爷爷菜园里的那只小竹篮

星期六的早上，太阳还没完全升起来，爷爷已经蹲在菜园边上。黄瓜藤上还挂着露水，他一片一片地掀开叶子看，看中了哪根黄瓜，就弯下腰再瞅一眼，嘴里念叨着：这根正好，这根正好。

他一只手托着藤，一只手掐住黄瓜的把儿，咔的一声拧下来，轻轻放进腰间的竹篮里，摆得整整齐齐，一层压一层。红透的西红柿另装一个布袋，爷爷说西红柿不能压，压坏了就不好吃了。

篮子渐渐满了。黄瓜垫底，西红柿在中间，最上面横着几根还带着泥的小葱。爷爷拍了拍篮沿，把篮子递给我：去，给隔壁李奶奶送去。替我问个好，跟她说黄瓜凉拌着吃，最爽口。

我抱着篮子走到三号楼门口，敲了三下门。李奶奶开门一看，眼睛笑成了月牙：又是你们家！回去告诉你爷爷，他种的菜是我们整幢楼最好的，我一个夏天都没买过菜。

她拿起一根黄瓜在手里来回摩挲，说晚上就拍一头蒜凉拌。说完转身进屋，再出来的时候，手里端着一碗绿豆汤，碗壁还是温的，汤里漂着几颗红枣。

拿回去给你爷爷，我熬的，给他解解暑。我一只手抱篮子，一只手端碗，一步一步往回走，生怕洒出一滴。篮子比来时轻多了，我的手却比来时沉。

爷爷接过碗，当场喝了一半，咂了一下嘴。他看看空篮子，又看看我，慢慢说：菜园子分一半出去，才是最高兴的。全留着，它就是一片菜；分出去，它就变成一幢楼的朋友。

下午我下楼扔垃圾，听见楼道里李奶奶正跟她的孙子说，三楼往下那个爷爷种的黄瓜，甜得很，比超市里的好吃多了。菜园门口那只竹篮空着，安安静静躺在太阳底下，看上去却是满的。

The Little Bamboo Basket of Grandpa

Saturday morning, the sun had barely risen when Grandpa was already crouching at the edge of the vegetable garden. Dew still hung on the cucumber vines. He lifted the leaves one by one to look, and when he found a cucumber he liked, he bent down for a second look, muttering: this one is just right, this one is just right.

He held the vine with one hand and pinched the stem of the cucumber with the other. With a snap it came off, and he laid it gently into the bamboo basket at his waist, arranging them neatly, layer upon layer. The fully ripe tomatoes went into a separate cloth bag, because Grandpa said tomatoes must not be squashed, or they would not taste good.

The basket filled up little by little. Cucumbers at the bottom, tomatoes in the middle, and on top lay several scallions still holding soil. Grandpa patted the rim of the basket and handed it to me: go, take them to Grandma Li next door. Give her my regards, and tell her cucumbers taste freshest tossed with garlic.

I carried the basket to the door of Building Three and knocked three times. When Grandma Li opened the door and saw it, her eyes curved like crescents. Always your family! Tell your grandpa his vegetables are the best in our whole building. I have not bought a single vegetable all summer.

She picked up a cucumber and rubbed it in her hand, saying she would smash some garlic and dress it tonight. Then she went back inside, and when she came out again, she carried a bowl of mung bean soup, the sides of the bowl still warm, a few red dates floating on top.

Take this back to your grandpa. I made it to cool the summer heat. I held the basket with one hand and the bowl with the other, walking step by step, afraid to spill a single drop. The basket was far lighter than on the way here, yet my hand felt heavier.

Grandpa took the bowl and drank half of it on the spot, smacking his lips once. He looked at the empty basket, then at me, and said slowly: a vegetable garden is happiest when half of it is shared. Keep it all, and it is only a patch of vegetables. Share it, and it turns into a building full of friends.

That afternoon I went downstairs to throw out the trash and heard Grandma Li telling her grandson in the stairwell: the cucumbers grown by the grandpa below our floor taste wonderfully sweet. The bamboo basket at the garden gate sat empty in the sunlight, yet it looked full.

