# 井水镇过的西瓜

我爱吃西瓜。要数吃得最痛快的一次，是在奶奶家，那个西瓜在井水里泡过。

七月底，我跟爸爸妈妈回乡下看奶奶。中午热得狗都趴在门洞里吐舌头。奶奶从井台边提上来一个网兜，里面装着她早上吊进井里的西瓜。她说天太热，瓜在井水里镇了一上午，正好吃。我凑过去看那个瓜：它比我家买的小一圈，圆溜溜的，皮是浅绿的，带着深绿的波浪纹，被井水泡得凉凉的，摸一下手心全是水珠，像刚从冰箱里拿出来，又不一样，它的水珠是活的，一颗一颗会滚。

奶奶把瓜放到砧板上，拿起菜刀。她切瓜跟别人不一样，先在瓜顶上开一个圆盖子，像揭锅盖。盖子一揭，一股凉气冒出来，红瓤黑籽露出来，瓤中间还裂着几道缝，奶奶说这叫沙瓤，甜。她把盖子扣回去，又顺着瓜把整个切成瓣，一刀一刀，汁水顺着刀背流，砧板湿了一大片，闻着又清又甜。

我们坐在院子里的老槐树下吃瓜。我捧起一瓣，先咬中间最甜的那一口，凉丝丝的，甜味从舌尖一直走到嗓子眼，瓤是沙的，一粒一粒在嘴里化开，籽不多，黑亮的几颗排在边上。爷爷吃得快，一瓣瓜转眼见了白。我学他的样子，把红瓤啃到只剩一层白边，白边也啃掉一小口，苦苦的，不好吃，我呸掉，爷爷大笑，说瓜皮是好东西，能炒着吃。

后来我们比赛谁能把籽吐进墙根的鸡食盆。我连吐四颗，中了三颗，奶奶拍手，说俺孙子眼力好。鸡真的过来啄那些籽，啄得头一点一点。

最后一瓣瓜，奶奶留给我。我抱着它从树荫这头走到那头，走得慢，舍不得吃完。瓜汁顺着手腕往下流，黏黏的，太阳底下亮晶晶。

下午我睡午觉，梦里还在啃一瓣永远啃不完的西瓜。离开奶奶家那天，我把井台看了好几眼。后来在城里吃过冰镇西瓜、切好的西瓜盒，都没有那个味道。我知道差的不是瓜，是那口凉凉的井水，和奶奶揭锅盖一样揭开瓜顶的那一刀。

# The Melon Chilled in Well Water

I love watermelon. The most glorious time I ever ate one was at Grandma’s village home, a melon that had been bathed in well water.

At the end of July I went back to the countryside with Mother and Father to visit Grandma. At noon the heat made even the dog lie in the gateway with its tongue out. Grandma lifted a net bag up from the well, and inside was the watermelon she had lowered into the well that morning. She said the weather was too hot, so the melon had taken a bath in well water all morning, just right to eat now. I went close to look at it. It was a ring smaller than the ones we buy at home, round and smooth, its rind pale green with wavy dark stripes. Chilled by the well water, it felt cool to the touch, and its beads of water were alive, rolling one by one down my palm, not like anything from a fridge.

Grandma set the melon on the chopping board and took up the knife. She cut it differently from anyone else, first opening a round lid on the top, like lifting the lid of a pot. When the lid came off, a cool breath rose out, showing red flesh and black seeds. The flesh had a few cracks in the middle. Grandma said this is sandy flesh, the sweet kind. She put the lid back, then cut the whole melon into wedges, stroke after stroke, juice running down the back of the knife, the board wet all over, the air clear and sweet.

We sat under the old locust tree in the yard to eat. I lifted a wedge and bit first at the very center, the sweetest point. It was cool and thin like water, and the sweetness walked from my tongue tip all the way down my throat. The flesh was sandy, grain by grain melting in my mouth. The seeds were few, a few glossy black ones lined up at the edge. Grandfather ate fast, and one wedge turned white in a flash. I copied him, gnawing the red flesh down to only a white rim, then took a bite of the white rim too. Bitter, not good. I spat it out, and Grandfather roared with laughter, saying melon rind is a fine thing, good stir-fried.

Later we had a contest: whoever could spit seeds into the chicken feed bowl by the wall. I spat four and hit three. Grandma clapped and said her grandson has sharp eyes. The chickens really came over to peck those seeds, their heads bobbing.

The last wedge, Grandma saved for me. I held it and walked slowly from one end of the shade to the other, unwilling to finish. Melon juice ran down my wrist, sticky and sparkling in the sun.

At nap time I dreamed I was still gnawing a wedge that could never be finished. On the day we left, I looked at the well many times. Since then I have eaten iced watermelon and cut melon boxes in the city, none with that taste. I know what was missing was not the melon. It was that cool well water, and the cut Grandma made when she lifted the top of the melon like the lid of a pot.