苹果皮断了，接上就好

奶奶生病那天，妈妈在厨房跟我说：你长大了，给奶奶削个苹果。我点头，心里却打鼓——我只见过大人削苹果，自己从来没碰过那把弯弯的削皮刀。

我从刀架上取下削皮刀。它轻得很，铁片子弯成一个小拱，中间一道细缝。我学着奶奶的样子把苹果攥在左手里，右手捏刀，刀口贴住苹果顶。可是苹果在我手里滑，刀刃在它身上打滑，吱的一声，只刮掉一层白印子。我换了个姿势，把苹果按在桌沿上，刀一推，咔，一条绿白相间的皮从刀缝里钻出来，卷成一个小筒。我心头一热，原来削皮是这样的。

皮越削越长，像一条小路绕着苹果走。我眼睛盯着那条皮，手一抖，咔哒，断了。断头卷在刀上，苹果上露出一道白茬，像路修到一半塌了。我捏着断掉的半截皮，火气上来，把刀往桌上一放：不削了，你看，全毁了。

奶奶在床上笑，声音还虚：接上呀。她说皮断了不要紧，把断头对准原来的口子，刀压上去，它就接着长了。我将信将疑，捡起那半截皮按回白茬上，刀口抵住接缝，轻轻一推——真的，新皮又从刀缝里钻出来，跟原来那条接上了，只留一个小小的疤。我长长出了口气，像把断掉的风筝线重新系好。

后半圈我削得慢。苹果在我手里转，一圈，又一圈，皮越来越长，盘在桌上像一条睡着的蛇。最后一刀收口，整条皮完整地躺在桌上，我把它摆成一个圆，比了比，正好是苹果原来的大小。原来它这么大，我头一回知道。

我把削好的苹果递给奶奶。她掰了一半给我。我咬下自己削的第一口，果肉白生生的，汁水多，甜里带一点点酸。说不上比平时好吃多少，可我嚼得特别慢。妈妈从厨房探头出来，问我甜不甜。我说甜。这甜不一样——这甜是我自己一刀一刀削出来的。

回屋我把那条完整的皮夹进字典，压平。后来我又削过很多苹果，断皮的时候少了，可我总留着那条断过又接上的皮。它提醒我：皮断了不要紧，接上，接着削，苹果照样是完整的。

The Peel Broke, Just Tie It Back On

The day grandmother fell ill, my mother said to me in the kitchen: You are growing up, go peel an apple for her. I nodded, but my heart was drumming. I had only ever watched grown-ups peel apples; I had never touched that curved peeling knife myself.

I took the peeler from the knife rack. It was very light, a blade bent into a small arch with a narrow slit in the middle. I copied grandmother, gripping the apple in my left hand, pinching the knife in my right, setting the edge against the top of the apple. But the apple slipped in my hand, the blade skidded on its skin, and with a squeak it only scraped off a white mark. I changed my stance, braced the apple

against the edge of the table, and pushed the knife. Click. A green-and-white ribbon of peel curled up through the slit into a little tube. My chest warmed. So this is how peeling works.

The peel grew longer, like a path winding around the apple. My eyes stayed on the path, my hand trembled, and with a snap it broke. The broken end curled on the knife, a raw white scar showed on the apple, like a road collapsed halfway through its building. I held the broken half of the peel, anger rising, and dropped the knife on the table: I quit. Look, it is all ruined.

Grandmother laughed from her bed, her voice still weak: Tie it back on. She said a broken peel does not matter. Line the broken end up with the original cut, press the knife over it, and it keeps growing. Half doubting, I laid the torn half back on the raw scar, set the blade at the seam, and pushed gently. Truly, new peel came through the slit and joined the old ribbon, leaving only a small scar. I breathed out long, like retying a snapped kite string.

I peeled the second half slowly. The apple turned in my hand, one round, another round, the peel longer and longer, coiled on the table like a sleeping snake. The last stroke closed the circle, and the whole ribbon lay on the table. I arranged it into a ring and compared it with the apple. It was exactly the size the apple had been. So it had been this big. I knew that for the first time.

I handed the peeled apple to grandmother. She broke off half for me. I bit my first bite of my own peeling. The flesh was snow-white, full of juice, sweet with a thread of sour in it. It was not much tastier than usual, yet I chewed very slowly. My mother peeked out of the kitchen and asked if it was sweet. I said sweet. This sweetness was different. This sweetness I had peeled out myself, stroke by stroke.

Back in my room I pressed the unbroken peel into my dictionary to flatten it. I have peeled many apples since, and break the peel less often, but I still keep that ribbon that broke and was joined again. It reminds me: a broken peel does not matter. Tie it back on, keep peeling, and the apple is whole all the same.

