跟父亲上山的早晨

凌晨四点半，父亲的手电在果园里划出一道白光。我打着哈欠跟在他身后，露水打湿了鞋面。苹果园在山上，天亮前摘果是这家的老规矩，凉快，果子也硬实。父亲教我转着摘：手托住果子往上一抬一拧，蒂留在枝上，指甲绝不能掐进果皮。他摘下的苹果一个个放进纸筐，筐里垫着旧报纸，他说果皮上那一层白霜是护着果子的，擦掉了反而不耐放。

我一开始图快，胡噜下来好几个，父亲拿起一个被我掐出指甲印的，递给我看：印子第二天就会发褐，一路颠到城里，这一筐都得跟着烂。我从此学着他的样子，轻抬轻拧，把每颗果子轻轻放进筐里，像放鸡蛋。太阳出来时，我们爷俩装了满满六筐，我的胳膊酸得抬不起来，手掌上勒出两道红印。我坐在田埂上喝水，看着那些筐，第一次觉得一颗苹果从枝头到我的书包，中间隔着的是这样一早上。

上午九点，果商的小货车上山了。装筐时父亲和司机把每一筐立稳、塞紧，不让它们在路上晃。我爬上了驾驶室，说要送苹果进城。车在山路上颠，每过一个坑，我就回头看一眼货厢，父亲说别担心，垫着呢。下了山转上公路，风从车窗灌进来，货厢里苹果的味道隐隐约约飘进来，一路若有若无。中午车停在城郊的批发市场，搬运工把筐卸下来，过秤，父亲一笔一笔记账。有几筐品相好的，被一家超市拉走；剩下的进了水果店。

傍晚回家，母亲从果商留给我们的一小箱里洗了两个苹果，摆进客厅那只青花果盘。我拿起自己摘的那颗——就是被我掐过一下、又被父亲挑出来放进自家箱子的——咬下去，脆，甜，带一点清晨露水的凉。母亲说明天给你带去学校。我看着果盘里那几颗苹果，红的黄的，安安静静摆着。它们经过父亲的手、纸筐、山路、货厢、秤盘，最后到了我家桌上。从今往后，我每次拿起苹果，都会先想起凌晨四点半的那道手电光。食物不该被随手浪费，因为每一颗的来路上，都站着一些起大早的人。

The Morning I Went Up the Mountain with Father

At half past four in the morning, the flashlight in Father's hand drew a white line through the orchard. I followed behind him, yawning, my shoes soaked by dew. The apple orchard sits on the mountain, and picking before dawn is the old rule of this farm: it is cooler, and the fruit is firmer. Father taught me to pick by twisting: support the fruit with your hand, lift it up, give it a twist, leave the stem on the branch, and never dig your nails into the skin. He placed each apple into a paper basket lined with old newspaper. That white frost on the skin protects the fruit, he said; scrub it off and the apple will not keep.

At first I rushed and knocked down several carelessly. Father picked up one with my nail mark on it and showed me: the mark will turn brown by the next day, and by the time the basket reaches the city, the whole basket will rot along with it. After that I copied his way, lifting and twisting gently, setting each fruit into the

basket like an egg. When the sun rose, we had filled six full baskets. My arms ached too much to lift, and two red strap marks were pressed into my palms from the basket handles. I sat on the field ridge drinking water, looking at those baskets, and for the first time felt how long the road is from a branch to my schoolbag.

At nine in the morning, the fruit buyer's small truck came up the mountain. While loading, Father and the driver stood every basket upright and wedged them tight so they would not shake on the road. I climbed into the cab, saying I would deliver the apples to the city. The truck bounced along the mountain road, and at every pothole I turned to check the cargo bed. Father said do not worry, they are padded. Down the mountain and onto the highway, wind poured through the window, and the faint smell of apples drifted in from the cargo bed all the way. At noon the truck stopped at a wholesale market outside the city. Workers unloaded the baskets, weighed them, and Father wrote down every entry in his ledger. A few baskets of fine fruit went to a supermarket; the rest went into fruit shops.

That evening at home, Mother washed two apples from the small box the buyer left for our family and set them in the blue-and-white fruit dish in the living room. I picked up the one I had picked myself, the one with my small nail mark that Father had saved into our own box, and bit into it. Crisp, sweet, with a coolness of morning dew. Mother said she would pack one for my school bag tomorrow. I looked at the apples in the dish, red and yellow, resting quietly. They had passed through Father's hands, paper baskets, the mountain road, the cargo bed, the scale, and finally our table. From now on, every time I pick up an apple, I will first think of that flashlight beam at half past four in the morning. Food should not be thrown away carelessly, because standing along the road of every single fruit are people who wake before dawn.

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.

