

## 墙角的金瀑布

我们小区后门出去，有一段老墙。墙是青砖砌的，不知道站了多少年，砖缝里长着瓦松和枯黄的狗尾草。墙根堆着碎砖头，谁也不往那儿看一眼。只有我奶奶每次路过都要说一句：这墙，怕是撑不过今年了。

去年冬天，我在墙根看见几根细枝条。说是枝条，其实更像铁丝，灰扑扑的，硬邦邦地从砖缝里探出来，顺着墙往下垂，垂到半路又翘起来，像谁随手画了几道没画完的弧线。那时候树上没有叶子，地上也没有草，那几根枝条就孤零零地挂在冷风里，我猜它们跟墙一样，都撑不了多久。

今年三月初，我放学回家，还没走到墙角，先看见一片黄。起初我以为是谁把黄绸子丢在了那儿，走近了才看清楚，是花。满枝条的花。一根根细枝条上挤满了黄色小花，六瓣的，小指甲那么大，从墙头一直开到墙根，风一过，整面墙的黄都晃起来，真像一道细细的金瀑布。我站在那儿看了很久，书包带子滑到胳膊上都没发觉。

我凑近看那堵墙。花就是从砖缝里长出来的，那缝窄得插不进一根手指，没有土，更没有谁浇过水。墙皮剥落的地方露出里面的碎砖，它就在那碎砖中间扎根，把根往缝的深处钻。它不挑地方，也不等人安排，墙给它一条缝，它就还墙一树春天。

奶奶再来，也站住了。她盯着那墙黄看了半天，说：这墙啊，比我想的争气。我说不是墙争气，是花争气。奶奶笑，说都一样，挨着这么硬的地方，还能开出这么软的花，就是争气。

后来每次路过，我都要绕到那面墙跟前看一眼。花谢了以后，细枝条长出了小叶子，绿得发亮，还是从那条砖缝里出来，还是往风里垂着。我忽然明白，坚韧不是喊出来的口号，它就是那条砖缝里的根，没人看见，也照样往深处钻；它就是那些黄色小花，没人浇水，也照样开满一面墙。

## The Golden Waterfall at the Wall Corner

Out the back gate of our neighborhood runs a stretch of old wall. It is built of gray brick, standing there for who knows how many years, its cracks sprouting liveforever and dried-out foxtail grass. Broken bricks are piled at its foot, and nobody ever glances that way. Only my grandmother says the same thing every time we pass: this wall probably won't last another year.

Last winter I noticed a few thin branches at the wall's foot. Branches is generous, for they looked more like wire, dull gray and stiff, poking out of a brick crack, hanging down along the wall, then springing back up halfway, like a few unfinished arcs someone had sketched in the air. No leaves on the trees, no grass on the ground; those bare twigs hung alone in the cold wind, and I figured they were as finished as the wall.

Then one day in early March I came home from school, and before I even reached the corner I saw a sheet of yellow. At first I thought someone had dropped a piece of yellow silk there. Walking closer, I saw it was flowers, flowers on every branch. Crowded along each thin branch were little yellow blossoms, six petals each, no bigger than a fingernail, running from the top of the wall all the way down to its foot. When the wind passed, the whole wall of yellow shimmered, a slender golden waterfall. I stood there so long that my schoolbag strap slid down to my elbow without my noticing.

I went close and studied the wall. The flowers grew straight out of a brick crack too narrow to fit a finger, with no soil in it and certainly no one to water them. Where the wall's plaster had flaked off, broken brick showed underneath, and that is where the plant drove its roots, pushing them deep into the gap. It does not choose its place and does not wait for anyone to arrange one. If the wall gives it a crack, it gives the wall a whole tree of spring.

When grandmother came by again, she stopped too. She stared at the yellow wall for a long while and said: this wall tries harder than I thought. I said it is not the wall, it is the flower. Grandma laughed and said it is the same thing, to bloom so soft a bloom in so hard a place is trying hard indeed.

After that, every time I passed I made a point of walking over to that wall. After the flowers faded, the thin branches put out small glossy green leaves, still coming from the same brick crack, still hanging down into the wind. I understood then that toughness is never a shouted slogan. It is the root in the brick crack, pushing deeper with nobody watching; it is those little yellow flowers, blooming across an entire wall with nobody to water them.

