吃西瓜比赛，我赢了籽

暑假的院子一到傍晚就凉快，井水镇过的西瓜抬出来，一刀下去咔的一声，红瓤露出来，籽黑亮黑亮的。那年我们院里几个孩子正式办了个吃西瓜比赛，表哥当裁判，规则是他现编的：一人一块，吃完为准，籽不能吞，吞一颗加赛一轮。

我报名报得最早，想得也最美。我平时吃饭在桌上是出了名的快，一块西瓜不在话下。比赛开始，表哥哨子一响，我把西瓜举起来对着嘴啃，汁水顺着胳膊肘往下流，红瓤以肉眼可见的速度消失。二娃在我对面啃得满脸花，三妹斯文，用小勺挖。我眼看就要先见底，心里一飘，手一松，最后一口连着十几颗籽一起吞了。

表哥举手：吞籽，加赛一轮。我愣在原地，嘴里还含着半口没咽下去的。加赛的那块西瓜是我自己挑的，挑的时候还嫌小，这会儿看着跟一座小山似的。我硬着头皮啃，啃到一半实在撑不住，举手投降。那一轮我名次垫底，二娃笑我，说我的胃是仓库，专门存西瓜籽。

表哥看我不服气，眼珠一转，改了规则：最后一局不比吃，比吐籽。一人三颗籽，吐过墙根的算赢，越远越赢。这个我熟啊——夏天在树荫底下，我们拿西瓜籽当子弹崩脑门，崩了整个暑假。我捏起一颗籽，舌头抵住，腮帮子一鼓，噗，那颗籽飞出去，越过墙根，掉到墙外那条道上。第二颗更远。第三颗我换了个姿势，侧身，眯眼，籽飞出一道看不见的弧线，落点没人看清，只听墙外铁皮垃圾桶当啷响了一声。

这一声把全院子都安静了一瞬，然后炸出满堂的喝彩。裁判表哥宣布，第三颗判定为最远，冠军是我。我举着剩下半块西瓜站在院子中间，接受几个孩子的鼓掌，表情尽量绷住，绷不住，嘴角怎么都压不平。

后来那半块西瓜我坐在台阶上慢慢吃完了，吃得很慢，没人比赛，籽一颗一颗吐进手心，再弹进垃圾桶。井水镇过的瓜，慢慢吃反而更甜，这个理我那年就懂了，虽然懂得不深。

再后来，院里办过第二回、第三回比赛，规则换了一堆，吃瓜冠军始终是二娃，吐籽冠军始终是我。我们各拿各的冠军，谁也不服谁。多年以后想起来，那个暑假的傍晚，井水、刀声、满手的西瓜籽，还有当啷那一响，比任何一块西瓜都解渴。

The Watermelon Eating Contest, and I Won the Seeds

The courtyard cooled off at dusk every day of that summer. Watermelons chilled in well water were carried out, and one stroke of the knife cracked them open with a snap, red flesh showing, seeds glossy black. That year several of us children held a formal watermelon eating contest. My cousin was the referee, and he made up the rules on the spot: one slice each, finish first to win, seeds must not be swallowed, and swallowing one seed means one extra round.

I signed up earliest and dreamed the biggest dreams. At the dinner table I was famously fast, and a slice of watermelon was nothing to me. When the referees whistle blew, I lifted the melon to my mouth and bit into it, juice running down to my elbow,

the red flesh vanishing at a visible speed. Erwa across from me ate with his whole face in bloom, and Sanmei ate politely with a small spoon. I was about to finish first, my head got light, my grip loosened, and my last bite went down together with a dozen seeds.

The cousin raised his hand: seeds swallowed, one extra round. I stood frozen, half a mouthful still not swallowed. The extra slice was one I had picked myself, complaining it was too small at the time; now it looked like a little mountain. I gnawed on stubbornly, and halfway through I gave up and raised my hand. That round I came last. Erwa laughed and said my stomach was a warehouse for storing watermelon seeds.

Seeing I was unconvinced, the cousin rolled his eyes and changed the rules: the final round would not be eating but seed spitting. Three seeds each; anything past the base of the wall counts, farther wins. This one I knew well — all summer under the shade trees we had used watermelon seeds as bullets to flick at foreheads. I pinched up a seed, pressed my tongue behind it, puffed my cheek, and pfft, the seed flew over the wall base and landed on the path outside. The second went farther. For the third I changed my stance, turned sideways, squinted, and the seed drew an invisible arc; no one saw where it landed, but outside the wall a tin trash can rang out with a clang.

That clang silenced the whole courtyard for one moment, then it burst into cheers. The referee declared the third seed the farthest, and the champion was me. I stood in the middle of the courtyard holding the remaining half slice, accepting the applause of the other children, trying hard to keep a straight face, failing, the corners of my mouth impossible to press down.

Afterwards I ate that half slice slowly on the steps, no contest, seeds dropped one by one into my palm and flicked into the can. Watermelon chilled in well water tastes sweeter eaten slowly — I understood that principle that year, though not deeply.

The courtyard held a second and third contest after that. The rules changed a dozen times; the eating champion was always Erwa, the seed-spitting champion always me. We each kept our own championship, neither yielding to the other. Years later, thinking back, those summer evenings — the well water, the knife sounds, hands full of seeds, and that single clang — quenched my thirst better than any slice of watermelon.

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