架上最后那串葡萄

采摘节结束的时候，园主老周站在门口数筐。九十七筐，一筐不落。游客们把架子上的葡萄剪得干干净净，连最小的散串都没放过。只有最东头那架还挂着一串，青一块紫一块，像没睡醒的脸。老周抬头看了一眼，没剪。晚熟的果子，得等。

那串葡萄是怎么被看见的，得从采摘节那天说起。早上八点园门一开，人流涌进去，先挤到中间那几架——那里的葡萄最紫，紫得理直气壮。孩子们举着剪刀够不着，就由大人托着剪。剪刀咔咔响，一串串葡萄落进筐里，筐满了就提到门口过秤。阳光、喊声、果香，整个园子像一锅烧开的水。那串晚熟的挂在东头最高处，没人挤过去，它就一直挂着，看人们进进出出。

第三天傍晚，园子快关门了，来了个背书包的女孩。她站在门口问，还有葡萄吗。老周往东头指了指。她进了园，中间那几架空了，光秃秃的藤条像说完了话的嘴。她一路找到东头，仰头看见那串葡萄，眼睛一下子亮了。

老周搬来梯子，她爬上去，左手托住串，右手贴梗下剪。一串葡萄的重量落在掌心里，比她想的沉。她小心翼翼顺着梯子下来，像端一碗满出来的水。

她没有过秤，站在架子底下先摘了一颗放进嘴里。青的那颗还酸，她皱了下鼻子；再摘一颗紫透的，甜味在舌头上化开，她笑了，说：等了三天，就该是这个味儿。老周在门口听见，收了她的钱，多塞给她一张果园的门票，说秋天再来。

后来那架葡萄落了叶，藤条埋进土里过冬。谁也不知道第二年它会不会结得更多。但女孩记住了一个道理：抢着摘的果子未必最甜，留在架上最后被剪下的那一串，有它自己的时间。

The Last Cluster on the Vine

When the picking festival ended, the orchard owner Old Zhou stood at the gate counting baskets. Ninety-seven baskets, not one left behind. The visitors had cut every cluster from the trellises, even the small loose ones. Only one cluster remained at the far east end, half green half purple, like a face not yet awake from sleep. Old Zhou glanced up at it and did not cut. Late-ripening fruit, he said, has to wait.

How that cluster was finally seen begins on festival day. At eight in the morning the gate opened and the crowd poured in, heading first for the middle rows where the grapes were purplest, purple with full confidence. Children reached with scissors and could not touch them, so adults lifted them up to cut. Snip after snip, clusters dropped into baskets, and full baskets were carried to the gate to be weighed. Sunlight, shouting, the smell of fruit: the whole orchard was like a pot of water come to the boil. The late cluster hung highest at the east end. No one pushed that way, so it simply hung there, watching people come and go.

On the third evening, just before closing, a girl with a schoolbag came to the

gate and asked whether there were any grapes left. Old Zhou pointed east. She walked through rows now bare, the empty vines like mouths that had finished speaking. She found the east-end trellis, looked up, saw the cluster, and her eyes lit all at once.

Old Zhou brought the ladder. She climbed, cradled the cluster in her left palm, and pressed the shears to the stem with her right. The weight of a grape cluster landed in her hand, heavier than she expected. She came down the ladder carefully, like carrying a bowl filled to the brim.

She did not go to the scale first. Standing under the trellis, she picked one berry and put it in her mouth. The green one was still sour, and her nose wrinkled. Then she picked one fully purple, and the sweetness melted on her tongue. She laughed and said: three days of waiting, and this is exactly the taste it should be. Old Zhou heard her from the gate, took her money, and slipped in an extra ticket for autumn, saying come back then.

Later the vine dropped its leaves and its branches were buried for winter. No one knew if it would bear more the next year. But the girl carried away one lesson: the fruit picked first is not always the sweetest. The last cluster cut from the vine keeps its own time.

www.vv99.net