

五月的青杏想起三月的花

五月中旬，奶奶在电话里说，杏子结了，青的，你来摘。周六一早我就到了。老院子的杏树挂满了小杏，毛茸茸的，贴着枝条一嘟噜一嘟噜。奶奶举着竹竿底下绑的铁钩，够高处那几串，我在底下拿衣兜接。

这个青，酸。我咬了一口，整张脸皱起来。奶奶笑：急什么，六月才熟。她靠着树干坐下，从兜里摸出手帕擦手，忽然说：三月它开花的时候，你不在。

我确实不在。三月底爸爸出差，妈妈值夜班，我在城里待了一个星期。奶奶讲给我听：那天早上她开门，发现一夜之间满树都开了，白里带粉，一朵挤一朵，枝条全看不见了。风大的那天，花瓣落了一地，她拿扫帚扫到树根底下，不往外扫，说让它们回去。

她还捡了一些完整的花瓣，一小撮一小撮摆在窗台的盘子里，摆成一圈。她说年纪大了，看一场花少一场，得留一点。我走的时候，那盘花瓣还在窗台上，晒得有点发白，奶奶没舍得收。

现在她坐在树下讲这些，头顶就是那些开过花的枝条，如今挂满了青杏。我忽然明白，三月的花没有丢。它们掉在树根底下，化进土里，又从这根枝条上回来了，换了一身毛茸茸的青衣裳。奶奶的窗台留了一盘，我的记忆也留了一盘。

我们摘了半盆杏子。奶奶把最大的一串留在树顶，说留给你们爷爷的坟前供一碗，他活着的时候年年三月在树下坐。我抬头看那串杏，它长在三月开过花的那个位置，现在青着，六月会黄。

回去的车上，衣兜里揣着三颗青杏。路过城郊，我把车窗摇下来一条缝，五月的风灌进来。我想起奶奶举着竹竿的样子，想起她说的看一场少一场，忽然坐直了，跟爸爸说：明年三月，提前一天回来，我要看它开。

爸爸从后视镜里看了我一眼，说，好。我低头看掌心的三颗青杏，毛还在，扎手。它们记得三月的花，我也记得。这个约定，从这棵树开始，一年一年往下结。

The Green Apricots in May Remember March

Mid-May, grandma said on the phone, the apricots have set, green ones, come pick them. I arrived early Saturday morning. The apricot tree in the old courtyard hung full of tiny apricots, fuzzy, clustered along the branches in bunches. Grandma held a bamboo pole with an iron hook tied to its end to pull down the high clusters, and I caught them below in the hem of my shirt.

Green like this, sour, I bit into one and my whole face scrunched up. What is the rush, grandma laughed, they ripen in June. She leaned against the trunk and sat down, took out a handkerchief to wipe her hands, and suddenly said, when it bloomed in March, you were not here.

I truly had not been. At the end of March dad was on a business trip, mom worked the night shift, and I stayed in the city for a week. Grandma told me what happened:

that morning she opened the door and found the whole tree in bloom overnight, white touched with pink, one blossom squeezing the next, every branch hidden. On the windy day the petals covered the ground, and she swept them toward the base of the tree instead of away from it, saying let them go home.

She also gathered some whole petals and arranged them pinch by pinch on a plate by the window, in a ring. She said she was getting old, and one fewer flower season is seen each year, so she had to keep a little. When I left, that plate of petals was still on the windowsill, faded a bit in the sun, and grandma never brought herself to put it away.

Now she sat under the tree telling me all this, and right above her head were the very branches that had bloomed, now hung with green apricots. It hit me all at once that the March flowers were not lost. They fell at the roots, melted into the soil, and came back up on these branches wearing fuzzy green coats. Grandma's windowsill kept a plate of them, and my memory kept a plate too.

We picked half a basin of apricots. Grandma left the biggest cluster at the top of the tree, saying it was for the bowl offered at grandpa's grave. While he was alive, he sat under this tree every March. I looked up at that cluster. It grew exactly where the March blossoms had been, green now, yellow by June.

In the car going home, three green apricots sat in my pocket. Passing the edge of the city, I cracked the window open and the May wind rushed in. I pictured grandma holding the bamboo pole, remembered her line about one season fewer each year, and suddenly sat up straight and said to dad, next March, come back a day early, I want to see it bloom.

Dad glanced at me in the rearview mirror and said, all right. I looked down at the three green apricots in my palm, fuzz still on them, pricking my skin. They remember the March flowers, and so do I. This promise starts with this tree, setting fruit year after year.