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.