水果店里的小学徒

我开水果店第六年，周末上午最热闹。来的多是带孩子的家长，孩子往筐前一站，比大人还认真。上个周六来的一对父子，让我记到今天。

爸爸问橙子怎么卖，儿子已经把手伸进筐里了。他不挑大的，专挑模样周正的，拿起来转一圈，看看肚脐，再换下一个。我逗他，挑橙子要掂分量，越沉的越有水。他听了，两只手一边一个比起来，比完把沉的那个递给爸爸，说这个归你。爸爸接了，放进袋里，一句没多说，像是早就习惯了儿子替他做主。

挑到第五个，孩子把橙子凑到鼻子底下，闭着眼闻。我说闻不出好坏，他睁开眼认真反驳我，说能，这个香，那个没味。他把有味的留下，没味的放回筐里，放回的时候还转了个方向，让有味的继续晒到太阳。爸爸在旁边笑，我也笑，从此他成了我们店的熟客，来了就直奔橙子筐。

结账时数了数，十二个橙子，一兜橘子。爸爸要拎，孩子不让，把袋子换到自己手上，说周末的任务是他完成的，得他自己拿。爸爸由着他，两人在门口分吃一个橘子，一人几瓣，皮丢进我店门口的垃圾桶，丢得比谁都准。

后来他们常来。孩子从够不着筐，到踮脚，到伸手就够得着，掂分量的手法越来越像老主顾。有一回他妈妈来，说孩子上周非要自己榨汁，把厨房弄得一塌糊涂，榨出来的汁倒真甜，全家喝完了。我装橙子的时候想，这店里的橙子，数他挑得最慢，也数他挑得最认真。

入冬后店里进橙子，他放学路过非要进来挑两个，说要给值班的妈妈带去。我给他留了个大的，他不要，说挑橙子不能靠别人让，得自己掂。最后他自己拿了四个，个个沉。我找零的时候多塞了一把橘子瓣干，他攥着走了，回头冲我摆手。这样的孩子，我这店开下去就有意思。

The Little Apprentice at the Fruit Shop

I have run this fruit shop for six years, and weekend mornings are the busiest. Most customers come with children, and a child standing in front of the crate can be more serious than the grown-ups. A father and son came last Saturday, and I still remember them.

The father asked how much the oranges were, and the son already had his hands in the crate. He did not pick the biggest ones but the well-shaped ones, turning each over to look at its navel before putting it down. I teased him, saying to weigh an orange for its heft, the heavier the juicier. Hearing that, he compared one in each hand, then handed the heavier one to his father, saying this one is yours. His father took it and put it in the bag without saying much, as if long used to his son deciding for him.

By the fifth orange, the child brought it under his nose and smelled with his eyes shut. I told him you cannot smell quality. He opened his eyes and argued seriously: yes you can, this one is fragrant, that one is not. He kept the fragrant

ones and returned the rest to the crate, turning them around on the way back so the good ones kept their sun. His father laughed, and so did I. From then on he became a regular, heading straight for the orange crate when he came.

At checkout we counted twelve oranges and a bag of tangerines. His father wanted to carry them; his son would not allow it, switching the bags to his own hands, saying the weekend mission was his to finish. His father let him. At the door the two shared one tangerine, a few segments each, and dropped the peels into my trash bin with better aim than anyone.

They came often after that. The child grew from unable to reach the crate, to tiptoeing, to simply stretching out a hand, and his way of weighing oranges looked more and more like an old customer. Once his mother came and said he had insisted on juicing them himself last week, making a mess of the kitchen, but the juice really was sweet and the whole family finished it. As I stacked oranges I thought: of all the oranges this shop sells, his are picked the slowest, and picked the most earnestly.

After winter came and the shop restocked oranges, he passed by after school and insisted on coming in to pick two, saying he would take them to his mother who was on duty. I set aside a big one for him, but he refused, saying that picking oranges cannot rely on someone giving way, you have to weigh them yourself. In the end he chose four himself, every one heavy. When I gave change I slipped in an extra handful of dried tangerine segments; he clutched it and left, turning back to wave at me. With children like this around, running this shop is worth it.