## 爷爷墙头的迎春花

外婆家的老院有一堵半人高的土墙，墙头长着迎春花。不是谁种的，听妈妈说，她小时候那花就有了，年年从墙头垂下来，像给土墙系了一条绿带子，冬天绿带子变成几根灰褐色的细枝条，硬硬地搭在墙头上。

爷爷的晚年是在这堵墙边过的。他腿脚不好，走不远，每天搬一只竹椅坐在墙根晒太阳，膝上盖一条旧毯子。他不说话的时候居多，就眯着眼看墙头。我看他看墙头，其实多半是看那几根细枝条，冬天里它们一动也不动，像晒在墙头上的干柴，谁都觉得它们死了。

可是每年雨水前后，那些细枝条会自己醒过来。先是枝条上鼓起一排排小疙瘩，然后一夜之间，小疙瘩裂开，钻出黄色小花。花不大，一朵只有黄豆那么大，可它们开得多，从墙这头排到墙那头，把土墙照得发亮。爷爷那天起得格外早，搬着椅子坐在花底下，仰着脸看，看得像个孩

子。奶奶喊他吃饭，他不动，说再坐一会儿，花刚开，我陪陪它。

有一年春天，墙让雨水泡塌了一角。爷爷拄着锹去挖，把塌下来的土一点点清开。那截细枝条压在土块底下，压弯了，枝条的皮都裂了口。我们都说这截完了。爷爷不吭声，把土块搬开，找了根布条，把弯下去的枝条轻轻绑在墙头的木桩上。

第二年，那截裂了口的枝条照样开花。黄色小花从裂口上头一朵一朵冒出来，比别处开得还旺。爷爷照旧搬椅子坐在底下，那天他话多，跟我说：花跟人一样，骨头断了接上，照样过日子，还过得热气腾腾。

爷爷走后，奶奶接着坐在墙根。再后来土墙补了又补，迎春花还是年年从墙头垂下来。我每次回去，先去看那截绑过布条的枝条，布条早烂没了，枝条上却有一圈淡淡的印子，像结的疤。春天一到，疤上照样开满黄色小花，一朵挨一朵，开得理直气壮。

## The Forsythia on Grandpa's Earthen Wall

The old courtyard at my grandmother's parents' home has an earthen wall half a person high, and forsythia grows along its top. Nobody planted it. Mother says it was there when she was a girl, hanging over the wall edge every year like a green sash tied around the wall; in winter the sash turns into a few gray-brown thin branches lying stiff along the wall top.

Grandpa spent his last years beside that wall. His legs were bad and he could not walk far, so every day he carried a bamboo chair out and sat in the sun at the wall's foot, an old blanket over his knees. He rarely spoke; he mostly sat half-asleep, looking at the top of the wall. When I watched him watching the wall, I was really looking at those thin branches, for in winter they never moved, like firewood drying on the wall, and everyone would have said they were dead.

Yet every year around the Rain Water season, those thin branches wake up by themselves. First little bumps swell along the branches in rows; then overnight the bumps split, and out come small yellow flowers. Each blossom is no bigger than a soybean, but they come in crowds, lining up from one end of the wall to the other, making the dull earthen wall shine. That day Grandpa got up unusually early, carried his chair under the flowers, and sat looking up at them like a child. Grandma called him to eat; he would not move. Just a little longer, he said. The flowers have just opened; I will keep them company.

One spring, rain soaked through the wall and a corner of it collapsed. Grandpa hobbled over with a shovel and dug out the fallen earth, shovelful by shovelful. One section of thin branch had been pinned under the clods, bent double, its bark split open. We all said that piece was finished. Grandpa said nothing, lifted the clods

away, found a strip of cloth, and gently tied the bent branch to a wooden stake on the wall top.

Next year, that split branch bloomed just the same. Little yellow flowers pushed out one by one above the split, more vigorously than anywhere else. Grandpa carried his chair under it as usual, and that day he talked more. Flowers are like people, he told me. Break a bone, set it, and life goes on as before, goes on warm and steaming.

After Grandpa passed away, Grandma took his place in the chair at the wall's foot. Later the earthen wall was patched again and again, and the forsythia still hangs over the wall edge every year. Every time I go back, the first thing I look for is that branch once tied with cloth. The cloth rotted away long ago, but the branch still carries a faint ring of a mark, like a scar. And when spring comes, that scar blooms full of little yellow flowers, one pressed against the next, blooming as if they had every right to.