生日那天的苹果蛋糕

妈妈的生日赶上我值日，回家天都黑了。她在厨房煮面，灶上的火光一跳一跳。我站在厨房门口，兜里揣着从学校带回来的那只苹果，红皮的，是我用攒的零花钱买的。

我想给她削一只苹果，就当生日蛋糕。可我从来没削过。平时只见妈妈一手转苹果一手走刀，皮像一条不断的带子。我偷偷看过很多次，手却一次没练过。

我回屋关上门，从文具盒里翻出美术课用的削皮刀。塑料柄，刀头是锯齿状的小轮。我把它攥在手里，攥得出汗。苹果抵在桌角，刀轮卡住顶端，往下拉——滋，皮没削下来，苹果上犁出几道浅沟。我调整角度，让刀轮贴紧果皮，重新拉。这回皮出来了，细细一条，断断续续，像一条走得跌跌撞撞的绳子。

削到一半，咔，断了。断掉的皮缩在我手心里，苹果上豁开一道白印。我盯着那道白印，鼻子发酸。妈妈在厨房给我煮面，我连一只苹果都削不好。我把苹果放下，又拿起来。断就断吧，剩下的接着削。

我换了个方向，从断口旁边重新下刀，一圈一圈往下走。这回我不看皮了，看苹果，手稳稳地转。后半只削得意外地顺，皮连上了断头，绕完最后一圈，收刀。苹果黄白黄白的，坑坑洼洼，远看还是只苹果。我把断成两截的皮摆在盘边，摆成两条小船。

我把盘子端出去，放在妈妈的面碗旁边。她说你这是干什么。我说生日蛋糕，没有蜡烛，苹果代替。她看看那只坑洼的苹果，看看盘边的两条皮船，没说话，拿起来咬了一口。我紧张地盯着她的脸。她嚼完，说：这是我吃过最甜的一口。我知道这话有水分，可她的眼睛是湿的。

那晚睡觉前，妈妈进我屋，把一只削得光溜溜的苹果放在我床头——她削的，皮一点没断。她说刀要用推的，别用拉的，明天教我一招。我咬着我那只坑洼苹果剩下的半只，嗯了一声。苹果皮的小船还摆在桌上，月光照着，像真要开往什么地方去。

The Apple Cake on Her Birthday

Mother’s birthday fell on my duty day, and I got home after dark. She was boiling noodles in the kitchen, the flame on the stove jumping. I stood in the doorway with a single apple in my pocket, red-skinned, bought with the pocket money I had saved.

I wanted to peel it for her as a birthday cake. But I had never peeled anything. All my life I had only watched mother turn the apple with one hand and walk the knife with the other, the peel a ribbon that never broke. I had stolen glances a hundred times; my own hands had never practiced once.

I went to my room and shut the door and dug out the peeling knife from art class. Plastic handle, a small serrated wheel for a head. I gripped it, my palm sweating. I braced the apple against the corner of the desk, caught the wheel at the top, and pulled down. Skrrt. No peel came off; the apple got a few shallow furrows. I changed the angle until the wheel hugged the skin, and pulled again. This time a peel came out, a thin ribbon, broken here and there, like a rope walking with a stagger.

Halfway around, it snapped. The torn peel shrank in my palm, and a white gash opened on the apple. I stared at the gash, my nose stinging. Mother was boiling my noodles in the kitchen, and I could not even peel one apple. I put the apple down. I

picked it up again. Broken or not, I would keep going from the break.

I turned the apple the other way and started the knife beside the tear, circling down. This time I did not watch the peel; I watched the apple, and my hand turned it steady. The second half came out surprisingly smooth, the new peel joining the broken end, and when the last circle closed I lifted the knife. The apple was pale yellow, pitted and bumpy, but from a distance it was still an apple. I laid the two broken ribbons of peel on the edge of the plate, like two little boats.

I carried the plate out and set it beside her noodle bowl. She asked what this was for. I said birthday cake, no candles, the apple stands in. She looked at the bumpy apple, looked at the two peel boats, said nothing, picked it up and took a bite. I watched her face while she chewed. She finished and said: the sweetest bite I have ever eaten. I knew that was generous, but her eyes were wet.

Before bed that night, mother came in and left a perfectly peeled apple on my bedside table, peeled by her, the ribbon unbroken. She said the knife should push, not pull, and she would teach me the trick tomorrow. I took another bite of my own bumpy apple and grunted yes. The little peel boats still sat on the desk, lit by moonlight, looking ready to sail somewhere.

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.

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