菜园里的那双手

周五下午放学，我坐班车回到镇上，书包没放下就先去了屋后的菜园。爷爷正在翻地，锄头举起来，落下去，一块板结的土翻开，露出底下深色的湿土。他翻得不快，每一锄都齐着垄边下，翻完一垄，用锄背把土坷垃敲碎，再用手把碎土抹平。我站在田埂上看他的手。那双手冬天裂过口子，指缝里嵌着泥，指纹的沟里也是泥，洗过很多次，也洗不净。他翻土的时候不看我，像是知道我会来。翻到第三垄，他直起腰，把锄头立在地上，说土要趁太阳翻，日头落了就不酥了。我接过来试着翻了两锄，锄头偏了，差点刨倒一垄萝卜。他把锄头接回去，没有说我，只说地不嫌人慢，多翻两回就会了。翻完地，他去摘菜。他摘菜不用指甲掐，拇指往瓜柄上一压，咔一声，黄瓜就下来了，顺手在褂子上蹭两下，递给我。我在菜园边咬黄瓜，他在一边看着，问甜不甜。我说甜。他点点头，又伸手够第二根，说这根留种，不摘。番茄他挑红透的摘，茄子专拣皮发亮的，豇豆要长的，短的不要。摘好的菜堆在垄沟边，他一样一样码进布袋，把袋口折了两折，走过来塞到我手里。袋子压手，番茄的温热从布袋底下传上来。他说，拿回去给你妈，菜放不住，趁早吃。我说知道了。他又不放心，把袋角在我手腕上套了一下，说路上别晃，番茄经不起晃。我拎着袋子往回走，回头看了一眼，他还蹲在地里，给番茄绑枝。那双手那么糙，碰着嫩藤的时候却轻。我以前只觉得那双手老，现在才明白，它一辈子只做三件事：翻土，摘菜，递给我们。菜园只有半亩大，经它手的东西，都到了我们饭桌上。

Those Hands in the Vegetable Garden

Friday afternoon after class, I took the bus back to town and, before putting down my schoolbag, went straight to the vegetable garden behind the house. Grandpa was turning the soil. The hoe rose and fell; a piece of hardened earth flipped over, revealing the dark, damp soil underneath. He worked slowly, each strike lined up with the edge of the ridge. When one ridge was done, he broke the clods with the back of the hoe and smoothed the crushed soil with his hands. I stood on the field ridge watching his hands. They had cracked in winter; dirt sat in the gaps between his fingers and in the ridges of his fingerprints. He had washed them many times, yet the dirt stayed. He did not look up while turning the soil, as if he knew I would come. By the third ridge he straightened up and set the hoe upright, saying the soil should be turned while the sun is on it, for once the sun goes down it will not crumble well. I took the hoe and tried two strikes. The blade went off line and nearly toppled a row of radishes. He took the hoe back without scolding me, only saying that the ground does not mind a slow person; turn it a few more times and you will learn. After the digging, he went to pick vegetables. He did not pinch with his nails. He pressed his thumb on the stem, there was a snap, and the cucumber came off. He wiped it twice on his jacket and handed it to me. I bit into the cucumber at the edge of the garden while he watched, asking whether it was sweet. I said it was. He nodded and reached for a second one, saying this one stays for seed. For tomatoes he picked

only the fully ripe ones; for eggplants he chose the glossy-skinned; for long beans he wanted the long ones. He stacked the picked vegetables along the ditch, then packed them one by one into a cloth bag, folded the mouth of the bag twice, walked over, and pressed it into my hands. The bag was heavy, and the warmth of the tomatoes rose through the bottom of the cloth. He said, take it to your mother; fresh vegetables do not keep, so eat them soon. I said I understood. Still worried, he looped the corner of the bag over my wrist, saying not to shake it on the road, for tomatoes cannot take shaking. Carrying the bag back, I looked once over my shoulder. He was crouched in the garden again, tying tomato branches to their stakes. Those rough hands were so gentle when they touched the tender vines. I used to think those hands were simply old. Now I understand that in a whole lifetime they have done only three things: turning the soil, picking the vegetables, and passing them to us. The garden is only half an acre, yet everything those hands have touched has found its way onto our table.

