一颗苹果的自述

我在烟台的果园里长大，枝头离地一米二，风一来，我跟着晃一下。六岁那年春天，果农给我套上一个纸袋，我在袋子里晒太阳，从青色慢慢晒出红边。十月初，剪刀咔嚓一响，我离开了枝头。托住我的那只手很稳，指腹有厚厚的茧。我被轻轻放进垫了报纸的筐，身边躺着一百多个兄弟姐妹，谁也不挤谁。果农在筐边钉了一块小牌，写着头天摘的。夜里山上凉，我们一筐一筐码在院墙下过夜，露水在纸袋上洇出小点。

第三天，一辆货车来接我们。车厢底板铺着旧毯子，筐与筐之间塞着草垫。发动机一响，我们知道要出远门了。山路颠，我听见旁边筐里有个兄弟闷叫了一声——他滚出来磕在筐沿上，第二天他那块伤就褐了。夜里上高速，车厢里安静，只有轮胎的嗡嗡声。我有点怕，也有一点盼：果农说过，好苹果是进城给人吃的，烂在山上的苹果最没出息。

天亮时车停在城郊的批发市场。灯底下，有人掀开我们的纸袋看脸色，有人掂我们的分量。磕伤的兄弟被单独拣出来，放进一个便宜筐，当天就被一个开水果店的女人买走，回家洗洗直接吃了——他后来跟别人讲，那一口咬下去的时候，他觉得自己值了。我们这一筐成色好，被贴上价签，摆进一家超市的冷柜，冷柜的风吹得我们个个挂着水珠，好看。

一个背书包的初中生把我们这筐端到收银台，挑了四个，装进塑料袋。他妈妈把我们在客厅茶几的果盘里摆好，像摆四个小灯笼。我在果盘里等了两天，看那个初中生写作业、吃饭、出门，果盘就在台灯边上。第三天傍晚，他写完作业，伸手拿起我，先在水龙头下冲了一遍，然后一口咬下来。那一口很认真，不是随手一咬。他说真甜。我这一路的剪刀、纸袋、毯子、草垫、夜路、冷柜的风，到这一口，全都值了。

果盘里还剩三个兄弟。第二天早上，初中生把其中一个装进书包带去学校，中午和同学一人一半分了。你看，被认真对待的食物，人也会认真对待它。这就是我们苹果一路奔波，最想换到的东西。

The Confession of an Apple

I grew up in an orchard in Yantai, on a branch one meter twenty above the ground. When wind came, I swayed with it. In the spring of my sixth year, a farmer slid a paper bag over me, and inside that bag I sunbathed, slowly blushing red at the edges from green. In early October, the shears went snip, and I left the branch. The hand that caught me was steady, its pads thick with calluses. I was laid gently into a basket lined with newspaper, more than a hundred of my brothers and sisters around me, none crowding another. The farmer nailed a small tag to the basket edge, writing that we were picked the day before. The mountain night was cool. Basket by basket we spent the night along the courtyard wall, dew dimpling small spots on our paper bags.

On the third day a truck came for us. The cargo floor was covered with old blankets, and straw pads were wedged between the baskets. When the engine roared, we knew we were leaving on a long journey. The mountain road bounced, and from the next

basket I heard a brother groan softly. He had rolled out and bumped the basket rim. By the next day his bruise had turned brown. At night on the expressway, the cargo bed was quiet except for the hum of tires. I felt a little afraid and a little hopeful. A farmer once said a good apple is meant to go to the city and be eaten. An apple that rots on the mountain is the most wasted of all.

At dawn the truck stopped at a wholesale market outside the city. Under the lights, people opened our paper bags to study our color, and weighed us in their palms. The bruised brother was picked out into a bargain basket, bought that same day by a woman who runs a fruit shop, washed at home, and eaten as he was. He later told others that the moment he was bitten, he felt it was all worth it. Our basket was fine-looking, so it got a price tag and sat in a supermarket cooler, where the cold wind hung beads of water on all of us, making us handsome.

A middle school student with a schoolbag carried our basket to the checkout and chose four of us into a plastic bag. His mother arranged us in the fruit dish on the living room table, like setting out four little lanterns. I waited two days in the dish, watching the student do homework, eat meals, leave for school. The dish sat beside his desk lamp. On the evening of the third day, he finished his homework, reached out and took me, rinsed me first under the tap, then bit down in one serious bite, not a careless one. He said it was truly sweet. My whole journey, the shears, the paper bag, the blankets, the straw pads, the night road, the cooler wind, all of it came down to that one bite, and it was worth it.

Three brothers remained in the dish. The next morning, the student put one into his schoolbag and took it to school, and at noon he split it half and half with a classmate. You see, when food is treated with care, people treat it with care in return. That is the one thing we apples hope to earn with all our traveling.