弯腰的人，不说话

爷爷的四季，是在菜园里过的，一格一格，像挂历撕下来的一页一页。

春天，篱笆根下的冰碴刚化，他就蹲在那儿点豆子。他把豆粒一颗一颗按进土里，间距用手量，谁也不许碰他的畦。苗出来以后，他弯腰间苗，捏住弱的一棵，手腕一抖带出根，强的那棵原地不动。我蹲在旁边看，他始终不说话。我替他拔了几棵草，他扫了一眼，把垄沟里我踩出的脚印用脚后跟一一抹平。

夏天，菜畦热闹起来。他给西红柿插竹竿，把倒伏的秧苗扶起来绑住，动作轻得像在给谁掖被角。傍晚摘菜是他一天里话最多的时候，他把黄瓜在围裙上擦擦递给我，说先吃，路上再拿。篱笆上的牵牛花也是夏天开的，他从不在早上摘，说早上开得好，要让人看见。

秋天起萝卜。他提萝卜的样子很讲究，攥着叶子根部，一拧一带，完整的萝卜就躺在掌心里。他把最大最正的几根留下埋进土坑，说那是留种的。霜降以后菜畦空下来，他给畦盖上一层草，像给地盖被子。空畦安静，他也安静，坐在畦头抽一袋烟，烟味散在冷掉的土气里。

冬天菜园歇了，他也不闲着。他坐在篱笆边修那把用了多年的锄头，磨镰刀，把松了的篱笆桩一根根砸紧。北风把篱笆吹得吱呀响，他坐在檐下的小凳上，眯着眼看那片空畦。有一回我问他，明年还种吗。他说，种。就一个字，像回答了几十年。

我在城里上学，一年回两回，春天一回，冬天一回。每次回来，菜畦里的菜换了一茬，篱笆又矮了几寸，弯腰的那个人背又低了一点。他从来不跟我说想念，也不问我成绩。他弯腰干活，把要说的话都种进畦里，长成了我每次离家时后备箱里那一兜一兜的菜。

The Man Who Bends Over Says Nothing

The four seasons of Grandpa pass inside the vegetable garden, one after another, like pages torn from a wall calendar.

In spring, the moment the ice by the foot of the fence melts, he squats there to plant beans. He presses each bean into the soil one by one, measuring the spacing with his hand, and lets no one touch his ridges. When the seedlings come up, he bends over to thin them, pinching the weaker one and flicking it out by the root while the stronger one stays in place. I crouch beside him and watch, and he never says a word. When I pull a few weeds for him, he glances over and smooths out, one by one with his heel, the footprints I left in the furrow.

In summer the ridges grow busy. He drives bamboo poles for the tomatoes, lifts the fallen seedlings and ties them up, his hands as gentle as when tucking in the corner of a quilt. In the evening, picking vegetables is the chattiest part of his day. He rubs a cucumber on his apron, hands it to me, and says eat it now, carry the rest on the road. The morning glories on the fence also bloom in summer, and he never picks them in the morning, saying they bloom best then and people should be allowed

to see them.

In autumn he lifts radishes. His technique is careful: he grips just above the leaves, gives a twist and a pull, and a whole radish lies in his palm. He keeps the largest and straightest few and buries them in a pit, saying those are for seed. After the first frost of late autumn the ridges empty, and he covers them with a layer of straw, like putting a blanket on the ground.

In winter the garden rests, but he does not. He sits by the fence mending the hoe he has used for years, sharpening the sickle, driving the loose fence stakes back down one by one. The north wind makes the fence creak, and he sits on a small stool under the eaves, eyes narrowed, looking at the empty ridges. Once I asked him whether he would still plant next year. He said, plant. One word, as if he had been answering for decades.

I study in town and come back twice a year, once in spring and once in winter. Each time I return, the vegetables in the ridges have changed for a new season, the fence has sunk a few inches, and the man who bends over has curved a little lower. He never tells me he missed me, and never asks about my grades. He bends over his work and plants everything he wants to say into the ridges, and it grows into the bags of vegetables that fill the trunk of the car every time I leave home.