我的手和爷爷的手

那年暑假我在爷爷家过，他给我派了个活：每天早上跟他去菜园翻地。头一天我抡起锄头使劲砸，半垄下来手心发辣。退开一步看，两个水泡，亮亮的。爷爷走过来，什么也没说，把锄头接过去接着翻。他的掌心有一层老茧，黄的，硬的，像给手缝了层旧皮。我跟着他翻，翻到第三个早上，水泡破了，结了痂，痂底下不疼了。第四个早上我能自己翻完一垄，爷爷站在田头数，等我翻完，他说不错。这是他说过最高的一句夸我的话。

地翻完了，他开始让我摘菜。他说摘菜是手上有分寸的事。黄瓜一压就断，豇豆要掐，茄子得用剪子。我摘番茄，不知道劲该多大，一攥，番茄在手里塌了，汁水顺着手腕往下流。我愣住了。爷爷把塌掉的番茄捡起来放进筐里，说这个还能炒鸡蛋，别浪费。他又示范了一遍：手指头弯起来，用指肚往上托，不能用巴掌攥。我照着摘，连着摘了三个，都完好。他蹲在垄边看了看，嘴角往上动了一下，说我的手开始懂菜了。

有天傍晚，爷爷摘了满满一筐菜，一路拎到县城，我妈妈来接我。他把袋子递给我，一样一样交代：豇豆两天内吃完，番茄放得住，茄子要蒸。他那双手刚翻过土，茧子蹭着我的手腕，有点扎。我拎着袋子忽然发现，这双在土里那么糙的手，把菜往袋子里放的时候那么轻，像怕碰坏了它们。车上我想起我的手和他的手。我的手从水泡到结痂，再到一层薄薄的茧；他的手从黑土到白发，茧子从来没掉过。到家妈妈说，这袋菜你爷爷走了四十分钟送过来的。我没接话，走到阳台上看自己的手。那层薄茧，我想，是菜园留下的。

My Hands and Grandpa's Hands

That summer vacation I stayed at the home of my grandfather, and he gave me a task: every morning, go with him to turn the soil in the vegetable garden. On the first day I swung the hoe hard, and after half a ridge my palms began to sting. Stepping back to look, I saw two blisters, clear and round. Grandpa walked over, said nothing, took the hoe, and kept turning. His palms carry a layer of old callus, yellow and hard, like a piece of worn leather sewn onto the hands. I followed him, and by the third morning the blisters had broken and scabbed over, and under the scabs there was no more pain. On the fourth morning I finished a whole ridge by myself. Grandpa stood at the edge of the field counting, and when I was done he said, not bad. That was the highest praise he ever gave me.

Once the soil was turned, he let me pick vegetables. He said picking vegetables is a matter of knowing measure in the hands. A cucumber comes off with one press, long beans need a pinch, eggplants need scissors. I tried tomatoes. I did not know how much force to use, and one squeeze made a tomato collapse in my hand, its juice running down my wrist. I froze. Grandpa picked up the ruined tomato, put it in the basket, and said it could still be cooked with scrambled eggs, do not waste it. Then he showed me once more: bend the fingers, lift with the pads of the fingers, never crush with the palm. I followed that way and picked three in a row, all of them intact. He squatted by the ridge, looked at them, and the corner of his mouth lifted slightly, saying that my hands were beginning to understand vegetables.

One evening Grandpa picked a full basket of vegetables and carried it all the way to the county town, where my mother was coming to fetch me. He handed the bag to me and told me one by one: eat the long beans within two days, the tomatoes keep well, the eggplants should be steamed. His hands, fresh from the soil, rubbed their calluses against my wrist, a little rough. Carrying the bag, I suddenly noticed that these hands so coarse in the dirt were so light when they placed the vegetables into the bag, as if afraid of hurting them. On the bus I thought of my hands and his hands. My hands had gone from blisters to scabs to a thin layer of callus; his hands had gone from black earth to white hair, and the calluses had never fallen off. When we got home, my mother said the bag of vegetables had cost my grandfather forty minutes on foot. I did not answer. I walked to the balcony and looked at my own hands. That thin layer of callus, I thought, was left behind by the garden.

