我和爷爷比赛摘西红柿

八月里，爷爷菜园的西红柿红得忙不过来了。那天我提着小桶去摘，爷爷在篱笆那头看见了，隔着篱笆喊我：小丫头，咱俩比一场，一人摘一篮，看谁摘得多、摘得好。我把手上的桶往篱笆缺口里一放，说比就比。

爷爷从缺口把篮子递进来，我的桶也在缺口那头。篱笆不高，到我腰上，竹竿被太阳晒得温热。我们隔着篱笆各忙各的，园子里全是掐断果柄的啪啪声。

我一开始摘得飞快，专挑大的，一把攥住往上拽。摘到一半，爷爷隔着篱笆探头看了一眼我的篮子，笑了。他说，你看你摘的。我低头一看，坏了。篮子里有两个西红柿捏出了坑，一个皮破了，还有一个果柄拽掉了，露出一个小洞。这样的果子不耐放，奶奶说过，破皮的当天就得吃掉。

我改了办法。先看颜色，红透的才摘；再用手背轻轻按一下，软得刚好的才要；摘的时候捏住果子往上托，不拽果柄，让它自己啪地断。这样摘得慢了，可个个完好。

爷爷摘得才叫快。他的手在架子底下穿来穿去，一抬一放，啪、啪，篮子一会儿就冒尖了。我数了数，爷爷摘了二十三个，个个完好；我摘了十九个，还有两个带伤。我输了。

爷爷把篮子从缺口递过来，连我那一桶也提过去，说输赢都一样，都是咱俩摘的。回家路上他教我，带果柄的放一起，破皮的挑出来单独放，红透的当天吃，半红的摆窗台。

晚上奶奶问谁摘得多，爷爷指我。奶奶不信，爷爷说，她输给我，可她学会的比我还多。

我喜欢爷爷的菜园，喜欢竹篱笆，喜欢从缺口递进来的篮子，喜欢啪的一声断柄。比赛输了我不难过，因为我知道，明年八月，我就能赢爷爷了。

My Grandfather and I Had a Picking Contest

In August the tomatoes in the garden of my grandfather ripened faster than anyone could pick them. That day I went with a small bucket, and my grandfather saw me from the far side of the fence. He called through the bamboo poles: let us have a contest, one basket each, and see who picks more and picks better. I set my bucket down at the gap in the fence and said, deal.

My grandfather handed his basket in through the gap, and my bucket stood on the other side of it. The fence was not high, it reached my waist, and the bamboo poles were warm from the sun. We worked on our own sides, and the garden was full of the snapping sound of tomato stems breaking.

At first I picked as fast as I could, grabbing only the big ones and yanking them upward. Halfway through, my grandfather peeked over the fence at my basket and laughed. He said, look at what you picked. I looked down. Trouble. Two tomatoes in my basket had thumb dents, one had torn skin, and on another I had pulled the whole stem

out, leaving a small hole. Such fruits do not keep, and my grandmother had said the ones with torn skin must be eaten the same day.

I changed my method. First look at the color, and pick only the fully red. Then press gently with the back of the hand, and take only those just soft enough. When picking, hold the fruit and lift it upward, do not yank the stem, and let it snap by itself. I picked slower this way, but every fruit came out whole.

My grandfather was the fast one. His hands moved through the shelves under the leaves, lift and release, snap, snap, and his basket filled to a mound in no time. I counted. He had picked twenty-three, every one whole. I had picked nineteen, two of them damaged. I lost.

He handed his basket through the gap, lifted my bucket over as well, and said win or lose it is all ours, picked by the two of us. On the way home he taught me: keep the ones with stems together, set aside the damaged ones separately, eat the fully ripe today, and place the half red ones on the windowsill.

At night my grandmother asked who picked more. My grandfather pointed at me. She did not believe it. He said, she lost to me, but she learned more than I did.

I love the vegetable garden of my grandfather, the bamboo fence, the basket handed through the gap, and the single snap of a breaking stem. Losing the contest did not sadden me, because I know that next August I will be able to beat my grandfather.