咱们一起去摘瓜

表哥来我们乡下过暑假，他跟我同岁，我俩玩得来。第二天一早，爷爷给我们派了任务：瓜地里有熟瓜，你俩去摘一个最大最熟的，晚上吃。表哥这辈子还没摘过瓜，我也没摘过，我俩都兴奋，又都装作不在乎。我们提着篮子、抱着小凳子，还给他带了一顶草帽，太阳刚出来就出发了。

走进瓜地，藤底下是阴的，跟外头的晒是两个世界。爷爷跟进来指挥：走垄沟，别踩主藤；叶子翻过来了，要给它翻回去，瓜要靠叶子遮阴。我俩照着办，踮着脚在藤缝里走，先找了一块阴凉地把篮子和凳子放下，像两个进山的猎人安营扎寨。

开始敲瓜。表哥说声音闷的算熟，我说声音脆的算熟，谁也说服不了谁，只好去问爷爷。爷爷把一个瓜抱到耳朵边敲了敲，说：声音发闷，咚咚的，是没熟；声音又脆又亮，像敲鼓，手心还跟着颤的，才是熟的。我俩照着这个标准挨个敲，一口气敲了二十多个，一边敲一边争。表哥还发现一个拳头大的小瓜要摘，我拦住他，说没熟的瓜得留在藤上继续长。我们又看见一只马蜂趴在瓜上，用草帽把它赶走了，马蜂气呼呼地飞走，我们为这事笑了十分钟。

最后我们相中了一个瓜，是真大，躺在垄中间，花纹张得开开的，瓜须也干了。我俩一人一边抬起来，走不到三步就掉下来，再抬，又掉，脸都憋红了，互相看了一眼，哈哈大笑。最后我们把它一路拖到地头，爷爷扛上肩。我们俩一边一个跟着，一个扶着藤，一个提着篮子，三个人排成一队回家。

到家奶奶切开，瓤是沙的，红红的，甜。爷爷说：自己摘的瓜，就是比别人家的甜一截。我和表哥不信，又各吃了一牙比了比，好像真的甜。我俩对视一眼，认定是因为累了，累了吃什么都甜。爷爷自己挑了最小的一块，摆摆手说他这个夏天瓜都吃够了，我们心里都明白，他是想多留给我们。

表哥走之前，我们俩在瓜地边上拉了钩：明年西瓜熟的时候，还一起来摘，比一比谁的耳朵更准，听声就能挑出熟瓜。回去的路上我想，这个暑假最开心的事，就是这一趟瓜地：敲瓜的声音，头上的汗，爷爷肩上的大西瓜，还有我们俩抬瓜抬不动、哈哈哈大笑的样子。

Let's Go Pick a Watermelon Together

My cousin came to the countryside to spend the summer vacation with us. We are the same age and get along very well. The next morning, Grandpa gave us a job: there are ripe watermelons in the field, so you two go and pick back the biggest and ripest one for dinner. My cousin had never picked a watermelon in his life, and neither had I, so we were both excited and both pretending not to care. We carried a basket and a small stool, I brought him a straw hat, and we set off while the sun had just come up and the country road was still cool.

When we walked into the melon field, it was shady under the vines, a completely different world from the blazing heat outside. Grandpa followed us in and gave us our

orders: walk in the furrows, do not step on the main vines, and if you flip a leaf over, turn it back, because the melon needs its leaf to shade it. We obeyed and tiptoed through the gaps between the vines, and first found a cool spot to set down the basket and the stool, like two hunters making camp in the mountains.

Then we started knocking on melons. My cousin said a dull sound meant a ripe melon; I said a crisp sound meant a ripe melon. We could not convince each other, so we asked Grandpa. He held a melon close to his ear and knocked. A dull sound, like thud, thud, means it is not ready, he explained. A clear, ringing sound, like dong, dong, with the vibration running through your hand, means it is ripe. We followed his rule and knocked on more than twenty melons one after another, arguing as we went. My cousin also found a tiny melon the size of a fist and wanted to pick it, but I stopped him and said an unripe melon has to stay on the vine and keep growing. Then we saw a wasp sitting on a melon and chased it away with our hats, and it flew off angry, and we laughed about that for ten minutes.

In the end we agreed on one melon lying in the middle of the ridge. It was truly huge, its stripes spread wide and open, and its tendril was dry. The two of us lifted it, one on each side, and we could not manage even three steps before it slid down. We lifted again, and it fell again, and our faces turned red, and we looked at each other and laughed out loud. Finally we dragged it all the way to the edge of the field, and Grandpa lifted it onto his shoulder. We walked on either side of him, one of us holding the vine and the other carrying the basket, and the three of us went home in a single file.

When we got home and Grandma cut the melon open, the flesh was sandy and red and sweet. Grandpa said: a melon you picked yourselves always tastes one notch sweeter than other people's melons. My cousin and I did not believe that, so we each ate another slice to compare, and it really did seem sweeter. We looked at each other, laughed, and decided it must be because we were tired, and being tired makes everything taste better. Grandpa picked out the smallest piece for himself and waved his hand, saying he had eaten enough watermelon this summer already, but we both knew he just wanted to leave more for us.

Before my cousin went home, the two of us made a promise at the edge of the melon field: next year, when the watermelons ripen, we will come and pick them together again, and we will have a contest to see whose ear is more accurate, the one who can pick out a ripe melon just by listening. On the way back that evening, I thought that of everything in this summer vacation, the happiest single thing was this one trip to the melon field, with its knocking sounds, its sweat, the big watermelon on Grandpa's shoulder, and the two of us failing to carry the melon and laughing our heads off.