李奶奶的记事

我每天早上五点半下楼遛弯，都要从老陈的菜园边上过。他比我起得还早，已经蹲在地头了。我喊一声老陈，他抬起头，眉毛上还沾着草屑，答应一声，又低头去看他的黄瓜。

我看他采摘看了一个夏天。他挑黄瓜不看大的，看直的，一只手托住藤，另一只手一拧，咔的一声，黄瓜就下来了，拿衣角擦都不擦，直接放进竹篮。红西红柿他单独装，说那东西娇气，经不得压。小葱拔一把，抖掉根上的泥，往篮子最上面一盖，一只篮子就装满了，齐着篮沿，冒不出头。

八点钟刚过，他孙子就抱着篮子来敲门了。三下，不多不少，是老陈家孙子的敲法。我开门他就说：李奶奶，我爷爷让我送来的，说黄瓜凉拌爽口。孩子抱得紧紧的，像抱着一窝小鸡。

我每次都要留孩子说两句话。有一回我拉着他，想起从前的事，差点掉下泪来。老头子走的那年秋天，老陈第一次给我送菜，也是这只篮子，里头是三个大南瓜、一把韭菜。他说：嫂子，南瓜熬粥，顶饿。那阵子我一个人，屋里静得能听见墙里的水管响。就是那篮菜，把我重新拽回了人堆里。

打那以后，我们两家你来我往。他送我一篮菜，我腌一坛萝卜干回他；他送我一筐西红柿，我给他孙子缝书包带子。菜有季节，情没有季节。

这天我回赠的是一碗绿豆汤，熬得烂，放了红枣，趁温让孩子端着回去。孩子在楼道里走得很慢，一手端碗一手扶栏杆，我跟在后面，忽然觉得这楼道亮堂。

晚上我把吃剩的黄瓜皮晒在阳台上，想起老陈说过，菜分一半出去，才是一幢楼的朋友。我对着阳台底下喊：老陈，明天给我留两根老黄瓜，我腌酱瓜！菜园那头应了一声：好嘞。

Notes from Grandma Li

Every morning at half past five I go downstairs for my walk, and I always pass the vegetable garden of Old Chen. He rises even earlier than I do, already crouching at the head of the field. I call out to him, he lifts his head, grass bits still on his eyebrows, answers with a grunt, and bends back down to his cucumbers.

I have watched him pick vegetables all summer. He does not choose the big cucumbers but the straight ones. One hand holds the vine, the other gives a twist, snap, the cucumber comes off. He does not even wipe it on his clothes, just drops it into the bamboo basket. The red tomatoes go in separately, for he says they are delicate and cannot bear pressure. He pulls a handful of scallions, shakes the soil from their roots, and lays them across the top of the basket. Then the basket is full, level with the rim, nothing sticking out.

Just past eight in the morning, his grandson comes knocking with the basket in his arms. Three knocks, no more, no fewer, that is the way the boy knocks. When I open the door he says: Grandma Li, my grandpa sent these, he says cucumbers taste freshest dressed with garlic. The boy holds the basket tight, as if carrying a brood of chicks.

Every time I keep the boy for a few words. Once I took his little hand and, remembering the old days, nearly dropped tears. In the autumn of the year my husband passed away, Old Chen sent me vegetables for the first time, in this very basket, with three big pumpkins and a bunch of chives inside. He said: sister, pumpkin makes a filling porridge. In those days I lived alone, and the room was so quiet I could hear the water pipes inside the walls. That single basket of vegetables pulled me back among people.

Since then our two families have kept exchanging. He sends a basket of greens, I send back a jar of pickled radish. He sends a crate of tomatoes, I sew new straps for the schoolbag of his grandson. Vegetables have seasons; friendship does not.

That day my return gift was a bowl of mung bean soup, simmered soft with red

dates, still warm as the boy carried it back. He walked very slowly through the stairwell, one hand on the bowl, one hand on the railing, and I followed behind, suddenly feeling that the stairway was bright.

