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.