陪父亲翻土的那半天

周六回娘家，父亲已经在菜园里，锄头举起来落下去，砸在地上闷闷地响。我换了鞋下地，他没停手里的活，只说：来了？帮我把这头翻了。我抄起另一把锄头，跟着他干。

父亲翻土的规矩是锄头落得深，土翻过来，再用锄背把土块敲碎。我学着敲，敲碎三块，手腕就酸了。父亲七十多岁，翻完一畦都不直腰。母亲说过，父亲刚接手这块地时还是片荒地，他一畦一畦翻成了菜园，翻了三十年。锄头柄让他的手磨出两道亮印，换过两回锄头，柄上的印子还是那个位置。我小时候以为菜园大得很，跑进去会迷路，现在从田埂上看，也就几畦。

上午过半，那半畦土翻松了，深褐色，攥一把还带着潮气。父亲拎过种子袋，该播菠菜了。他捏一撮种子，沿着沟撒，籽间距几乎均匀。我学着撒，头一把就撒密了。父亲伸手帮我疏，说苗挤了，谁都长不好。

播完种，盖上土，父亲在田埂上坐下，招手让我也坐。他问我的工作，我说都好。他不追问，转头说今年的雨，说番茄再过几天要搭架，说下年的种子要留那行扁豆的。他还说我小时候跟他下地浇水，水壶提不动，拖着走，他也不骂。日头照在后颈上，暖洋洋的，我不想起来。

我算了算，已经好多年没跟父亲说这么长的话了。在城里打电话，总是那几句：吃了吗，冷了你多穿点，然后挂。在这里，一整个下午化在菜园里，话说的都是菜，说的又是别的什么。

父亲眯眼看天，说该回了。我在井边洗手，回头看见他还蹲在地头，把播过种的地方拍实。他的白头发在太阳底下很亮。

回城的车上我做了个决定：每个月都回来。不用想理由，菜园缺人手，就是理由。

Half a Day Turning Soil with My Father

Back at the home where my parents live on Saturday, my father was already in the garden, raising the hoe and letting it fall, thudding dully into the ground. I changed my shoes and went down. He did not stop working, only said: You are here? Then turn this end over for me. I grabbed the other hoe and followed him.

My father has a rule for tilling: sink the hoe deep, turn the soil over, then break the clods with the back of the blade. I tried, and after breaking three clods my wrists ached. He is past seventy and does not straighten his back until a whole bed is done. Mother used to say that when Father first took over this plot it was wasteland, and he turned it into a garden furrow by furrow, over thirty years. As a child I thought the garden was vast, that one could get lost in it. Seen now from the ridge, it is only a few beds.

By mid-morning the half bed lay loose, dark brown, still holding dampness when you squeezed a handful. Father fetched the seed bag. Time to sow spinach. He pinched

a small portion and sowed along the furrow, the spacing between seeds almost even. I copied him and sowed my first pinch far too thick. He reached over to thin them for me, saying that if seedlings crowd, none of them grows well.

After sowing and covering the seeds with soil, Father sat down on the ridge and waved me to sit. He asked about my work; I said everything was fine. He did not press, and turned instead to the rain this year, to the tomato stakes needed in a few days, to saving seed next year from that row of hyacinth beans. He mentioned that when I was small I followed him to water, could not lift the can, dragged it along, and he never scolded me. The sun warmed my neck, and I did not want to get up.

I counted: it had been years since I talked with my father this long. Phone calls in the city were always the same few lines: have you eaten, it is cold, wear more, then goodbye. Here a whole afternoon melted into the garden. The talk was all about vegetables, and it was about something else.

Father squinted at the sky and said it was time to go home. I washed my hands at the well and, looking back, saw him still crouched at the head of the plot, patting the sown ground firm. His white hair shone in the sun.

In the car back to the city I made a decision: come home every month. No reason needed. The garden is short of hands, and that is reason enough.

