我家阳台那盆苹果苗

读完《苹果树上的外婆》，我在学校周记本上写读后感，写了三行就卡住了。安迪的外婆在苹果树上出现，带他去坐旋转木马、去开汽车、去当牛仔，全是大人不许小孩干的事。我抄了一句书里的话：外婆从树上跳下来，裙子上挂着叶子。抄完不知道下面接什么。晚上吃饭我跟妈妈说，要是我家有苹果树就好了。妈妈说阳台那盆苹果苗是你爸种的，种了两年，一片叶子都没多。

隔天我跑去阳台看那盆苗。它种在一个旧陶盆里，枝子细得像筷子，顶上几片叶子，确实不像能结果的样子。可我把书里安迪的样子想起来——安迪对着苹果树说话，把心事说给树听。我也开始对着这盆苗说话。上学前往盆里看一眼，说今天数学测验；放学回来说食堂的苹果是面的，不好吃，书里的苹果看着就甜。说的时候我有点不好意思，声音压得很低，像怕邻居听见。可是说完心里顺当，跟安迪在树杈上坐了一下午那种顺当一样。

书里安迪把苹果分给邻居外婆，我学着做了件小事：把阳台上熟过头的一个苹果洗了，给楼下看车的爷爷送去。爷爷掰了一半还我，说甜的。我举着那半苹果上楼，忽然想，安迪要是有一盆这么小的苗，他也会跟它说话吧。树不等大小，等你把它当回事。我想象有一天这盆苗长高，枝叶中间探出一个系围裙的影子，那是我想像里的外婆，她不说话，就冲我笑。

后来那篇读后感我重写了一遍，不再抄书里的句子，写的是这盆苗：它不会从树上跳下一个外婆，可它让我敢把想念说出口。妈妈说我写得不像三年级的，像五年级的。我把阳台那盆苗挪到光照最足的位置，浇了水。书里说想念会长成一棵树，我家这盆还小，那就先当一盆草养着，根在土里，一天比一天稳。等它结果那年，我把第一颗留给楼下的爷爷。

The Apple Sapling on Our Balcony

After finishing Grandma on the Apple Tree, I sat down to write my reading response in the school journal and got stuck after three lines. Andy's grandma appears in the apple tree and takes him on the carousel, behind the wheel, out to be a cowboy - all the things grown-ups forbid. I copied one sentence from the book: the grandma jumped down from the tree with leaves caught in her skirt. Then I did not know what came next. At dinner I told Mom it would be something if our family had an apple tree. Mom said the apple sapling on the balcony was planted by Dad, two years ago, and it has not added a single leaf.

The next day I went to the balcony to look at it. It sat in an old clay pot, its stem thin as a chopstick, a few leaves at the top, plainly not the sort of plant that bears fruit. But I remembered what Andy does - he talks to his apple tree and tells it what is on his mind. I started talking to this sapling. Before school I glanced into the pot and told it there was a math quiz today; after school I told it the apples in the canteen were mealy and bad, while the apples in the book look sweet just to look at. I felt embarrassed saying it, keeping my voice low as if the neighbors might hear. But afterward my chest felt clear, the same clearness Andy must feel sitting in a tree fork all afternoon.

In the book Andy shares apples with the neighbor grandmother, so I tried one small thing of my own: I washed an overripe apple from the balcony and carried it down to the old man who minds the bikes downstairs. He broke off half and handed it back, saying it was sweet. I climbed the stairs holding that half apple and suddenly thought: if Andy had a pot this small, he would talk to it too. A tree does not wait for you to be big; it waits for you to take it seriously. I imagine the sapling growing tall one day, and out of its leaves leaning a figure in an apron - the grandmother of my imagining. She says nothing; she just smiles at me.

In the end I rewrote the reading response. Instead of copying sentences from the book, I wrote about this pot: no grandmother will jump down from it, but it gave me the courage to say my missing out loud. Mom said it did not read like third grade, it read like fifth. I moved the pot to the brightest spot on the balcony and watered it. The book says missing someone grows into a tree. Ours is still small, so for now I will keep it like a pot of grass, roots in the soil, steadier day by day. The year it fruits, the first one goes to the old man downstairs.

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