带儿子回爷爷的菜园

周六早上，儿子满七岁，还分不清小葱和蒜苗。我带他回父亲的菜园，在城外三十里。

车刚停稳，父亲已经扛着锄头站在畦边。他没抱儿子，递过去一只小竹筐，说：跟着我。儿子攥着筐跟上去，步子迈得半大，筐磕着小腿。

沿畦埂，父亲这儿指指、那儿指指：这是葱，这是蒜，叶子长得像，掐一根闻闻就知道。儿子掐了一根，皱了一脸，说臭，转头又掐了一根。

到了豆角架前，父亲蹲下，指着架竿说，豆角是顺着竿往上爬的，荚挂在叶子底下，掐得断、掐下来有响声的才算嫩，掐不动的留下接着长。儿子试了一根，没掐动，抬头看父亲。父亲不帮，只说：拧一下，拧四分之一圈。这回咔的一声断了。他蹲在那儿一根接一根地掐，筐底渐渐铺绿了。

往回走，父亲拔出一棵花生，抖掉土，把根转向儿子。儿子叫起来，问花生怎么长在根上。父亲说，地上开花，地下结果，花谢了，子房往土里钻，花生就在土里鼓起来。儿子蹲着数，数出四粒，非要把这棵花生带回家栽进花盆。父亲说，盆太浅，子房钻不到土里。

中午摘了满满一筐，有豆角，有茄子，还有两根顶花带刺的黄瓜。回程车上儿子睡着了，筐抱在怀里，一根豆角贴着脸。妻子打电话来，说你就让他玩土。我说，玩土，他才知道了吃的东西打哪儿来。他在课本里背过盘中餐粒粒皆辛苦，可他没掐过一根豆角。书里的句子是别人的，手上的感觉才是他自己的。

晚上他帮母亲择豆角，一边择一边说，爷爷讲掐不动的要留下接着长。我听见了，没接话，打开手机记了下来。父亲教给他的，从来不只是摘菜。

Back to the Garden of My Father

Saturday morning, my son turned seven and still could not tell a green onion from a garlic sprout. I took him back to the garden of my father, thirty li outside the city.

The car had barely stopped when my father stood by the ridge with a hoe on his shoulder. He did not hug the boy; he handed him a small bamboo basket and said: follow me. The boy held the basket and followed, his steps half the size, the basket knocking his calf.

Along the ridge the old man pointed here and there: this is scallion, this is garlic, the leaves look alike, but crush one and smell. The boy crushed one and wrinkled his whole face, said stinky, then crushed another.

At the bean plot the old man squatted and pointed to the poles: snap beans climb up the poles, the pods hang under the leaves; only the ones that snap with a sound are tender, the ones that do not snap stay and keep growing. The boy tried one and

could not snap it, and looked up. The old man did not help, only said again: twist it, a quarter turn. This time it snapped with a sound. The boy squatted there snapping one after another, and the bottom of the basket turned green.

On the way back the old man pulled up a peanut plant, shook off the dirt, and turned the roots toward the boy. The boy cried out: peanuts grow on roots. The old man said: the flower is above, the fruit below; the flower withers, the ovary pushes into the soil, and the peanut swells there. The boy crouched and counted four, and wanted to carry the whole plant home into a flowerpot. The old man said: the pot is too shallow, the ovary cannot reach the soil.

At noon the basket was full: snap beans, eggplants, two cucumbers still with the flower on. On the way home the boy fell asleep in the car, the basket on his lap, one snap bean against his cheek. His mother called and said I only let him play in dirt. I said: playing in dirt is how he learns where food comes from. In class he can recite the poem about each grain on the plate being the fruit of hard labor, but he has never snapped a snap bean. The line in the book belongs to someone else; the feeling in the hand belongs to himself.

That night he helped his mother shell beans, saying as he worked: Grandpa taught that the ones that do not snap should be left to grow. I heard it and wrote it into my phone. What the old man teaches was never only how to pick.