苹果树等得人心里甜

《苹果树上的外婆》我是一口气读完的，晚上九点上床，十一点半开小夜灯把最后几章看完。合上书，眼前留下的不是海盗船，也不是牛仔竞技场，是那棵苹果树。安迪的外婆去世以后，有一天，外婆竟然出现在他家苹果树上，从树枝中间往下跳，裙角挂在叶子上，一落地就拉着安迪去做那些外婆们从来不让大人同意的事。我读到这里忍不住笑，笑完又有点想哭，因为安迪等这棵树，等了好多年。

书里写那棵树的时候总是很安静。风吹叶子，苹果掉下来，安迪坐在树杈上想心事。外婆在树上出现，是在安迪最孤单的时候——他没有外婆，同桌有，邻居有，别人都有。我忽然想起我们小区门口也有一棵老苹果树，春天开一树白花，秋天结的果子又小又硬，没人摘。小时候在外婆家，每到傍晚，外婆就站在院子那棵树下喊我乳名，喊两声，我应了，她就转身进屋端饭。后来外婆不在了，那棵树我也好多年没见过。

安迪后来在邻居家认识了真的老外婆，帮她做事，陪她的孙子玩，慢慢明白外婆不只在想象里，也在伸手就能够着的地方。书里分苹果那段我记得清楚：安迪把最大的苹果留给别人，自己拿小的，手伸出去的时候有点舍不得，伸出去以后反而松快。我读到这儿想起去年秋天，妈妈买了两斤苹果放果盘，我挑了一个最大的，咬了一口很甜，忽然想到要是外婆在，我一定把这个递过去。苹果当时就吃不下了，甜也变成了别的味道。

现在路过小区那棵苹果树，我会放慢脚步。树不认识我，可它站在那儿，像替我记着喊我回家的那个声音。安迪有他的苹果树，我也有。书里说，想念一个人的时候，那个人会在你心里长成一棵树。我信。秋天它结果，小小的，硬硬的，摘一个擦擦咬一口，心里就甜一下。外婆的苹果，原来一直留着等我。

The Apple Tree Waits, and the Heart Grows Sweet

I finished Grandma on the Apple Tree in one sitting: into bed at nine, nightlight on, last chapters done by half past eleven. When I closed the book, what stayed before my eyes was not the pirate ship or the cowboy ring but the apple tree. After Andy's grandma died, one day she appeared, of all places, in his apple tree, jumping down through the branches, her skirt hem catching on the leaves, landing and pulling Andy off to do all the things grown-ups never let grandmothers do. I laughed reading it, and the laugh turned into something close to tears, because Andy had waited for that tree for years.

The book always writes the tree quietly. Wind in the leaves, apples falling, Andy sitting in the fork of a branch thinking his thoughts. The grandma appears in the tree at Andy's loneliest hour: he has no grandma, the boy at the next desk does, the neighbors do, everyone else does. I suddenly remembered the old apple tree at the gate of our compound, white flowers all over it in spring, small hard fruit in autumn that nobody picked. When I was little at my grandmother's house, every evening she stood under the tree in the yard and called my pet name; if I answered to the second

call, she turned and went in to bring out dinner. Then she was gone, and I have not seen that tree for years.

Later Andy meets a real old grandmother next door, helps her with her chores, plays with her grandsons, and slowly understands that a grandmother lives not only in imagination but within reach of a hand. I remember clearly the part where they divide apples: Andy leaves the biggest one for someone else and takes a small one himself; his hand hesitates going out, and after it goes out he feels light. There I recalled last autumn: Mom bought two jin of apples and set them in the bowl; I picked the biggest, bit into it, it was sweet, and out of nowhere I thought, if Grandma were here I would hand this one to her. The apple could not be eaten after that; the sweetness had turned into another taste.

Now when I pass the apple tree at our gate I slow my steps. The tree does not know me, yet it stands there keeping the voice that called me home. Andy has his apple tree; I have mine. The book says that when you miss someone, that person grows into a tree inside you. I believe it. In autumn it fruits, small and hard; pick one, wipe it, take a bite, and the heart goes sweet for a moment. Grandma's apples, it turns out, were kept all along, waiting for me.