柿饼上的白霜是时间结的

奶奶活着的时候说过一句我记到今天的话：柿子要等霜。她说柿子是认节气的果子，霜没落过，咬一口涩嘴；霜落过了，涩气自己就退了。小时候我不信，霜降前后从老柿树上摘回来的柿子，我偷着捏一个软的吃，涩得直伸舌头。奶奶不笑我，只说等一等，再等一等。她的一辈子好像都在等一等里过，等霜降，等柿子红，等柿饼上那层白霜。

故乡晒柿饼有晒场的规矩。柿子是霜降那天起摘的，摘下来堆在堂屋墙角，捂两天，挑硬实无损的削皮。削皮用一把小刀，转着圈削，皮要连不断，削好的柿子串在麻绳上，一条绳串十几个，挂在晒场的木架子上。头几天要日日翻，把背阴的一面翻过来见日头。奶奶的手在绳子间翻动，快而不乱，像在做一件极熟的事。晒场边就是那棵老柿树，叶子落尽了，枝头最后几个柿子红着，奶奶说那是留给鸟的，人不摘。

约莫二十来天，柿饼出了白霜。奶奶把柿饼收进缸里，一层柿饼一层干叶，封好，再拿出来见风，白霜越出越厚。她那天最高兴，捏起一个给我看，说这不是霉，是柿子自己出的糖，是时间结的糖。我不懂时间怎么会结糖，只觉得那白霜甜得和别处不一样，舔一口，凉，然后慢慢回甜。

后来我离了家，在城里见过包装精致的柿饼，盒子上印着产地和等级，却没有白霜出得那样厚的。有一年冬天母亲寄来一罐，开盖一看，霜白得像落了雪。我捏起一个，忽然想起晒场，想起麻绳，想起老柿树梢上留给鸟的那几个红柿子。奶奶走了六年了，晒场拆了盖了偏房。可我每年冬天剥开一只柿饼，都在那层白霜里认得她——她说过的话没有错，时间真的会结糖，一层一层，结在会认它的人舌尖上。

The White Frost on Persimmon Cakes Is Made by Time

Grandmother had a saying I still keep: persimmons must wait for frost. She said the fruit knew the seasons. If frost had not fallen, one bite would pucker your mouth; after frost, the astringence left on its own. As a child I did not believe her. I pinched a soft persimmon from the pile brought down from the old tree and puckered my tongue. She did not laugh, only said wait, wait a little longer.

Drying persimmons in my hometown had its rules. They were picked from the day of Frost Descent, piled in the corner of the main room for two days, then the firm and unbroken ones were peeled. She peeled with a small knife, turning as she cut, so the skin came off in one unbroken strip. The peeled fruit went onto hemp rope, a dozen to a line, hung on racks in the drying yard. For the first days they were turned every day so the shaded side saw the sun. Beside the yard stood the old persimmon tree, its leaves gone, the last few fruits red on the top branches. Grandmother left those for the birds.

After some twenty days the white frost appeared. She packed the cakes into a jar, a layer of fruit, a layer of dry leaves, then took them out to the wind until the

frost grew thick. On such days she was happiest. She held one up and said this was no mold, it was sugar made by the fruit itself, sugar tied by time. I did not know how time could make sugar, but the frost tasted sweet in a way nothing else did, cool at first, then slowly sweet.

I left home years ago. In the city I have seen persimmon cakes in fine boxes, printed with origin and grade, yet none wore so thick a frost. One winter my mother sent me a jar. I opened it and the frost was white as snow. Holding one up, I thought of the drying yard, the hemp rope, the red fruits left for the birds. Grandmother has been gone six years, and the yard is gone too. But every winter, peeling a persimmon cake, I know her in that white layer. Her words were true: time does make sugar, layer by layer, on the tongue of those who can recognize it.