我们到瓜地里摘西瓜

西瓜熟的那天，天还没大亮，爷爷就把我叫醒了，说：起来，跟我去山下瓜地里摘瓜。我还没去过瓜地，一骨碌爬起来，衣服都穿反了半件。爷爷肩上扛着锄头，我抱着一把小凳子，我们沿着土路走，天还是灰的，路边草上的露水打湿了鞋。

瓜地在山下向阳的坡上，不大，全是绿的。走进瓜地，藤蔓爬得满地都是，叶子大得像扇子，叶边上还挂着露水，一滴一滴落在手背上。爷爷走在前头，一路叮嘱我走垄沟，别踩主藤，藤踩断了，瓜就不长了。我踮着脚跟在他后面，像走在一座绿色的桥上。

爷爷蹲下来教我挑瓜。先看瓜蔓旁边那个卷卷的须，须干了、变成褐色的，瓜就熟了。再看瓜皮的花纹，纹路张开、清清楚楚的，是好瓜。最后敲一敲，听声。他敲一个瓜，声音发闷，咚咚的，说这是没熟的，不要。又敲一个，声音又脆又响，像敲鼓，说这才是熟的。我学着他的样子，一个瓜一个瓜地敲过去，敲得指头都疼了。爷爷把我挑的挨个看过，最后指着一个圆滚滚的大西瓜说：就它。

那个西瓜真大，深绿条纹，我抱起来，两只胳膊还差一点合不拢。我非要自己抱，抱着走一步，又一步，第三步就放下了，脸憋得通红。爷爷笑出了声，什么也没说，弯下腰把西瓜扛到肩上，说：你走前头，扶着藤，给我引路。我就扶着那根干了的瓜藤走在前面，觉得自己像牵着一头大牛回家。

回来的路上，我们在路边的大树下歇了一会儿。爷爷没把西瓜放下来，只是从这边肩换到那边肩。到家，奶奶把西瓜洗了，刀刚放上去，瓜就咔嚓一声自己裂开了，瓤是沙的，红红的。我抱着吃了一牙，汁水顺着手腕往下流。奶奶说：今年的瓜格外甜。我大声说：是我摘的！爷爷蹲在门口，烟袋锅子都忘了抽，笑得眼睛眯成两条缝。

后来奶奶把剩下的半个瓜给隔壁家送去，因为春天栽瓜秧的时候，隔壁奶奶帮过忙。隔壁奶奶吃着瓜，夸我能干，我给她表演怎么敲瓜，告诉她熟瓜的声音像鼓，她学得比我爷爷还快。那个暑假我后来去了很多回瓜地，再后来，我光听声音就能分出熟没熟，还能把小一号的瓜一路抱到地头。敲瓜的声音、藤上的露水、爷爷扛着西瓜的背影，我都记得。现在每次吃西瓜，我都会想起山下那块瓜地，想起爷爷说的话：瓜急不得，也哄不得，你得敲一敲，听一听。

We Went to the Field to Pick a Watermelon

On the morning the watermelons finally looked ready, Grandpa woke me up before the sun was fully up and said: get up, we are going to the field at the foot of the hill to pick a watermelon. I had never been to a watermelon field before, so I was out of bed and dressed in one second, and I even put half of my shirt on backwards. Grandpa put a hoe on his shoulder, I carried a small wooden stool, and we walked out along the dirt road while the sky was still gray and the grass on both sides soaked my shoes with dew.

The melon field sat on a sunny slope below the hill. It was not a big field, but

it was full of green. When we walked in, vines were crawling over the ground in every direction, and the leaves were as wide as fan blades, with dew still hanging on their edges and dripping onto the back of my hand. Grandpa walked in front and warned me to stay in the furrows and never step on the main vines, because a stepped-on vine stops feeding its melon. I followed him on tiptoe, the way you cross a green bridge without getting your shoes wet.

Grandpa squatted down and taught me how to choose. First look at the tendril: if the little curly tendril next to the stem has dried up and turned brown, the melon is ready. Then look at the stripes on the skin: if they are spread wide and clear, it is a good melon. Then knock it and listen. He knocked one melon and it made a dull thud, and he said that was an unripe melon, leave it. Then he knocked another one, and it sounded dong, dong, clear and ringing, like knocking on a drum, and he said that was a ripe one. I copied him and knocked melon after melon until my fingers ached. Grandpa checked each one I chose, and finally pointed at a round, heavy watermelon and said: this one. This is the one.

The watermelon was enormous, with dark green stripes, and when I hugged it my arms could not quite meet around it. I insisted on carrying it myself. I lifted it, took one step, then another, then a third, and had to put it down, my face burning red. Grandpa laughed out loud and did not say anything. He bent down, lifted the melon onto his shoulder, and told me to walk in front and hold the dried vine so I could lead him. I held that little vine and walked ahead proudly, as if I were leading a large ox home from the market.

On the way back we rested under a big tree by the road. Grandpa did not put the watermelon down; he only moved it from one shoulder to the other. When we got home, Grandma washed the melon and set the knife on it, and the rind split open with a crack before she had even finished cutting. The flesh was sandy and red. I ate a slice and the juice ran all the way down my wrist. Grandma said this year's melons were especially sweet. I said loudly: I picked this one! Grandpa was squatting in the doorway, forgetting all about his pipe, laughing until his eyes became two narrow lines.

Afterwards Grandma carried the rest of the melon next door, because the neighbor grandma had helped us plant the melon seedlings in spring. She ate a slice, praised me for being useful, and I showed her how to knock on a melon and told her that a ripe one sounds like a drum. She learned faster than my grandpa did. That summer I went to the melon field many more times. Later I could tell a ripe melon from an unripe one just by listening, and I could even carry a medium-sized melon all the way to the edge of the field. The knocking sounds, the dew on the vines, and Grandpa's back under the watermelon on his shoulder, I remember all of it. Now, every time I eat a watermelon, I think of that field below the hill, and of what Grandpa always

said: you cannot rush a melon, and you cannot fool a melon; you just have to knock and listen.