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.