停电那晚的芒果沙拉

十一月十四日，星期六，傍晚忽然停了电。冰箱不能开，妈妈提议把快放不住的芒果和苹果赶紧做成果盘，就当晚饭后的点心。说干就干，她拿手机照明，我拎布袋下楼去超市补两样。货架前我捏了捏芒果，硬的像石头，软的又塌了手指，挑了两个不软不硬、凑近果蒂能闻到甜味的。收银员说今晚这一片都停了，超市里反而热闹，好多人围着买蜡烛和雪糕。回家路上我想，停电也没那么糟。

妈妈把果盘端到窗边，趁最后一点天光开工。她削苹果皮，刀贴着果皮转，果皮连成一长条不断，像削苹果比赛里的动作。她教芒果切法：顺着核在皮里划一个井字，刀别划穿皮，然后两手一顶，皮里的果肉就翻成一朵花开着，拿勺一刮就下来。我学着划，井字歪歪扭扭，顶出来的花也缺了瓣，妈妈笑说缺瓣的花也甜。切到一半，天彻底黑了，我们点起两根蜡烛，把碗盘往烛光边挪。烛光里切橙子，刀影在碗壁上晃，香蕉片切得比平时厚。

摆盘是爸爸打着手机手电完成的：苹果和芒果垫底，橙子片围一圈，香蕉片压在外圈，圣女果当纽扣。沙拉酱在黑暗里挤歪了，顺着碗沿淌下来一点，像给果盘描了道白边。烛光下整碗水果亮亮的，谁的手影伸过来都会变成一大片。

品尝在客厅进行。爸爸第一勺就舀到芒果，说甜；妈妈说那是芒果本身甜，酱只是陪衬。我给自己多添了两片芒果，边吃边想，原来挑芒果要按软硬，原来妈妈削皮的手艺是练出来的。灯还没来，我们围着蜡烛把果盘吃得见底。我在日记本上写：希望明天再停电一次，好让我练熟芒果的切法，下次停电，换我主刀。

The Mango Salad on the Night the Power Went Out

November 14th, Saturday. The power went out suddenly in the evening. The fridge could not be opened, so Mom suggested turning the mangoes and apples that were close to turning into a fruit platter, dessert after dinner. Down the stairs we went to the supermarket for two more things, my mother holding her phone as a lamp, me carrying the cloth bag. In front of the shelf I squeezed the mangoes: hard ones felt like stones, soft ones gave way under my finger. I chose two that were neither, and held the stem end to my nose for the sweet smell. The cashier said the whole block was out tonight. The store was busier because of it, full of people gathering candles and popsicles. Walking home I thought an outage was not so bad.

Mom carried the platter to the window and started while the last daylight lasted. She peeled an apple with the blade hugging the skin, the peel coming off in one long unbroken ribbon, like the moves in a peeling contest. She taught me the mango trick: score a hash mark in the skin along the pit without cutting through, then push from both hands and the flesh blooms into an open flower inside the skin, scraped off easily with a spoon. My hash mark came out crooked and the flower lost a few petals. Mom laughed and said a flower with missing petals is still sweet. Halfway through cutting, the sky went fully dark. We lit two candles and moved the bowls closer to

the flame. Cutting oranges by candlelight, the knife shadow swam on the bowl wall, and my banana slices came out thicker than usual.

Dad finished the plating with his phone flashlight: apples and mango on the bottom, orange slices in a ring, banana slices pressed around them, tomato halves as buttons. In the dark the dressing squirted crooked and a little ran down the bowl rim, drawing a white edge around the platter. Under candlelight the whole bowl of fruit glowed, and any hand reaching over threw a huge shadow.

Tasting happened in the living room. The first spoonful my father took landed on mango, and he said it was sweet. Mom said the mango itself was sweet and the dressing only kept it company. I slipped two extra mango slices onto my own plate, thinking as I ate: so mangoes are chosen by their give, and so the peeling hands of my mother were trained, not born. The lights never came back, and we finished the platter around the candles. I wrote in my diary: I hope the power goes out again tomorrow, so I can practice the mango trick, and next outage I will be the head knife.