## 春天是从墙角开始的

我们学校的春天，是从花坛来的吗？不是。花坛里的花要到四月才肯露面，三月里它们只是一圈秃土，围着冬青，冻得硬邦邦。真正的春天来得比这早，它在教学楼后墙那个墙角上，先亮了起来。

那个墙角没人注意。墙是水泥刷的白，墙角堆着扫帚、簸箕和几块旧瓷砖。可就在扫帚后头，墙根和地面的接缝里，钻出一丛迎春花。没人栽过它，校工老周说，是鸟叼来的种子。它的枝条细得很，一根一根往下垂，垂到地上又往上翘，乱蓬蓬的，像一把倒过来放的金丝扫帚。

三月初的一个早晨，我抱作业本去办公室，路过墙角，眼角忽然被什么亮了一下。我停下脚步，开花了。昨天还是光枝条，今天一夜之间缀满了黄色小花，一朵一朵，小得像谁拿黄漆在枝条上点了一排点子。我蹲下来看，花上有露水，亮晶晶的；墙根的缝里还留着上一层霜。一边是霜，一边是花，就在同一个墙角里，谁也不让谁，谁也没输。

我开始留意那个墙角，一留意就停不下来了。我发现花不是同时开的：向阳那面的枝条先开，背阴那面晚三天；靠根的矮枝开得密，墙头的高枝开得稀。我发现蜜蜂来得比我们还早，早上七点，花上已经有蜂了。我还发现，扫帚天天在花的旁边挪动，没有一个人知道墙角开过花，全校只有那丛花知道春天来过。

四月，花坛终于热闹起来，同学们围着花坛拍照。没人往后墙走。我不难过，反倒有点得意，好像那个墙角是我一个人的秘密。我绕过去看它，花已经开到最盛，细枝条被花压得弯下去，快扫到地面，黄色小花从墙根一路开到墙头，把半面白墙都映黄了。

后来我常想，春天原来不排队，不从花坛、从公园、从谁安排好的地方开始。它从墙角开始，从砖缝、从没人扫的角落、从一把扫帚背后开始。谁也不请它，它自己来；没有土，它就自己带一

点土来。那丛迎春花年年都懂这个道理，所以年年都是它，替我们学校把春天第一个打开。

## Spring Begins at the Wall Corner

Does spring at our school come from the flower beds? No. The flowers in the beds will not show their faces until April; in March they are only a ring of bare frozen soil around the privet, hard as stone. The real spring arrives earlier than that. It lights up first at the wall corner behind the teaching building.

Nobody notices that corner. The wall is whitewashed cement, and the corner holds brooms, dustpans, and a few old tiles. But right behind the brooms, out of the seam where the wall foot meets the ground, pushes up a clump of forsythia. Nobody planted it. Old Zhou the caretaker says a bird carried the seed. Its branches are very thin, each one hanging down, touching the ground and then curving back up, tangled like a golden broom set upside down.

One morning in early March, I was carrying exercise books to the office and passed the corner when something flashed at the edge of my eye. I stopped. It had bloomed. Yesterday bare branches, today every branch studded overnight with little yellow flowers, each one small as a dot of yellow paint dabbed onto the twig. I squatted down. There were dewdrops on the petals, glittering; in the crack at the wall's foot lay the last of the frost. Frost on one side, flowers on the other, in the very same corner, neither giving way, neither losing.

Once I started watching that corner, I could not stop. I found the flowers do not open all at once: the branches on the sunny side bloom first, the shady side three days later; the low branches near the root bloom thick, the high branches at the wall top bloom sparse. I found the bees arrive earlier than we do, for at seven in the morning there are already bees on the flowers. I also found that the brooms move beside those flowers every day, and not one person in the school knows a corner has been blooming; of the whole school, only that clump of flowers knows spring came.

In April the flower beds finally got lively, and classmates gathered around them for photos. Nobody walked to the back wall. I was not sad; I was secretly a little pleased, as if that corner were my private secret. I detoured to see it: the flowers were at their peak, the thin branches bowed almost to the ground under the weight, little yellow flowers running from the wall's foot all the way to its top, tinting half the white wall gold.

I often think about it now: spring does not stand in line after all. It does not begin at the flower beds, or the parks, or wherever someone has arranged for it to begin. It begins at wall corners, in brick cracks, in un-swept corners, behind a

broom. Nobody invites it, so it comes on its own; where there is no soil, it brings a little soil with it. That clump of forsythia understands this every year, which is why every year it is the flowers that open spring first on behalf of our school.