父亲的地，我的班

工作日我对着一班四十多个孩子，周末回乡下陪父亲侍弄菜园。那个周六早上，父亲派给我的头一件事，是把这半畦地翻了。他把锄头递给我，说：落深一点。

我握了三十年笔，握锄头是外行。头一锄落浅了，锄尖只划破地皮；第二锄我加了劲，土星子溅了一脸，袖口里都灌了土。父亲不教口诀，只在我前面翻了几步示范：举锄，落下，翻土，碎块，节奏不紧不慢。父亲七十多了，翻地不喊腰疼，我先疼了。我照着那个节奏来，到第十锄，才有点像样。

晌午前，半畦土翻松。父亲掏出一包萝卜种，用一根树枝划出浅沟，说籽沿沟撒，盖一层薄土，别埋深。我捏着细小的籽，怕撒密，手腕僵在半空。父亲说，急不得，籽有籽的时辰。

播完种，我们在菜园边的竹椅底下坐着歇，话就聊开了。竹椅是父亲坐旧了的，椅面塌下去一点，他坐惯那个位置，挪开半尺都要坐回来。他问班上怎么样，我说现在的孩子急，我也急，作业错一个字都要当天订正。父亲沉默一会儿，指着那条刚播过的沟说：你今天撒种，明天就盼它出土？土不答应。他不懂教育，他懂生长。

我愣在那里。我天天批改、追进度，像把苗拔起来助长。父亲侍弄他的菜，按土的速度等。

翻地、播种、浇水、间苗，一样一样来，菜园从没教过他快。

那天下午我们给番茄搭架，他一边绑绳一边讲起我上班第一年，他挑了一筐西红柿送到学校门口，放下就走，怕耽误我上课。他的手握锄头稳，握绑绳也稳，指节粗得像树皮。

回去的路上，我总想起那条刚播过的沟。土底下，籽在安静攒劲。班上的孩子，我想我也可以像父亲那样，等一等。

My Father's Field, My Classroom

On weekdays I face a class of more than forty children; on weekends I go back to the village to help my father tend his garden. That Saturday morning, the first thing he assigned me was turning this half bed. He handed me the hoe and said: sink it deeper.

I have held a pen for thirty years; holding a hoe I am a beginner. My first stroke was too shallow, the tip only scratching the skin of the ground; on the second I put in force, and clods spattered my face. Father gives no slogans. He just tills a few paces ahead as a demonstration: raise, drop, turn, break, the rhythm neither tight nor loose. He is past seventy and never complains of a sore back; mine ached first. I followed his rhythm, and by the tenth stroke I looked almost presentable.

Before noon the half bed lay loose. Father took out a packet of radish seed and scratched a shallow furrow with a stick: sow along the furrow, cover with a thin layer, do not bury deep. I pinched the tiny seeds, afraid of sowing too thick, my wrist frozen in the air. Father said, no rushing; the seeds have their own hour.

After sowing, we rested under the shade near the bamboo chair by the fence, and the talk opened up. He asked how the class was doing. I said the children nowadays are anxious, and so am I; a single wrong character in homework must be corrected the same day. Father was quiet for a moment, then pointed at the freshly sown furrow and said: you sow today and expect it above ground tomorrow? The soil does not agree. He does not understand education; he understands growing.

I sat there stunned. Every day I grade and chase progress, like pulling up seedlings to help them grow. Father tends his vegetables at the speed of soil: till, sow, water, thin, one thing after another. The garden never taught him to hurry.

That afternoon we staked the tomatoes. As he tied the twine he recalled the first year I taught: he carried a basket of tomatoes to the school gate, set it down, and left at once, afraid of interrupting my class. His grip on a hoe is steady, his grip on twine is steady, his knuckles rough as bark.

On the way home I kept thinking of that freshly sown furrow. Under the soil, the seeds are quietly gathering strength. For the children in my class, I think I too can wait, the way my father waits.

