

奶奶院子里的杏花开了

清明放假，爸爸开车带我回乡下。车还没停稳，我就从车窗里看见了那树杏花，白花花的一大团，高出院墙一截，像院子里冒出来的一朵大云。

推开那扇掉漆的木门，老院子还是老样子。墙根的瓦罐、靠墙的锄头、地上那圈母鸡转出来的小道，全没变。变的只有杏树——满树的花，密得看不见枝条，风一吹，地上就落一层，像刚下过一场薄雪。

奶奶在树下。她把那条三条腿的小凳摆正，坐在树荫边上晒太阳——今天有太阳，她说要晒晒骨头。她身上盖着我去年穿小的旧外套，两只手拢在袖子里，眯着眼，头一点一点的，像要打盹，又舍不得睡。

奶奶。我叫她。她睁开眼，第一句话是：回来啦，花正好，去年你走的时候它才打骨朵。我走到树下，抬头看。杏花一小朵一小朵挤在一起，花瓣薄薄的，白里透着一点粉，花心是深一点的红。有几朵开过了边，花瓣缺了一角，还是好看。一片花瓣落下来，落在我手心里，我捏着给它看：奶奶，它掉下来了。奶奶说：掉吧，掉完了就结杏子了。

我在她旁边蹲着，看她膝盖上外套的袖子，袖口磨得发亮。她的头发全白了，比上次见面时更白，有一片花瓣落在上面，卡在一绺头发里，没人看见，它自己待着。我没给她拿掉。我觉得那片花瓣待在那儿挺好。

奶奶从兜里摸出一把炒花生，硬往我手里塞，说路上肯定没吃东西。我们一个剥花生，一个看花。蜜蜂在头顶嗡嗡地来来回回，比城里公园里的胖。奶奶说这棵树是她嫁过来那年栽的，比爸爸还大。我围着树走了一圈，两个人拉手才勉强抱住。

下午太阳挪了三次地方，奶奶的小凳也跟着挪了三次。她始终在树底下。走的时候，我从后视镜里看老院子，杏树白成一团，树下坐着奶奶，小，安静，不动。

回城的路上我睡着了。梦里又是那个院子，花落一地，奶奶坐在花底下，像坐在一个守了很多年的位置上。明年清明，我还要回来看它开。

The Apricot Blossoms in Grandma's Yard

During the Qingming holiday break, dad drove me back to the countryside. Before the car even stopped, I saw the apricot tree through the window, a huge mass of white, rising a good part above the courtyard wall, like a big cloud that had sprouted inside the yard.

Pushing open the paint-chipped wooden gate, the old courtyard was just as it always was. The clay jars by the wall, the hoe leaning against it, the little path the hens had worn in the dirt, all unchanged. Only the apricot tree had changed, its branches packed with blossoms so thick you could not see a single twig. When the wind

blew, the ground gathered another layer of petals, as if a thin snow had just fallen.

Grandma was under the tree. She straightened her little three-legged stool and sat at the edge of the shade to warm herself in the sun. There was sun today, she said, time to dry out her bones. She had my old coat from last year spread over her, hands tucked into the sleeves, eyes narrowed, head nodding little by little, as if about to doze off but unwilling to sleep.

Grandma, I called. She opened her eyes, and her first words were, you are back, and the flowers are at their best. When you left last year they were only buds. I walked under the tree and looked up. The apricot blossoms crowded together in small clusters, their petals thin, white touched with pink, the centers a deeper red. A few had passed their prime, petals chipped at one corner, still beautiful. One petal drifted down into my palm. I pinched it up to show her, grandma, it fell. Let it fall, she said. Once they are all gone, the apricots start growing.

I squatted beside her, looking at the sleeve over her knee, worn shiny at the cuff. Her hair was completely white, whiter than the last time I visited. A petal landed on it and lodged in one lock of hair, unnoticed by anyone, keeping itself company. I did not brush it off. I thought it was fine right where it was.

Grandma fished a handful of roasted peanuts from her pocket and pressed them into my hand, sure I had eaten nothing on the road. One of us shelled peanuts while the other watched the flowers. The bees overhead were fatter than the ones in city parks. Grandma said she planted this tree the year she married into the family, older than my father even. I walked around the trunk, and two people holding hands could barely encircle it.

In the afternoon the sun moved three times, and grandma's stool moved with it three times. She stayed under the tree the whole time. When we left, I watched the old courtyard in the rearview mirror, the apricot tree a mass of white, grandma sitting beneath it, small, quiet, still.

I fell asleep on the drive back to the city. In my dream I was in that courtyard again, petals covering the ground, grandma sitting under the blossoms, as if sitting in a place she had kept watch over for years. Next Qingming, I am coming back to see it bloom.

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.

