小猴子的桃子宴

山顶上有一棵桃树，是小猴子种下的。那年春天，他把一颗桃核按进土里，浇了一瓢水，拍拍土说，你要好好长。桃树真的好好长了，第一年蹿出枝条，第二年开出满树粉花，第三年，挂满了毛茸茸的大桃子。

桃子熟的那天，小猴子围着树转了三圈。他挑了一个最大最红的，捧在手里闻了又闻，口水都快下来了。可是他没有咬。他想，去年桃树开花的时候，小兔子路过，夸过花好看；小松鼠帮他把掉下来的果子捡回筐里；老山羊爷爷每次上山，都给他带一把新炒的松子。桃树结果了，这些事也该还了。

小猴子忙起来。他摘了一筐最大最甜的桃子，先给小兔子送去两个，说周六上山吃桃宴。小兔子跳起来说好。他又给小松鼠送两个，给老山羊送两个，一路上桃香飘了一路。他还用大树叶垫了石桌，摆好果盘，数了数，请了七个朋友，加上他自己，八个。

周六那天，朋友们都来了。桃宴开始，小猴子把最大的桃子切开，一人一瓣，汁水甜得大家眼睛都眯起来。小兔子说这是她吃过最甜的桃。小松鼠说当然甜，这树是小猴子浇了三年水浇出来的。老山羊慢悠悠地说，桃甜是一半，人多是一半，凑在一起才是桃宴。

吃到月亮升起来，筐空了，果核堆成小山。小猴子把果核收起来，一颗颗埋回树下，说明年它们又会长成小树，结更多桃，请更多朋友。朋友们七嘴八舌说好，还说明年每家带一样东西来，小兔子带萝卜糕，小松鼠带松子，老山羊带一壶热茶。

第二年夏天，桃树上的桃子更多了，石桌也换成了两张。桃宴从太阳落山开到星星满天的时候，数一数，来了十五个。小猴子站在树下想，一棵树最甜的时候，不是桃子熟的那天，是树下坐满了朋友的那天。

The Peach Banquet of the Little Monkey

On the top of the hill stood a peach tree, planted by the little monkey. That spring he pressed a peach pit into the soil, watered it with a ladle of water, patted the earth, and said, grow well. And the tree really did grow well. In the first year it shot out branches, in the second it bloomed with pink flowers all over, and in the third it hung heavy with big fuzzy peaches.

The day the peaches ripened, the little monkey circled the tree three times. He picked the biggest and reddest one, held it in his paws, smelled it again and again, his mouth watering. But he did not bite it. He thought: last year when the tree flowered, Little Rabbit passed by and said the blossoms were beautiful; Little Squirrel helped him pick the fallen fruit back into his basket; old Grandpa Goat brought him a handful of fresh roasted pine nuts every time he climbed the hill. Now the tree had borne fruit, and it was time to pay those kindnesses back.

The little monkey got busy. He picked a basket of the biggest, sweetest peaches

and carried two to Little Rabbit first, saying come up the hill Saturday for the peach banquet. Little Rabbit jumped up and said yes. He took two to Little Squirrel and two to old Goat, and the peach fragrance trailed him the whole way. He lined the stone table with big leaves, set out the fruit plates, and counted: seven friends invited, plus himself, eight.

Saturday came and everyone arrived. The banquet began, and the little monkey cut the biggest peaches open, one slice for each, the juice so sweet that everyone squinted with delight. Little Rabbit said it was the sweetest peach she had ever eaten. Little Squirrel said of course it was sweet, the tree had been watered by the little monkey for three whole years. Old Goat said slowly, sweetness is half of a banquet, company is the other half, and only together they make a peach banquet.

They ate until the moon rose. The basket was empty and the pits piled into a little hill. The little monkey gathered the pits and buried them one by one under the tree, saying next year they would grow into little trees and bear more peaches for more friends. Everyone chimed in with yes, and added that next year each family would bring one thing: Little Rabbit would bring carrot cake, Little Squirrel would bring pine nuts, and old Goat would bring a pot of hot tea.

Next summer the peach tree carried even more fruit, and the stone table grew into two. The banquet lasted from sunset until the sky was full of stars, and when they counted, fifteen had come. The little monkey stood under the tree and thought: the sweetest moment of a tree is not the day its peaches ripen, but the day its shade is full of friends.