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.

瓜地里的秘密

我们家的瓜地在房后，只有几垄，可爷爷把它当宝贝。每天傍晚吃了饭，爷爷都要进瓜地里去，蹲一会儿，再出来。我问爷爷在里面干什么，爷爷笑笑说：照看一个秘密。我跑到地头看过好几回，眼里全是藤和叶子，哪有什么秘密？我问得更急，爷爷只说：到时候你就知道了。

八月底的一天，爷爷拉着我的手说：走，今天开秘密。走进瓜地，藤尖已经开始发黄，蜜蜂比夏天少多了，露水也干了，叶子在风里哗啦哗啦地响。爷爷径直走到瓜地最里头，那里有一堆稻草。他掀开稻草，底下躺着一个大西瓜，瓜藤上还系着一根小红绳。

爷爷说：这个瓜，七月就在那儿了，是你放暑假回来那天我挑中的。地里中间的瓜熟得早，这个熟得晚，没人照看，过路的人顺手就摘走了。所以我每天进来敲它一下，听一听。今天该熟了。爷爷把手搭在瓜上敲了敲，声音咚咚的，像敲鼓。他又敲了一下，点点头：熟了，抱回去。

我也凑过去敲，学着爷爷的样子，把耳朵凑近，果然也听见咚咚的声音，那震动顺着瓜皮传到我的手心。我非要自己抱瓜，抱着走了三步，胳膊就发软，只好放下。最后爷爷把瓜扛在肩上，我牵着那根小红绳走在他旁边。爷爷说，这根绳系了两个月，今天可以解开了。他说这话的时候，声音轻轻的，像怕吵醒谁。

回来的路上爷爷告诉我，这个瓜的位置也是挑过的：上午晒得到太阳，下午稻草能给它遮阴，那块地是沙土，瓜才起沙。他还每隔十来天给瓜翻一次个儿，让它四面熟得匀。我原以为摘瓜就是敲和抱，没想到里头有这么多讲究。爷爷种了一辈子地，他不说，我都不知道。

奶奶把瓜切开，我们在院子里吃。瓤是沙的，籽很少，甜得我总觉得把整个夏天吞了下去。爷爷自己挑了最小的一块，说这个夏天他尝瓜都尝够了。奶奶说：这个瓜爷爷照看了两个月，能不甜吗？我问爷爷为什么不早点告诉我。爷爷说：告诉你，还叫什么秘密？秘密就得藏到熟的那天，才有意思。

晚上躺在床上，我忽然明白了一点：瓜地里的秘密，不在瓜里，在照看里。爷爷每天进地里一趟，稻草底下才有那个大西瓜。最大的那个瓜，是爷爷每天进瓜地的报酬。我打定主意：明年暑假，我也每天跟爷爷进地里，照看一个我自己的秘密。

The Secret in the Watermelon Field

Our family's watermelon field is behind the house. It is only a few rows wide,

but Grandpa treats it like a treasure. Every evening after dinner, he would walk into the field, squat in it for a while, and then come out again. When I asked him what he was doing in there, he only smiled and said: taking care of a secret. I ran to the edge of the field and looked carefully many times, but all I could ever see were vines and leaves. What secret could possibly be out there? When I asked again and again, Grandpa only said: you will know when the time comes.

One day at the end of August, Grandpa took my hand and said: come on, today we open the secret. When we walked into the field, the tips of the vines had already begun to turn yellow, and there were far fewer bees than in midsummer. The dew had dried up, and the leaves rustled in the wind. Grandpa walked straight to the far corner of the field, where there was a pile of straw. He lifted the straw, and underneath it lay a huge watermelon, with a small red string tied to its vine.

Grandpa said: this melon has been here since July, the day you came home for the summer vacation. The melons in the middle of the field ripen early, but this one is late. If nobody watched over it, whoever passed by would pick it up and take it away. So every day I come in and knock on it once and listen. Today it should be ready. He put his hand on the melon and knocked. It sounded dong, dong, like a drum. He knocked again, nodded, and said: ripe. Carry it home.

I leaned over and knocked on it myself, copying the way Grandpa did it, holding my ear close, and sure enough it answered dong, dong, and the vibration traveled through the rind into my palm. I insisted on carrying the melon. I hugged it and managed three steps before my arms gave out and I had to set it down. In the end Grandpa lifted it onto his shoulder, and I walked beside him holding the little red string. Grandpa said the string had been tied there for two months, and now we could finally untie it. He said it softly, as if he were afraid of waking somebody up.

On the way back, Grandpa told me that even the spot for this melon had been chosen on purpose. The sun reached it in the morning, but the straw could keep it cool in the afternoon, and the soil there was sandy, which is what makes the flesh sandy. He had also turned the melon over once every ten days or so, so that it ripened evenly on all four sides. I had always thought picking melons meant knocking and carrying, and I never knew there were so many things to learn. Grandpa had farmed his whole life, and if he did not talk, I would never have known any of it.

Grandma cut the melon open, and we ate it out in the courtyard. The flesh was sandy, the seeds were few, and it was so sweet that eating it felt like swallowing the whole summer. Grandpa picked out the smallest piece for himself and said he had tasted enough melons this summer already. Grandma said: this melon has been watched over by Grandpa for two months, how could it not be sweet? I asked Grandpa why he had never told me. He said: if I told you, where would the fun of a secret be? A secret

has to be kept until the day it ripens.

That night, lying in bed, I suddenly understood a little. The secret of the melon field is not hidden inside the melon. It is hidden in the taking care. Grandpa came into the field every single day, and that is why this big watermelon was waiting under the straw. The biggest melon of the summer was the reward for Grandpa's daily visits. I made up my mind: next summer I will go into the field with Grandpa every day too, and take care of a secret of my own.

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.