一颗桃的夏天

我是一枚桃子，住在院子中央那棵歪脖子树上。清明前后，小主人还在树上开过花，粉白的花瓣落了我一头。后来花瓣谢了，我和兄弟姐妹们一个个从青豆子大小，长成了拳头大小。

五月初，外婆架起竹梯，把我和一个纸袋一起安顿下来。袋口用细铁丝拧着，只留一条缝透气。起初我闷得慌，外头的声音都变了样，蜜蜂落在袋子上，嗡嗡声像隔了一层水。外婆隔着袋子摸了摸我，说，再等等，还硬着呢。

我在袋子里数日子。白天太阳晒热纸壁，我身上一点点发软；夜里凉下来，露水顺着铁丝缝渗进来一点。我闻见自己身上的味道一天比一天浓——那是甜在往外走。袋外头，蝉从第一声叫到了一片叫。

袋子里我也没闲着。我听见树下的日常：外婆清晨扫院子，笤帚一下一下；小主人蹲在树根写作业，笔尖沙沙，写错了就抓头发。有时他仰头朝我的袋子喊，桃熟了吗。外婆在屋里答，没熟，别老拽袋子，拽坏了虫子正好进去。

六月底的风掀开了我的袋口。我头一回看清外面的天，蓝得晃眼。紧接着，一只粗糙的大手把我摘了下来。外婆凑近闻了闻，对树下的孩子说，熟了，井水里镇一镇再吃。

井水凉得我打了个哆嗦。再被递到小主人手里时，他咬下我的第一口，汁水溅出来，顺着他的手腕淌下去。他喊，甜！我在他的牙齿间听见这句话。他啃到靠近我核的地方，有点酸，停了一下，还是把我吃完了，只留下一枚带红绒毛的核。

那颗核后来被小主人埋到了院墙根下。外婆看见了，也不挖出来，由它去。第二年春天，墙根冒出一芽红褐色的嫩叶，叶子还没长开，卷着，像攥紧的小拳头。

我不知道那算不算我的后代。我只记得那年的夏天：纸袋里的闷热，井水的凉，还有孩子咬下第一口时喊的那声甜。树上的桃子年年都结，可被记住的，总是被咬开的那一颗。

One Peach's Summer

I am a peach, living on the leaning tree in the middle of the yard. Around Qingming, blossoms opened all over my branches and the little master used to shake petals onto my head. Then the petals fell, and my brothers and sisters and I grew one by one from the size of a green bean to the size of a fist.

In early May, Grandmother set up the bamboo ladder and settled me inside a paper bag. The mouth of the bag was twisted shut with thin wire, leaving only a crack for air. At first I felt stifled; every sound outside changed shape. When a bee landed on my bag, its buzzing came through as if heard through water. Grandmother felt me through the paper and said, wait a little longer, you are still hard.

Inside the bag I counted the days. By day the sun warmed the paper walls and my body softened bit by bit; at night it cooled and a little dew seeped in along the

wire crack. I could smell my own scent growing stronger each day, sweetness moving outward. Outside my bag, the cicadas grew from one voice into a chorus.

I was not idle inside the bag either. I overheard the life below the tree: Grandmother sweeping the yard at dawn, the broom one stroke after another; the little master squatting at the tree roots doing homework, his pen scratching, pulling at his hair whenever he made a mistake. Sometimes he looked up and shouted at my bag, are the peaches ripe yet. Grandmother answered from inside the house, not yet, stop tugging at the bags, tear them open and the insects will walk right in.

At the end of June the wind flipped my bag open. For the first time I saw the sky, blue enough to dazzle. Then a rough big hand picked me. Grandmother sniffed me and told the child under the tree, ripe, chill it in the well water first.

The well water was so cold it made me shiver. When the little master bit into me, my juice splashed out and ran down his wrist. He shouted, sweet! I heard that word between his teeth. Near my stone the flesh turned a little sour, he paused, then finished me anyway, leaving only a stone wearing a coat of red fuzz.

The child buried that stone at the foot of the courtyard wall. Grandmother saw it and did not dig it up; she let it be. Next spring a reddish-brown sprout came out by the wall, its leaves still rolled tight like little clenched fists.

I do not know whether that counts as my descendant. All I remember of that summer is the stuffy heat inside the paper bag, the cold of the well water, and the shout of sweet when the child took his first bite. The tree bears peaches every year, but the one remembered is always the one bitten open.