

His son walked over with a plate of watermelon slices. “Here ya go Dad, it’s actually a really ripe one. Wouldn’t have been the first time I bought an under-ripe melon.”

“I’m sure it’s fine,” the man grumbled, barely audible. His son just smiled and nodded, returning to the kitchen counter.

The man looked down at the plate of red slices, glistening with juice and peppered with white and black seeds. He lifted a piece with his shaking and bruised hands, then took a bite. The fruit dispersed effortlessly in his mouth, and he was able to swallow it down. What a blessing that was. Swallowing and chewing had become so difficult, and he drooled constantly. He would keep a tissue handy, but half of the time he had drool on his chin without knowing it. Damn Parkinson’s. But his son had been right, this watermelon was perfect. He hadn’t had watermelon in so long, he had forgotten how good it was. He gingerly took another bite. He felt a bit of juice dribble down his chin. He reached for a napkin and tried to wipe it away. His hands continued to shake, trying to regain any semblance of control. Finally, he resigned himself to just taking another bite of watermelon. As he lifted the piece to his mouth again, he remembered another time when watermelon had been the centerpiece of his meal.

*They had been in Korea for some time when they had found the field of watermelons. For three weeks they had been the only infantry division there, holding the lines alongside the ROK. They had been stationed in Japan, and they had been closest when North Korea had attacked the South. They had been the first soldiers there. Was it three weeks, or an eternity? An eternity of pushing back and holding position. Of going behind enemy lines on recon missions and bringing back the bodies, or sometimes parts, of friends. To take home to their families. It was better than nothing at all. Leaving them to rest in Korea, in a place where no one would see them again. He remembered one mission where he had jumped on the car and as they rode away he had been hit by a piece of shrapnel. He had nearly shit himself, thinking he had been shot. He hated it all: the fear, the killing, the shooting, the body parts, and the smells. Even the watermelons, a welcome treat at first, had hidden toxins in their red innards.*