

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.