陈宇的爷爷和他那半亩地

陈宇的爷爷在城中村边上种着半亩菜园。拆迁的消息传了几年，菜地一直没动，老人的手也就一直没闲。陈宇说，他爷爷那双手，冬天裂口子，裂得最深的在虎口，贴一圈医用胶布，第二天照样下地翻土。胶布翻着翻着就卷了边，沾了土，变成灰黑色，他也不换，说手比胶布结实。翻土的时候，那双手握锄的位置永远靠下，锄头压得低，起土稳。陈宇站在围挡外看过，说看爷爷翻土像看人写字，一笔是一笔，急不得。

摘菜是另一双手。陈宇说，爷爷摘辣椒不攥，两根指头一拧，辣椒带着把儿下来，一棵能摘十几根，叶子不伤。摘丝瓜专挑巴掌长的，长的不要，说老了咬不动。有一回陈宇帮他把摘好的菜往筐里放，爷爷急了，让他轻放，丝瓜磕一块第二天就黑。陈宇这才留意，那双手在土里粗，碰菜的时候却细，指头肚上全是茧，偏偏能摸出番茄熟没熟，隔着皮一按就知道。

每回周日晚陈宇坐公交回学校，爷爷都提前一个钟头去摘菜，摘满一袋，拎到路口塞给他。袋子里有配好的：一把豇豆、四个番茄、两根黄瓜，有时加一把小葱，葱是用报纸包着的，怕蹭脏别的菜。爷爷只交代一句：城里菜贵，这个新鲜，到了就放冰箱。有一回车都开了，陈宇从车窗里看见老人还站在路口，手抬着没放下，像还保持着刚才递袋子的姿势。他后来在作文里写，他爷爷不识字，从没跟他讲过什么道理，可那双手替他讲了一辈子：地不会骗人，你对它下多少力气，它就还你多少东西；疼人也不用说，装进袋子里，塞到你手上就行了。班主任把这篇作文念给了全班听。念完陈宇补了一句：我现在在学校食堂打番茄炒蛋，都会先挑没磕坏的。

Chen Yu's Grandfather and His Half-Acre Field

The grandfather of Chen Yu farms a half-acre vegetable garden at the edge of an urban village. Demolition news has circulated for years, the plot has never moved, and the hands of the old man have never been idle. Chen Yu says the hands of his grandfather crack in winter, the deepest split at the joint of the thumb and palm; he wraps a ring of medical tape around it and is back turning the soil the next day. The tape curls at the edges as he works, gathers dirt, turns gray-black, and he does not change it, saying his hands are tougher than tape. When he digs, his grip on the hoe is always low, the blade pressed down, lifting the soil of the field steadily. Chen Yu has watched him from outside the construction fence, saying that watching his grandfather dig is like watching someone write characters, one stroke after another, never to be hurried.

Picking vegetables calls for a different pair of hands. Chen Yu says his grandfather does not grab chilies; two fingers give a twist and the chili comes off with its stem, a dozen from one plant, the leaves unhurt. For luffa he takes only palm-length ones, leaving the long ones, saying the big ones are too tough to chew. Once Chen Yu helped him put the picked vegetables into the basket and the old man

hurried him, telling him to set them down gently, for a luffa bumped goes black by the next day. Only then did Chen Yu notice: those hands are coarse in the soil but delicate with vegetables, their fingertips all callus, yet able to tell by touch whether a tomato is ripe, one press through the skin and he knows.

Every Sunday evening, when Chen Yu takes the bus back to school, his grandfather goes out an hour early to pick vegetables, fills a bag, and presses it into his hands at the corner of the street. Inside is a matched set: a handful of long beans, four tomatoes, two cucumbers, sometimes a bunch of scallions wrapped in newspaper so they do not soil the rest. The old man gives only one instruction: vegetables are expensive in the city, these are fresh, put them in the fridge when you arrive. Once, after the bus had started, Chen Yu saw through the window that the old man still stood at the corner, his hand raised and not lowered, still holding the posture of passing over the bag. He later wrote in a composition that his grandfather cannot read and never lectured him on any great principle, yet those hands have spoken for him a whole lifetime: the ground never cheats people; whatever effort you give it, it returns the same measure; and love for people does not need words either, just put it in a bag and press it into the hands of the person you love. The homeroom teacher read that composition to the whole class. When she finished, Chen Yu added one line: now when he gets tomato and scrambled eggs in the school canteen, he always picks the unbruised ones first.