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.