祖孙三代的菜园

那个周日，我带着儿子回乡下，说好来帮父亲侍弄菜园。到的时候，父亲已经把畦边理好了，见了我儿子，笑出一脸褶子：好，又来一个帮手。

父亲递给我儿子一把小锄，短柄小刃，是他自己配的。他先示范翻土，举锄，落下，把土翻过来，再用锄背敲碎土块。儿子学着挥，锄头抡得像铲子，土扬上了鼻子。我接过锄头跟父亲并排干。他那把锄头用了几十年，柄让手磨得发亮。一畦干下来，我恍惚回到他这个年纪，跟在他身后走畦沟的时候。

播种的时候，父亲把一块布铺开，倒上黄瓜籽。儿子抓一把往沟里扬，大半撒到了沟外。我刚要拦，父亲先蹲下来，说不要紧，捡回来埋进去，一样出。他教儿子沿沟下籽，黄瓜籽要平放，根朝一个方向，埋歪了芽也歪。他教得很慢，让儿子的手覆在他手底下，一把一把地撒。

播完种，祖孙三个坐在田埂上聊天。儿子靠着父亲，父亲给他讲接手这块地的年头：那时是荒地，石头多，他挑土一筐一筐垫，垫了几年才成菜园。父亲说他年轻时嫌菜园是累赘，如今一天不摸锄头，手就痒。儿子眼睛睁得大，问：爷爷，我下周还能来浇水吗？父亲说：来，怎么不来。

我坐在旁边，忽然想起我小时候，父亲也在菜园里跟我讲过这个故事。故事还是那个故事，讲故事的人老了，听故事的人换了。

日头偏西，儿子举着一根摘来的黄瓜走在前头，不肯放。父亲和父亲的手，在我身边并着走，他替孙子掸掉手上的土，说：常回来，菜园不指望你们干活，就是盼见人。

我回头看那片菜园，刚播过的沟平平的，篱笆边的竹椅空着。总有一天，这片地要交到我手上，也会有人蹲在田埂上，把同一个故事讲给下一个孩子。

Three Generations in the Garden

That Sunday I brought my son back to the village, promising to help my father tend the garden. When we arrived, he had already tidied the bed edges. Seeing my grandson, his face broke into smile upon smile: good, another helper.

Father handed the boy a small hoe, short handle, small blade, fitted together by his own hands. He first demonstrated tilling: raise, drop, turn the soil over, break

the clods with the back of the blade. The boy swung like a shovel, and dirt flew up onto his nose. I took a hoe and worked shoulder to shoulder with my father. His hoe is decades old, its handle polished bright by hands. When the bed was done, I felt briefly like I was his age again, walking the furrows behind him.

At sowing time, Father spread out a cloth and poured cucumber seeds on it. The boy grabbed a handful and scattered it into the furrow, most of it landing outside. I was about to stop him, but Father crouched first and said: never mind, pick them up and bury them, they will sprout just the same. He taught the boy to lay seeds along the furrow, flat, roots facing one way, for a seed buried crooked sprouts crooked. He taught slowly, letting the hand of the boy rest inside his own, sowing pinch by pinch.

After sowing, the three of us sat on the ridge and talked. The boy leaned against his grandfather, and Grandpa told him the year he took over this plot: wasteland then, full of stones, and he carried soil basket by basket to raise it, over several years, into a garden. He said that when he was young he thought the garden a burden; now a day without a hoe in his hand makes his fingers itch. The eyes of the boy went wide: Grandpa, can I come water them next week too? Father said: of course, why not.

Sitting beside them, it struck me that when I was small, my father told me this same story in this garden. The story is still the story; the teller has grown old, and the listener has changed.

The sun leaned west. The boy walked ahead holding a picked cucumber he refused to give up. My father walked beside me, brushing soil off the hand of his grandson as he caught up, saying: come back often. The garden does not count on your labor; it just longs to see people.

I looked back at the garden. The freshly sown furrow lay flat, and the bamboo chair by the fence stood empty. One day this ground will pass into my hands, and someone will crouch on the ridge and tell the same story to the next child.

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