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.