葡萄架下的九十九串

大巴一拐进葡萄园的门，车窗里就炸开了。棚架一眼望不到头，一根根铁丝上挂满了葡萄，紫的压着青的，一串比一串沉，把铁丝压成一道道弯。老师喊别急，先排队进园，眼睛先看，剪刀后动。

我们钻到架子底下，头顶全是葡萄，像倒挂的紫色铃铛。太阳从架缝里漏下来，一格一格的光落在地上。园主老赵叔发剪刀，一人一把，又叮嘱：剪的时候一手托住串底，葡萄沉，光剪不托，落地就摔成泥。我抬头相串，相中一串紫得发黑的，粒粒挨得紧，像一家人挤在一块儿取暖。

我举起剪刀，卡住藤梗，一握，没剪动。换个大口子，再握，咔，梗断了，手早就伸在下面托着，那串稳稳落进我掌心，沉得我手腕一坠。串上的白霜被我掌心的汗蹭掉一小片，露出底下的紫，亮得发乌。我举着它倒退两步，想给同桌看，后腰撞上架子的立柱，头顶哗啦一声，别人家的葡萄洒了我一脖子。

再剪第二串，我贪大，专挑最沉的下剪。剪刀咬住粗梗，我使劲，串在半空晃，底下托的手没接正，啪，一串砸在地上，紫的青的滚了一地，溅起点泥星。老赵叔过来，没恼，蹲下捡了两粒完好的递给我：摔了的进桶堆肥，没摔的还能吃，尝尝，自家园子不亏待嘴。我接过来，那颗在衣角蹭都没蹭，直接塞进嘴里，牙一磕，皮破了，汁水又甜又凉，从舌尖一路凉到嗓子眼。我眯起眼，一个字都没说出来。

后来我学乖了，剪中等个儿的，一手剪一手托，一串一串往篮里放。篮子渐渐冒尖，紫的堆成小山。收工过秤，我们班的篮子排第一，九十九串。老赵叔把剪刀收回去，说下年还来。全班齐声喊来，声音把棚架上的叶子都震得动了。

回大巴的路上，我嘴里还留着那颗葡萄的甜。手上被剪刀柄磨出两道红印，掌心沾着白霜蹭掉的紫。我靠着车窗数，数着数着睡着了，梦里棚架低低的，一伸手，哪串都是我的。

Ninety-Nine Bunches Under the Trellis

The moment the bus turned through the gate of the grape orchard, the windows erupted. Trellises stretched beyond sight, every wire hung with grapes, purple pressing on green, each bunch heavier than the last, bending the wires into arcs. Our teacher shouted, hold on, line up to enter, eyes look first, scissors move later.

We ducked under the trellis. Grapes hung overhead like purple bells upside down. The sun leaked through the gaps in frames, falling on the ground in squares of light. The orchard owner, Uncle Zhao, handed out scissors, one per person, and warned: when you cut, cradle the bottom of the bunch with one hand. Grapes are heavy. Cut without cradling and they shatter into mud on the ground. I looked up and chose a bunch so purple it was nearly black, its berries packed tight, a family huddling for warmth.

I raised the scissors, caught the stem, squeezed. It did not cut. I switched to the wider notch, squeezed again, click, the stem gave, and my hand was already below,

and the bunch dropped steady into my palm, so heavy my wrist dipped. The pale bloom on the skin rubbed off where my sweaty palm touched it, showing the purple beneath, dark and shining. I held it up and backed two steps to show my desk mate, and my lower back hit a support post with a crash, and somebody else's grapes rained down my neck.

For the second bunch I got greedy and went for the heaviest. The scissors bit the thick stem, I strained, the bunch swung in the air, the cradling hand got under it wrong, and smack, a whole bunch hit the ground, purple and green rolling everywhere, spattering mud. Uncle Zhao came over, not angry, squatted, picked up two unharmed berries and handed them to me: the fallen ones go to the compost barrel, the unharmed ones are still good, taste one, our orchard does not cheat the mouth. I took them without wiping them on my sleeve and popped one in my mouth. My teeth broke the skin, and the juice was sweet and cold, cool all the way from tongue to throat. I squinted and said nothing at all.

After that I learned sense and cut the medium ones, scissors in one hand, cradling with the other, bunch after bunch into the basket. The basket mounded over, purple piled into a little hill. At the weigh-in our class basket came first, ninety-nine bunches. Uncle Zhao collected the scissors and said, come again next year. The whole class shouted yes in one voice, and the sound shook the leaves on the trellis.

On the bus home, the sweetness of that one grape still stayed in my mouth. The scissor handles had pressed two red lines into my hands, and my palms were stained purple where the bloom had rubbed off. I leaned on the window counting, fell asleep mid-count, and in the dream the trellis hung low, and whichever bunch I reached for was mine.