# 一进菜园门，童年就回来了

周六中午回乡下，家里门开着，父亲不在，墙边的锄头也不在。他准在屋后菜园。我换了鞋下地去帮忙。一脚踩进畦沟，土腥气混着香菜茎被掐碎后的清气迎面撞过来，我愣在原地。这个味道，二十多年没撞见过它了。

小时候我就是从这个畦沟里进进出出的。夏天我拽着父亲的衣角，他蹲下间苗，我蹲旁边拔草，拔几根就跑过去献宝。他捏起来看看，说这根不是草，这根是胡萝卜苗。我那时分不清，蹲下去看半天也分不出；如今蹲下去，一眼就能分出来，反倒没人问我了。

菜园里干过的事，我一件一件都记得。偷吃黄瓜，摘下来在袖子上蹭两下就咬，顶花的那截脆，带点苦，父亲看见了不点破，由我啃完。罩蜻蜓，红蜻蜓爱停在豆角架顶，靠近得慢，手要慢，呼吸也要慢，罩住一只就在掌心里笑出声，指缝里透出它翅膀扑腾的风。抖花生最热闹，拔起一棵往土上磕，花生扑簌簌落一地，我蹲着数，数出四粒、六粒，数到高兴处喊父亲来看。

一晃我四十，父亲七十三。那天在园里，他拿锄，我拿水舀，他在前头指点：这畦要浇透，那畦沙，别浇多。我弯腰从井台提水，一趟下来腰发酸，忽然就明白他这样弯了多少年，腰是怎么一点点弯下去的。

回程路上妻子问我，你在菜园里发什么呆。我答不上来。菜园像间库房，里头存的不是菜，是童年。人一脚踩进去，味道、土、蹲下的姿势、掌心的风，全回来了，比脑子里存的那点东西可靠得多。手上的事，比脑子里的事记得牢。

傍晚父亲把间下来的青菜炒了一盘，我吃了两大碗饭。他看我吃得好，话不多，只把盘子往我跟前推了推。竹椅摆在院角，夕阳照上去，跟他七十三岁的样子很称。

# Step into the Garden and Childhood Returns

Saturday noon I drove back to the village. The house door stood open; Father was not in it, and the hoe by the wall was gone. He must be in the garden behind the house. I changed shoes and went down to help. One step into the furrow, and the smell of soil mixed with the clean smell of crushed coriander stems hit me from the front. I stood there stunned. I had not met this smell for more than twenty years.

When I was small, I came in and out of this very furrow. In summer I pulled at the hem of Father clothes. He squatted to thin seedlings; I squatted beside him and pulled grass, pulled a few and ran to show him. He lifted one, looked, and said: this one is not grass, this one is a carrot seedling. Back then I could not tell them apart; I crouched and looked a long time and still could not. Now I crouch down and tell at a glance, yet no one asks me anymore.

Everything done in that garden, I remember one by one. Eating a cucumber without asking: pick it, wipe it twice on the sleeve, bite; the flowery end is crisp and a little bitter; Father saw through it and said nothing, let me finish it. Catching

dragonflies: red dragonflies love the tops of bean poles; to go near, the hand must move slow, the breath must move slow; when one is covered in the palm, the laugh bursts out loud, and the wind of its wings leaks through the gaps of the fingers. Shaking peanuts was the liveliest: pull up one plant, knock it on the soil, and the peanuts fall in a rustle; I crouched and counted, four, six, and called Father over when the count pleased me.

In a flash I am forty, and Father is seventy-three. That day in the garden he held the hoe and I held the water ladle. He directed from the front: this bed needs a thorough watering, that one is sandy, do not pour too much. I bent to carry water from the well, and after one trip my waist ached, and I suddenly understood how many years he had bent this way, and how his back bent down little by little.

On the way back my wife asked what I had been spacing out about in the garden. I could not answer. A vegetable garden is like a storehouse. What it keeps is not vegetables; it is childhood. One step in, and the smell, the soil, the posture of crouching, the wind in the palm, all come back, far more reliable than what the head keeps. What the hands remember lasts longer than what the head remembers.

At dusk Father stir-fried the greens he had thinned out, and I ate two big bowls of rice. Seeing me eat well, he said little, only pushed the plate a little closer to me. The bamboo chair stood in the corner of the yard, lit by the setting sun, well matched with his seventy-three years.