劳动课上那只削坏的苹果

劳动课铃一响，老师把一筐苹果抬上讲台，一人一只，又说从工具柜里取出十二把削皮刀，一人一把。刀是铁皮的，柄上有年头磨出来的亮痕。老师说今天学削苹果，比谁的皮削得长、不断。

我拿到一只青苹果，一把旧刀。我把刀口搭上苹果，往下拉，刀刃在皮上打滑，拉了个空，虎口磕在苹果上，生疼。前桌回头笑了一声，又赶紧转回去。我把苹果在手里转了个面，重新卡住刀口，这回用推的，推出一小条皮，指甲盖那么长。我照这个办法一截一截地推，桌上渐渐落了一圈碎皮，像下过一场皮雨。

同桌林小满那边却顺得很。她左手转苹果，右手走刀，皮从刀缝里连续不断地吐出来，垂在她胳膊底下，像一条黄绿色的纱巾。她削到一半，皮在她手腕上绕了一圈，还没断。我看得手都忘了动。我的苹果这时候还顶着大半身绿皮，坑坑洼洼，像没刮干净的墙。

我本来想举手说老师我削不好，话到嘴边咽回去了。我把断头按回去，换个地方重新下刀，接着推。推得慢，可我不停了。苹果在我手里转，转一圈，绿皮少一条，再转一圈，又少一条。碎皮落了一桌，接不成一条带子，可苹果一寸一寸露出白肉来。

收哨的时候，讲台上比皮。林小满的皮最长，一米多，全班欢呼。老师走到我跟前，看桌上那一圈碎皮，又看我手里那只削完的苹果——削得不光，带疤，还留着几块没削净的绿，可它完完整整，一点果肉没浪费。老师把它举起来给大家看：这只苹果，皮全在桌上，一克肉没削掉。这个也算本事。稀稀拉拉的掌声里，我觉得耳朵烫。

下课，我把那只坑洼的苹果在衣角上蹭了蹭，咬下去。果肉氧化了一会儿，边上有点发黄，可咬到中间还是脆的、甜的。我嚼着往教室走，手心还全是汗，刀印子勒在指头上，一道红。

后来那只削皮刀我借了一个星期，每天给家里的苹果推一遍。碎皮慢慢变成了长皮，长皮慢慢变成了不断的皮。可我始终记得劳动课那圈碎皮，和那句一克肉没削掉。会削不断的皮是本事，把削坏的苹果削完，也是。

The Ruined Apple in Labor Class

When the labor class bell rang, the teacher carried a basket of apples onto the platform, one for each student, then took twelve peelers out of the tool cabinet, one apiece. They were tin-bladed, their handles polished bright by years of use. The teacher said today we learn to peel apples, and we compare whose peel is longest and unbroken.

I got a green apple and an old peeler. I set the blade on the apple and pulled; the edge skidded on the skin, the pull came up empty, and my knuckle banged against the apple, sharp pain. The kid in front turned around and laughed, then quickly turned back. I rotated the apple in my hand, caught the blade again, and this time pushed. A strip of peel came out, the length of a fingernail. I kept pushing strip by

strip, and by and by a ring of peel scraps gathered on my desk, like it had rained skin.

My desk mate Lin Xiaoman was sailing along. Her left hand turned the apple, her right hand walked the knife, and the peel came out of the slit in one unbroken stream, hanging under her arm like a yellow-green scarf. Halfway through, her peel had looped once around her wrist and still had not broken. I watched so hard my hands forgot to move. My apple still wore most of its green coat, pitted and patchy, like a wall not fully scraped.

I nearly raised my hand to say teacher I cannot do this, and swallowed it at the lip. I pressed the broken ends back together, started the knife somewhere new, and kept pushing. Slow, but I did not stop. The apple turned in my hand; one round, one strip of green less; another round, another strip less. The scraps piled across the desk and would never join into a ribbon, but the apple bared its white flesh inch by inch.

At the whistle, the peel contest began on the platform. Lin Xiaoman's ribbon was the longest, over a meter, and the class cheered. The teacher walked up to me, looked at the ring of scraps on my desk, then at the finished apple in my hand. It was not smooth, it carried scars and a few patches of green left unpeeled, but it was whole, and not a gram of flesh wasted. He held it up for everyone: This apple, all its peel is on the desk, not one gram of flesh cut away. That is skill too. In the scattered applause, my ears burned.

After class I rubbed the bumpy apple on my sleeve and bit into it. The flesh had oxidized a little, yellowed at the edges, but the middle was still crisp and sweet. I chewed my way back to the classroom, palms still all sweat, a red line from the knife handle pressed across my finger.

Later I kept that peeler borrowed for a week, pushing one apple a day at home. Scraps slowly became long strips, long strips slowly became an unbroken ribbon. But I always remember that ring of scraps in labor class, and the line about not one gram of flesh cut away. Peeling without breaking is skill. Finishing a ruined apple is skill too.