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.