巷口的西瓜摊

蝉声一密，巷口就多了一辆卡车，车厢上蒙着湿麻袋，麻袋底下压着一车西瓜。司机把车停稳，掀开麻袋一角，随手拍了一个，听声，点头，又盖回去。我和伙伴绕着车轮转，数瓜，数到一半就被大人喊回家吃饭。

卖瓜的是个黑瘦的中年人，戴一顶洗白的草帽。他支起一块纸板，用毛笔写本地沙瓤不甜不要钱。傍晚收工的人流涌过来，他的吆喝声就起来了：西瓜，沙瓤的西瓜。声音拖得长，从巷头拉到巷尾，谁家窗户听见了，纱门一响，人就摇着蒲扇下来了。

挑瓜不用挑。他看人下刀，刀尖往瓜腰上一碰，瓜自己裂开，红瓤翻出来，汁水顺着刀口淌，沙粒一样的瓤在夕阳里发亮。熟得正好，他把最中间那心子切下来，递给围着看的小孩。我接过来，一口咬下去，甜到眉毛里，籽沾在嘴角，舍不得吐。

奶奶坐在瓜摊边的石墩上摇蒲扇，扇风，也赶蚊子。她跟卖瓜人讨价，一毛一分地磨，磨到最后自己先笑了，多塞了两个小瓜进网兜。回家路上蒲扇搁在膝头晃，网兜里的瓜撞着我的小腿，一下一下，像巷子的心跳。

瓜摊在巷口待了整整一个夏天。立秋过后，卡车来得一天比一天晚，瓜也一天比一天少，吆喝声里添了句清仓。最后那天，卖瓜人把纸板翻过来，用背面记下一笔一笔的赊账，奶奶的那几笔，母亲替她还了。卡车走的时候，巷口的地上留下一小摊水渍，太阳一晒就干了，像什么都没发生过。

后来巷子拆了，卡车和纸板都不见了。夏天再吃西瓜，都是冰箱里拿出来的，切得整整齐齐，装在盘子里。可我还是想念那一刀下去瓜自己裂开的声音，想念那声从巷头拉到巷尾的吆喝，想念蒲扇摇出来的、带着蚊香味的风。

The Watermelon Stand at the Alley Mouth

When the cicadas grew dense, a truck appeared at the mouth of the alley, its bed covered with wet gunny sacks, and watermelons pressed underneath. The driver stopped, lifted a corner of the sack, tapped one melon, listened, nodded, and covered it back up. My playmates and I circled the wheels counting melons, and halfway through we were called home for dinner by the grown-ups.

The seller was a lean, sun-blackened middle-aged man in a washed-out straw hat. He propped up a cardboard sign with brush-written characters: local sandy-flesh melons, no charge if not sweet. As the evening crowds of workers flowed in, his cry rose: watermelon, sandy-flesh watermelon. The sound stretched long from one end of the alley to the other. When a window heard it, a screen door banged, and someone came down waving a palm-leaf fan.

There was no need to pick. He cut according to the customer. The knife tip touched the waist of the melon, and the melon split open by itself, red flesh turning

out, juice running along the blade, the sandy grains of pulp shining in the setting sun. Ripe at its best, he said, and he cut out the very center piece and handed it to the children gathered around. I took a bite, and the sweetness reached my eyebrows; the seeds stuck to the corners of my mouth, and I could not bear to spit them out.

Grandma sat on the stone block beside the stand, waving her palm fan to cool herself and shoo mosquitoes. She haggled with the seller, grinding over one cent at a time, and in the end she laughed first herself and stuffed two extra small melons into the string bag. On the way home the fan rested on her lap and swayed, and the melon in the bag knocked against my calf, once and again, like the heartbeat of the alley.

The stand stayed at the alley mouth for a whole summer. After the Start of Autumn the truck came later each day, the melons grew fewer each day, and the cry picked up a line about clearing stock. On the last day the seller turned the cardboard sign over and used its back to note the credit accounts, one by one; The few lines written under Grandma were paid off by my mother. When the truck left, a small patch of water was left on the ground at the alley mouth, and the sun dried it quickly, as if nothing had happened.

Later the alley was torn down, and the truck and the cardboard sign were gone. Watermelon in later summers came out of the refrigerator, cut neat and served on a plate. Still, I miss the sound of a melon splitting open under one stroke of the knife, I miss the cry pulled from one end of the alley to the other, and I miss the wind rocked out of a palm fan, carrying the smell of mosquito coil.