

那棵树举了一冬天的笔

我们小区门口有棵玉兰，高过两层楼。冬天它是最难看的树，枝子光着，只有枝头立着一支支笔头样的苞，外面裹一层灰绿的绒，风吹不动，鸟也不碰。别的花木都等着春天，它倒好，大冷天就把花苞举出来了，举一整个冬天，不开，也不掉。我在树下进出了一冬天，看那些笔头从黄豆大长到指头长，绒壳慢慢裂开一条缝，露出里头像玉一样的白。它不着急。冷它受着，暖它也不急着谢。

满树白是在一个礼拜天早上忽然出现的。前一天路过，树上才开了三五朵，第二天出门，整棵树全白了，白得发亮，一朵压一朵，从最低的枝到树顶，没有一片叶子陪着，就那么自己开着。我在树下仰着头看了很久，脖子都酸了。那白不是淡的，是厚的，一朵有一碗大，花瓣立着，像举起来的手掌。路过的人都在看，谁也没说话。那种静不是被吓住了，是被那棵树安顿下来了。

花落的时候更静。玉兰谢不是一片片碎，是整朵整朵地落。有天早上我出门，树下一地都是完整的花，白里带着一点褐，一朵一朵躺得很端正，像自己放下的，不是摔下来的。我捡过一朵，花瓣还硬挺，托在手里沉甸甸的。扫花的环卫师傅说，这树的花落得干净，不烂在树上，也不零碎，好扫。他说这话的时候有点夸它的意思。

后来我想，那棵树举了一冬天的笔，写出来的就四个字：不慌，不忙。该结苞的时候结苞，冷也不收回去；该开的时候一夜全开，不试探，不扭捏；该落的时候整朵落地，不拖泥带水。它没有叶子衬托，也不借香味，就那么站着，开自己的，落自己的。我现在每天从它底下过，脚步比从前慢。人挤在早高峰里，心里急的事多，可一抬头看见那棵树，就想起它举了一冬天笔也没开，想起它一夜开满也没吵。它什么也没说，路过的人自己懂了。

The Tree Held Up Its Pens All Winter

There is a yulania tree at the gate of our compound, taller than two floors. In winter it is the plainest tree of all, branches bare, only pen-nib buds standing at the tips, wrapped in a gray-green fuzz, unmoved by wind, untouched by birds. Other plants wait for spring, but this one brings its buds out in the coldest days and holds them all winter, neither opening nor dropping. I passed under it all winter and watched the nibs grow from soybean size to finger length, the fuzzy shells cracking open a seam to show a jade-like white inside. It was not in a hurry. It took the cold, and when warmth came it did not rush to fade.

The whole tree turned white on a Sunday morning, all at once. The day before, only three or five blooms had opened. The next morning when I stepped out, the entire tree was white, shining white, bloom pressing bloom from the lowest branch to the top, not one leaf in attendance, just opening by itself. I stood under it with my head tilted back so long my neck ached. The whiteness was not thin but thick, each flower the size of a bowl, petals standing upright like raised palms. Everyone passing looked, and no one spoke. That silence was not shock. It was being settled by the tree.

When the flowers fell, it was quieter still. Yulania does not fade petal by petal. It falls whole. One morning I found the ground under the tree covered with complete flowers, white touched with brown, lying neatly one by one, as if they had set themselves down rather than been dropped. I picked one up. The petals were still firm, heavy in my palm. The sanitation worker sweeping them said this tree's flowers fall clean, not rotting on the branches, not shattering into bits, easy to sweep. There was something like praise in his voice.

Later I thought: that tree held up its pens all winter, and what it wrote comes down to four words, unhurried, unanxious. It forms buds when it should and does not take them back in the cold. When it is time, it opens fully in a single night, no testing, no coyness. When it is time to fall, it falls whole, no dragging. It borrows no leaves for backdrop and no scent for help. It simply stands, opening its own opening, falling its own falling. Now I pass under it every day, and my steps are slower than before. People are packed into the morning rush with so much to fret about, but one look up at that tree reminds me that it held its pens a whole winter without opening, and filled itself full in one night without making a sound. It said nothing, and everyone who passed understood on their own.