heart. The book says: one bed of vegetables, one share of love. I want this share to reach my side of the family. What Grandpa bent down, I will straighten up for him.