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.

瓜摊前的黄昏

太阳落到楼后头去了，暑气还没散，瓜摊的灯泡先亮了。二十来个瓜码在车厢里，底下垫着旧地毯，一张纸板斜靠在车轮边。卖瓜人站在车边，胳膊搭在车厢沿上，喊一声西瓜，沙瓤的。声音不高，却把整条街的嘈杂压出一条缝来。

先停下来的是几个摇蒲扇的老人。蒲扇搁在膝盖上，有一搭没一搭地摇，眼睛却盯着瓜。一个老头弯腰拍了一个，侧着耳朵听，摇头说这个空；又拍一个，点头说这个中。卖瓜人笑着应和，夸大爷好手。刀往瓜腰上一碰，瓜自己咧开嘴，红瓤翻出来，汁水顺着刀沿滴到地毯上。灯光照着那一片红，沙瓤一粒一粒，像浸在糖水里的细珠子。

小孩是闻着甜味来的。他们不拍瓜，只围着看切，看卖瓜人把瓜心那一块递出来。递给了最小的那个。大的也不恼，仰头看天，等下一刀。蒲扇的老人买走了半个，用网兜装了，扇着扇子

慢慢走，走了几步回头叮嘱，明儿给我留个小的。留着呢，卖瓜人应得爽快。

街对面的水果店开着冷气和彩灯，瓜切好装在保鲜盒里，贴着价签。可这边摊前的人不走，他们要听那一刀下去瓜裂开的声音，要挑一个自己拍过、自己听过响的。卖瓜人不恼，吆喝一声比一声慢，反正夏夜长，西瓜管够。

卖瓜人自己不吃好瓜。切开的瓜他先递人，剩下的边皮他坐在车沿上啃，啃得慢，籽吐回地毯上，排成一小堆。有回我看见他啃到瓜心那块，停了一下，掰成两半，一半揣进兜里，说明儿带给他闺女。灯泡的光照着他背影，蒲扇的老人看见了，也没说话，第二天特意多带了把自家烙的饼给他。

收摊前，卖瓜人把最后一筐翻过来，挑出两个裂了口的，切成块，摆在车沿上，给凑过来的街坊随便拿。灯泡熄了，纸板收了，卡车发动，吆喝声跟着车走远，变成巷子深处一点模糊的响动。蒲扇的老人还坐在原处，摇着扇子，说明儿再来。

Dusk at the Watermelon Stand

The sun had dropped behind the buildings, but the heat had not cleared when the bulb at the watermelon stand lit up first. Two dozen melons were stacked in the truck bed on an old carpet, and a cardboard sign leaned against the wheel. The seller stood at the side with one arm on the bed rail and called out, watermelon, sandy flesh. Not loudly, yet the call pressed a seam through the noise of the whole street.

The first to stop were a few old people waving palm-leaf fans. The fans rested on their knees, rocking now and then, while their eyes stayed on the melons. One old man bent down, tapped one, listened sideways, and shook his head: this one is hollow. He tapped another and nodded: this one is right. The seller laughed with him and praised the old gentleman for his good hand. The knife touched the waist of the melon and the melon opened its mouth by itself, red flesh turning out, juice dripping along the blade onto the carpet. The lamplight fell on that red, the sandy pulp grain by grain, like tiny beads soaked in sugar water.

The children came following the sweetness. They did not tap melons; they just circled and watched the cutting, watching the seller hand out the heart piece of the melon. It went to the smallest one. The bigger children did not sulk; they tilted their heads to watch the sky, waiting for the next stroke of the knife. The old men with fans bought half a melon each, put them in string bags, and walked away slowly, fanning, and one turned back after a few steps to say, save me a small one tomorrow. Will do, the seller answered readily.

Across the street the fruit shop ran cold air and colored lights, with melon cut and packed in plastic boxes under price tags. But the people at this stand would not

leave. They wanted to hear the melon crack open under one stroke of the knife, and to choose one they had tapped and listened to themselves. The seller did not mind; his cry grew slower and slower, and anyway the summer night is long and there are plenty of melons.

The seller himself did not eat the good parts. He handed out the cut melon first, and sat on the bed rail gnawing the rind edges, slowly, spitting the seeds back onto the carpet in a small pile. Once I saw him reach the heart piece, pause, break it in two, and put one half into his pocket, saying he would bring it to his daughter tomorrow. The bulb lit his back, and the old man with the fan saw it and said nothing; the next day he brought an extra flatbread baked at home for him.

