

THE WATERMELON

Fred and Frank lived about a block from their grandma Benedict's home. On their way home from school or the village store, they often stopped for a visit with grandma. She was pleased even if she suspected their main interest was in the pantry cookie jar, or the bread and wild honey sandwiches waiting for them.

Grandma was proud of her flowers, and especially of her fruits and vegetables. Seeds for these had been brought from the east and carefully treasured. The little boys liked flowers well enough--they were always willing to carry an armful of lilies of the valley or phlox or sweet williams home to their mother--but the vegetable garden--that was really worth while! Armed with salt cellars they pulled from the ground and ate young carrots and rutabagas, cucumbers and tomatoes. No fruit properly washed and peeled to be served on a dining room table could possibly taste like these! But the last word of gustatory delicacy were the muskmelons and watermelons which ran all over the lower end of the garden. These were Grandma's special pets and only when the final approval was given could one be picked and eaten.

Fred and Frank had watched the growth of one particular watermelon since it was only as big as a walnut. Day by day it grew--first to the size of a lemon; then an orange; a squash; and finally it was the biggest thing in the garden.

When it was an enormous bright green elongated ball with dark spots all over it, the children made daily visits to the lower garden after school, patting and thumping the huge melon the way they had seen grandma do. Each day they hoped Grandma would say, "Boys, the melon is ready to eat," but their mouths watered in vain.

One evening as the boys were playing in the yard, Fred said to Frank--or Frank said to Fred--(I am sure both had the thought at the same time), "That melon would taste awful good tonight!" And Frank (or Fred) replied, "Let's go up and look at it!"

So, by the light of the moon they went up the street, not by the road or walk, but back of the houses over the fences till they came to grandma's garden from the rear. Quietly they climbed the fence. Quietly, with their pocket knives, they cut off the big melon; then sitting in the fence corner, they ate and ate and ate. They ate till nearly every scrap of that huge melon was gone, all the beautiful pink pulp, a few of the seeds, and very probably, some of the rind.

Then they went home. Somehow the fences were harder to climb on the way back, and they didn't talk much. They went to bed without the usual argument--their mother looked at them a little sharply, but it wasn't till midnight that she learned the reason why.

Fred and Frank were very ill. They were so ill they were first afraid they were going to die, then they were afraid they weren't.

In the morning, when they were able to get up, pale and wan, their mother (although smiling a little inside) said gravely, "Now boys, you know what you must do now; you must go to Grandma's and confess to her that you stole and ate the prize melon she was so carefully saving for the fair! I know she will feel very badly!"

Fred looked at Frank and Frank looked at Fred. They wondered how mother knew!