At night I dried the leftover cucumber peels on the balcony and recalled Old Chen saying that a garden shared by half becomes a building of friends. I called down from the balcony: Old Chen, save me two old cucumbers tomorrow, I will pickle them in sauce! From the garden side came the answer: all right.

一只竹篮的自述

我是一只竹篮，编得细，刷过三遍清漆，蹲在菜园门口的石墩上。我的主人是个老头，手上有老茧，摸过我每一道篾缝。他不用我装土，不用我装草，只在星期六的清晨把我拎起来，那时候露水还没干。

采摘那天，我是被一层一层喂饱的。黄瓜最先来，凉的，肚脐上还顶着一朵快干的小黄花。西红柿第二个来，热的，是被太阳晒熟的，一个挨一个躺下，不敢挤，主人怕我装太满压坏它们。小葱最后来，根上还带着黑泥，搭在我身上当被子。我满到篮沿，心口发胀，这是我一年里最神气的时刻。

然后我被挂在一个男孩的胳膊上。他个子刚到我耳朵，走路却稳，绕开水洼，绕开砖头。风从我篾缝里穿过去，黄瓜们轻轻碰头，发出很闷的笃笃声，像它们在说悄悄话。我们穿过两幢楼中间那条小路，路两边的窗子一扇扇打开，有人探头，有人打招呼：哟，老陈家的菜又出门啦。

三号楼，三下敲门。门开了，一位老奶奶把我们接过去。她摸黄瓜的时候手很轻，像摸小孩的脸。她说了一串话，我记不全，只记住她说这篮菜是整幢楼最好的。后来我的肚子里换了东西，换成一只碗，碗底热热的，热得我心里也发烫。他们管这个叫回礼。

回去的路上，男孩一手抱我一手端碗，走得比来时更慢。我空了，轻了，可我不知道为什么，反而觉得自己比装满的时候沉。后来那个老头把我放回石墩，用拇指蹭了蹭我的篮沿，像擦汗。

我在太阳底下蹲着，闻见自己身上又是黄瓜味又是绿豆味，两种味道混在一起，说不上好闻，但是暖。我忽然明白，我这只篮子，装菜的时候是满的，倒空了去装回礼，也是满的。原来有些东西越分越多，我身上就装着这个理。

Confessions of a Bamboo Basket

I am a bamboo basket, woven fine, varnished three times, squatting on a stone block at the garden gate. My owner is an old man with hard calluses on his hands that

have stroked every seam of my bamboo strips. He never uses me for soil or weeds. He only lifts me on Saturday dawns, while the dew is still wet.

On picking day I am fed layer by layer. The cucumbers come first, cool, a small yellow flower about to dry still on their navel. The tomatoes come second, warm, ripened by the sun, lying shoulder to shoulder, careful not to crowd, for my master fears overfilling me will bruise them. The scallions come last, black soil still on their roots, draped over me like a quilt. I am filled level with the rim, my chest swollen. It is my proudest moment of the year.

Then I am hung on the arm of a boy. He is barely as tall as my handle, yet he walks steadily, around the puddles, around the bricks. Wind passes through my bamboo seams, the cucumbers bump heads softly, making a muffled knock-knock sound, like whispers. We cross the little path between two buildings. Windows open one by one, people lean out, people call: oh, the vegetables of the Chen family are out again.

Building Three, three knocks. The door opens, and an old grandmother takes us over. Her hand is very light when she touches the cucumbers, like touching the cheek of a child. She says a string of words; I cannot remember them all, only that she called this basket the best in the whole building. Later what fills my belly changes, replaced by a bowl, hot at the bottom, so hot my insides glow too. They call this a return gift.

On the way back the boy holds me with one arm and the bowl with the other, walking slower than before. I am empty, I am light, yet somehow I feel heavier than when I was full. Later the old man sets me back on the stone block and rubs my rim with his thumb, like wiping away sweat.

I squat in the sun, smelling of both cucumbers and mung bean soup, the two smells mixed together, not exactly pleasant, but warm. I suddenly understand: this basket of mine is full when holding vegetables, and still full when emptied to carry a return gift. Some things really do grow more the more they are shared, and I carry that truth in my seams.

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