Before closing, he turned the last basket over, picked out two that had split, cut them into pieces, and set them on the bed rail for whoever came near. The bulb went out, the sign was packed, the truck started, and the cry traveled away with the vehicle until it became a blurred sound deep in the alley. The old men with fans still sat where they were, fanning, saying, come back tomorrow.

卖瓜人的夏天

老周凌晨四点就醒了。瓜在地头过秤，他一辆三轮往回拉，六趟，麻袋蒙顶，怕日头把瓜晒伤。到巷口时天刚亮，他把瓜一个个码上车厢，垫好旧地毯，摆正纸板。纸板上的字是老伴写的，本地沙瓤不甜不要钱，毛笔字，边角被雨水泡软了。

上午的日头一天比一天硬。他躲在伞底下打盹，手里那把蒲扇搁在肚子上，一起一伏，像是扇子自己在摇。偶尔有早买菜的人停下来，他睁开眼，扇子一放，拍瓜，听声，一刀下去，红瓤亮出来，买主点头，掏钱，他递过去，说声回见。

傍晚才是他的时候。他把灯泡拉亮，吆喝声起来：西瓜，沙瓤的西瓜。这一嗓子他喊了十一个夏天，从巷头喊到巷尾，连巷口小卖部的收音机都听熟了，他一开腔，收音机就把音量拧小。熟客不用挑，他看人下刀：给老人挑沙瓤，甜软；给年轻人挑脆沙，爽口；给小孩留瓜心，最甜的那一块他切下来递过去，小孩嘴角沾着籽，他看着笑。

有一年夏天雨多，瓜卖不动，老周把车停在巷口三天，天天把瓜翻一遍个儿，怕闷坏。第四天出了日头，他吆喝得比哪天都响，那天的瓜格外甜，街坊都说雨后的瓜养住了。他嘴上应着，心里记着另一笔账：瓜经不起等，人经不起闲，吆喝一停，一个夏天就过去了。

收摊前，裂口的瓜留不住，他就切成块摆在车沿上，谁路过谁拿一块。蒲扇的老人、跳完舞的阿姨、放学的孩子，一人一块，站在灯底下吃完，说今年的瓜甜。老周应着，手里蒲扇摇起来，赶蚊子，也赶一天剩下的热气。

卡车开走时街已经安静了。他盘算着明天进什么瓜，盘算着再过半个月瓜就少了。蒲扇搁回

肚子上，夏天还长，他的吆喝还得再喊许多个傍晚。

The Summer of a Watermelon Seller

Old Zhou woke at four in the morning. The melons were weighed in the field, and he hauled them back by tricycle, six loads, covered with gunny sacks against the sun. By the time he reached the alley mouth the sky was just brightening. He stacked the melons one by one into the bed, padded the old carpet, and set the cardboard sign straight. The characters on the sign were written by his wife with a brush: local sandy-flesh melons, no charge if not sweet, and the corners had gone soft in the rain.

The morning sun grew harder day by day. He dozed under the umbrella, that palm-leaf fan of his resting on his belly, rising and falling as if the fan were waving itself. Now and then an early shopper stopped, and he opened his eyes, set the fan down, tapped a melon, listened, and with one stroke of the knife the red flesh shone out. The buyer nodded, paid, and he handed it over with a see you next time.

Evening was his hour. He pulled the bulb lit, and his cry rose: watermelon, sandy-flesh watermelon. He had shouted this voice for eleven summers, from one end of the alley to the other, until even the radio at the corner shop knew it by heart: the moment he started, the radio turned itself down. Regulars did not need to pick; he cut according to the person. For old people he chose sandy pulp, sweet and soft; for the young, crisp and sandy; for children he kept the heart of the melon, the sweetest piece, cut out and handed over while seeds stuck to their mouths, and he watched and smiled.

One rainy summer the melons would not sell, and Old Zhou parked the cart at the alley mouth for three days, turning every melon end over end each day for fear of the damp. On the fourth day the sun came out, and he shouted louder than on any day. The melons that day were sweeter than usual, and the neighbors all said rain-fed melons hold their sugar. He agreed out loud while keeping another account in his heart: melons cannot wait, and a seller cannot idle; once the cry stops, a summer is gone.

Before closing, melons that had split could not be kept, so he cut them into pieces on the bed rail, and whoever passed by took a piece. The old men with fans, the aunties back from dancing, the children out of school, one piece each, eaten standing under the light, saying this year the melons are sweet. Old Zhou answered yes, his palm fan waving, shooing mosquitoes and shooing the last heat of the day.

When the truck drove off the street was quiet. He figured out what melons to buy tomorrow, and figured that in half a month the melons would start to run low. The fan

went back onto his belly. The summer is still long, and his cry has many more evenings to go.