老院墙外的杏花消息

村里东头的老院子那年春天格外热闹。院墙里那棵杏树开了，枝条压得低低的，一半的花探到墙外头来，白里带粉，从村路上走过的人都要抬一下头。新搬来半年的男孩叫小满，上六年级，他每天上学放学都从那堵墙根过，起初只当那是一树雪，后来才发现是花。

他很快发现了另一件事：每天上午，院里那个老奶奶会把一条三条腿的小凳搬到树下，坐下来晒太阳。她穿一件蓝布褂子，膝盖上搭着旧外套，一坐就是一上午，不怎么动，也不说话，就是看树。小满有一回从墙缝里往里看，看见老奶奶仰着脸，花瓣落在她头发上，她也不拿掉。

第二天放学，墙根底下掉了两枝杏花，不知是被风折的还是被猫碰的。小满捡起来，犹豫了

一下，走到院门口，敲了敲那扇掉漆的木门。门开了，老奶奶先看见他手里的花，愣了一下，说，哪儿捡的。墙根底下掉的。小满递过去。老奶奶接了，捏着看了半天，说，进来吧。

那是小满第一次进那个院子。满树的花站在头顶，比在墙外看的大得多，密得多，蜜蜂在耳边飞来飞去。老奶奶把两枝花插进窗台的粗瓷瓶里，然后回到树下的小凳上，问小满，你天天从墙外过，看没看够。小满说，看了，就是看不明白，为什么开这么多。老奶奶想了想说，攒了一年的劲儿，都使在这半个月里了。

从那以后，小满放学先去老院子，坐在树下的另一头写作业。老奶奶不吵他，偶尔递一把花生。有一阵风大，花瓣落得急，小满拿作业本接了一页，老奶奶拿手拢了一捧放进口袋，两个人比赛谁接得多。那天下午，院子里第一次有了笑声。

花期过了，树上一夜之间全是小小的青杏。小满好几天没见老奶奶出来，就去敲门。老奶奶说，花谢了，没什么可晒的。小满说，杏子也在长啊。老奶奶看着他，看了好一会儿，说，对，杏子也在长。

第二天上午，三条腿的小凳又摆到树下，旁边多了一个小板凳。风从村路上过来，吹得青杏轻轻晃。墙外的杏花消息早散了，可院子里的人知道，这个春天没有过完，它挪了个地方，从枝头挪到了树下，坐着，晒着太阳，等下一个三月。

News of Apricot Blossoms over the Old Wall

That spring, the old courtyard at the east end of the village was especially lively. The apricot tree inside the wall came into bloom, its branches pressing low, half the flowers reaching over the wall to the outside, white touched with pink, and everyone passing on the village road lifted their head. A boy named Xiaoman, who had moved to the village half a year earlier and was in sixth grade, walked past that wall to school and back every day. At first he took it for a tree of snow, and only later realized they were flowers.

He soon noticed another thing. Every morning, the old woman in the courtyard carried a three-legged stool under the tree and sat warming herself in the sun. She wore a blue cloth jacket, an old coat over her knees, and sat the whole morning without moving much, without talking, just watching the tree. Once Xiaoman peered in through a crack in the wall and saw her face tilted up, petals landing in her hair, and she did not brush them off.

The next day after school, two apricot branches lay at the foot of the wall, broken by the wind or knocked down by a cat, no one knew. Xiaoman picked them up, hesitated a moment, then walked to the courtyard gate and knocked on the paint-chipped wooden door. It opened. The old woman saw the flowers in his hands first, froze for a second, and asked, where did you find them. They fell by the wall.

Xiaoman held them out. She took them, held them up for a long look, and said, come in.

It was the first time Xiaoman entered that courtyard. The full tree of blossoms stood overhead, far bigger and denser than from outside the wall, bees buzzing past his ears. The old woman put the two branches into a coarse porcelain jar on the windowsill, then returned to her stool under the tree and asked Xiaoman, you pass by the wall every day, have you seen your fill. I have, he said, only I never figured out why it blooms so many. She thought a moment and said, all the strength saved up for a year is spent in these half months.

After that, Xiaoman went to the old courtyard first after school and sat at the other side of the tree to do his homework. The old woman did not disturb him, and now and then handed him a handful of peanuts. When the wind blew hard one stretch, petals fell fast. Xiaoman caught a page full in his homework notebook, and the old woman cupped a handful in her palm and put them in her pocket, and the two of them had a contest over who caught more. That afternoon, for the first time, the courtyard held laughter.

When the flowering season passed, the tree was full of tiny green apricots overnight. The old woman did not come out for several days, so Xiaoman knocked on her door. She said, the flowers are gone, there is nothing left to sunbathe over. Apricots are growing too, Xiaoman said. She looked at him, for quite a long while, and said, yes, apricots are growing too.

The next morning, the three-legged stool was set under the tree again, and beside it stood a smaller stool. The wind came down the village road and rocked the green apricots gently. The news of the blossoms over the wall had long scattered, but the people in the courtyard knew that spring was not over. It had only moved, from the branches down to under the tree, sitting, warming itself in the sun, waiting for the next March.