

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.