果盘里的来路

大巴在十点拐进山沟里的果园，周雨辰趴在车窗上看呆了。苹果树一排一排站得整齐，果子压得枝条往下弯，红的一片、黄的一片。班主任说今天秋游的任务是摘苹果，一人摘满一筐。园主老隋迎出来，手掌宽得像蒲扇，他先给全班演示：一手托果，一手捏蒂，往上一送再一旋。他说摘果跟摘脾气不一样，手重了，果子当时不哭，三天以后它自己烂给你看。

周雨辰头一回知道苹果要这样摘。她托着一颗红苹果，捏着蒂，手上用了三分劲，果子稳稳落进掌心，果蒂留在枝上，一点伤都没有。她越摘越慢，越摘越轻，把筐里的果子一个个码平。同组的男生图快，把果子扔进筐，老隋走过去，捡起一颗带擦痕的，没批评，只说这颗他留下自己吃，剩下的都进城。男生们后来都学着轻拿轻放。中午收工，全班摘了四十多筐，果园空地上堆成一座小山。

下午返校前，老隋在果园口的棚子里打包寄往城里的苹果。纸箱里有一个个纸托，每颗苹果单独躺一格，箱口封三层胶带。老隋一边封箱一边跟帮工的家长说，这批走快递，两天到，颠不坏。周雨辰帮他把一箱箱搬到快递三轮上，箱角上盖着红戳：本周现摘。她想起自己摘的那筐里也有几颗会被这样装进纸托，心里忽然有点骄傲。

一周后的晚上，周雨辰家楼下快递站打来电话。她父亲搬上来一箱，开箱，纸托里一颗颗苹果躺得整整齐齐，箱底压着一张字条，是老隋托人捎的：秋游那帮娃娃摘的，挑了几颗顶好的寄来。母亲把苹果擦净，摆进餐边柜上的白瓷果盘。周雨辰看着果盘，从抽屉里翻出一块干净纱布，垫在果盘底下。她母亲笑她讲究，她说这是老隋教的，果子要垫着。那几天她吃苹果都挑自己秋游摘过的那种红富士，咬一口，脆甜里带着一点山风的味道。她开始明白，一颗苹果从树上到果

盘，中间是那么多双手。浪费它，就是辜负那些手。

The Road Inside the Fruit Dish

The bus turned into the mountain orchard at ten in the morning, and Zhou Yuchen pressed her face to the window, stunned. Apple trees stood row after row in good order, their branches bending down under the weight of fruit, patches of red, patches of yellow. The head teacher said today's field trip task was picking apples, one full basket each. The orchard owner, Old Sui, came out to meet them, his palm wide as a palm-leaf fan. He demonstrated for the whole class first: one hand supports the fruit, one hand pinches the stem, lift it up and give a twist. Picking fruit, he said, is nothing like plucking a temper. If your hand is heavy, the fruit will not cry at the time; three days later it will rot on its own and show you.

It was Zhou Yuchen's first time learning that apples must be picked this way. She supported a red apple, pinched the stem, used three-tenths of her strength, and the fruit settled steadily into her palm, the stem left on the branch without a scratch. She picked slower and slower, gentler and gentler, leveling the fruit in her basket one by one. The boys in her group hurried and tossed apples into the basket. Old Sui walked over, picked up one with a scuff mark, criticized no one, and simply said he would keep this one for himself and everything else would go to the city. After that the boys all learned to handle them gently. At noon the picking ended. The class had filled more than forty baskets, piled into a small mountain in the open ground of the orchard.

Before the bus left in the afternoon, Old Sui was packing apples for the city in the shed at the orchard gate. Inside each carton sat paper cradles, every apple lying in its own compartment, and the box seams were taped three times. Sealing boxes, he told the parents who were helping: this batch goes by courier, two days, it will not get bruised. Zhou Yuchen helped him carry carton after carton onto the courier's tricycle. The box corners bore a red stamp: freshly picked this week. She remembered that among the apples in her own basket, a few would be packed into paper cradles like this, and a small pride rose in her heart.

One week later in the evening, the courier station downstairs called. Her father carried a carton up. He opened it, and apples lay in neat rows in their paper cradles. Under them was a note Old Sui had asked someone to deliver: picked by those field-trip children; we chose the best few and sent them to you. Her mother wiped the apples clean and arranged them in the white porcelain fruit dish on the sideboard. Zhou Yuchen looked at the dish, then dug out a clean gauze cloth from the drawer and laid it under the dish. Her mother laughed at her fussiness. She said Old Sui taught

her that fruit needs padding. For days afterward, whenever she ate an apple she chose the Fuji kind she had picked on the trip, and one bite gave a crisp sweetness with a taste of mountain wind in it. She began to understand that between a tree and a fruit dish stand so many hands. To waste the fruit is to betray those hands.