窗台上的芒果

五月三日 星期日 阴转晴

今天姑姑从海南寄来一箱芒果，箱子里垫着报纸，每个芒果单独裹着一层白泡沫网。拆开一个，青皮，硬得像石头。姑姑在电话里说，别急着吃，先在屋里放几天。

我把芒果放在窗台上，每天看它。头两天它一点变化也没有，皮还是青的。第三天，青色从蒂头开始退，黄从那边慢慢漫过来，像一滴黄颜料在水里化开。第四天我伸手摸，表皮还是滑的，可是指头按下去有了印子，软软的，回弹很慢。凑近闻，有一股浓郁的甜香，比橘子香得多，有点像花蜜，又有点像熟透的香蕉。我知道，它熟了。

吃之前我还做了一件事。我把箱子里没熟的青芒果一个一个检查，有伤的挑出来先吃，完好的垫上报纸放回纸箱，纸箱搬到柜子顶上，怕妹妹拿去当球踢。数了数，一共八个，加上窗台这个，正好够全家吃几天。我在纸箱外贴了张纸条，写：芒果，别踢。字是倒着贴的，妹妹看不懂，还是踢了一脚，被妈妈发现了。

晚上我学着大人的样子切芒果。先把芒果立在案板上，它站不稳，滚了一下，我按住它，刀从离核两指的地方切下去，切下两片厚厚的果肉，中间剩下带肉的核。然后我拿刀尖在果肉上划格子，横五刀，竖五刀，手抖，有一刀划破了皮，露出一点红。妈妈说划破了也能吃，只是不好看。我把皮往上一顶，格子翻出一个个小方块，黄得发亮，可惜破的那一角塌了。

我低头咬翻出来的果肉。第一口汁就爆出来，甜得齁，舌头上像抹了糖。果肉细，几乎不用嚼，就是纤维挂在牙上，一根一根的。核上剩的那层肉我舍不得扔，对着核啃，啃得满脸汁，妹妹在旁边笑我像小花猫。我们俩一人一半，她吃方块，我啃核，吃到最后手指黏得合不拢，去洗了三回手。

我在日记里画了一个芒果，旁边写：摸过、闻过、切过、咬过，它才真正是甜的。姑姑说明年还寄，我要留一个放到最熟，最软的那天再吃。

The Mango on the Windowsill

May 3, Sunday, cloudy then sunny

Today my aunt mailed a box of mangoes all the way from Hainan. The box was padded with newspaper, and each mango wore its own sleeve of white foam netting. I unwrapped one: green skin, hard as a stone. Over the phone Aunt said, do not hurry, leave them in the room for a few days first.

I set the mango on the windowsill and watched it daily. For the first two days it showed no change at all, still green. On the third day the green began to retreat from the stem end, and yellow crept in from that side, slow as a drop of yellow dye spreading in water. On the fourth day I reached out and touched it: the skin was still smooth, but my finger left a dent when I pressed, soft, springing back very

slowly. Brought close to the nose it gave off a rich sweet fragrance, far stronger than an orange, something like flower nectar and something like an overripe banana. I knew it was ready.

Before eating I did one more thing. I checked the unripe green mangoes still in the box one by one, set the bruised ones aside to eat first, and laid the perfect ones back on newspaper in the carton, which I moved to the top of the cupboard for fear my sister would use them as a ball. Counting them: eight in all, and with this one on the windowsill, exactly enough for the family for several days. I stuck a note on the carton that read, mangoes, do not kick. I pasted it on upside down; my sister could not read it and kicked the carton anyway, and Mom caught her.

At night I tried cutting the mango the way grown-ups do. I stood it on the cutting board, but it could not keep its balance and rolled once; I held it down and ran the knife in two fingers' width from the stone, taking off two thick slabs of flesh and leaving the meat-clad stone in the middle. Then I scored the flesh with the knife tip, five cuts one way, five the other. My hand trembled and one cut broke through the skin, showing a little red. Mom said a broken cut is still fine to eat, only not pretty. I pushed the skin upward and the grid flipped into little cubes shining yellow, though the broken corner had collapsed.

I bent my head and bit into the flipped flesh. The first bite burst with juice, sweet enough to catch in the throat, as if sugar had been painted onto my tongue. The flesh was fine-grained and needed almost no chewing, only fibers hung on the teeth strand by strand. I could not bear to waste the layer of meat left on the stone, so I gnawed against it and ended up with juice all over my face, and my little sister laughed at me for looking like a small spotted cat. We split the mango between us, one each: she ate the cubes and I gnawed the stone, until our fingers were too sticky to close and we washed them three times.

In my diary I drew a mango and wrote beside it: only after it has been touched, smelled, cut, and bitten does it truly become sweet. Aunt said she will send more next year, and I mean to keep one until it is the ripest and softest of all, and eat it on that day.