女儿在柚子树下踮脚

我在城里的院子种柚子树，是七年前的事。那时女儿刚上小学，总问我秋天是什么味道。我答不上来。城里的秋天只有桂花香，甜得太客气。我想让她知道一种又苦又清、苦尽之后回甘的味道，于是挖坑，栽苗，浇水，像把一个南方的秋天埋进北方的土里。

柚子树在北方长得慢，头五年只开花不结果，第六年结了三个，被冬天的寒流冻掉两个。第七年秋天，树上挂了七个柚子，青里透黄，一个个沉甸甸地坠着。女儿每天放学先去数一遍，从七个数成七个，她不满意，问为什么不多几个。我说树还年轻，它得先学会活，再学会结果。

摘柚子那天，女儿踮着脚够最矮的那个，够不着，回头喊我。我把她举起来，她两只手抱住柚子拧，拧得脸通红，喊爸爸它不听话。柚子终于脱枝，落进她怀里，她抱着不撒手，抱着走了十几步才想起来放进篮子。那个瞬间我恍惚了一下：三十年前，我也是这样抱着一个柚子，在老家的树下，父亲的手在我背后，稳得像一堵墙。如今换我做那堵墙。

分食在傍晚。七个柚子摆上桌，我学着父亲的样子在顶上划十字，女儿学我的样子掰皮。白汽腾起来，她凑近闻，说像把树叶和糖放在一起的味道。我说对，柚子的香气就是树攒了一年的话。我们一人一瓣，剥掉瓤衣。女儿那瓣酸，她皱着脸灌了口水，又去拿第二瓣，说再给它一次机会。她妈在旁边笑，说这话像她外婆说的——三十年前，我的母亲也是这样，把不甜的柚子让给全家，自己吃最酸的那瓣，还说再给它一次机会。

晚上女儿在作文里写：我家的柚子树今年会结果了，明年会结更多。我把这句话抄进我的日记。树用七年学会结果，人用三十年学会懂一颗柚子。秋天年年都来，它不着急。它知道总有一个孩子会在树下踮起脚，接过上一代人递下来的、微酸带苦的那一瓣，然后抬起头，笑。

My Daughter Stood on Tiptoe Under the Pomelo Tree

I planted the pomelo tree in our city yard seven years ago. Our daughter had just started primary school then and kept asking me what autumn tasted like. I could not answer. Autumn in the city offers only osmanthus fragrance, a sweetness too polite. I wanted her to know a flavor that is bitter and clean, sweet only after the bitterness passes. So I dug the hole, set the sapling, watered it, as if burying a southern autumn in northern soil.

Pomelo trees grow slowly in the north. For the first five years they flowered but bore nothing. The sixth year produced three fruits, and the winter cold snap knocked two off. In the seventh autumn, seven pomelos hung on the branches, green shading into gold, each one heavy with intent. After school our daughter counted them every day, seven again becoming seven, and she was not satisfied: why not more? I said the tree is still young. First it must learn to live; then it learns to bear fruit.

On picking day, our daughter stood on tiptoe reaching for the lowest fruit and could not reach it, turning back to call me. I lifted her up. She wrapped both arms

around the pomelo and twisted, her face red, shouting: Daddy, it will not behave. At last the fruit came off the branch and fell into her arms. She would not let go. She carried it a dozen steps before remembering the basket. In that instant I was dazed: thirty years ago, I too held a pomelo like that, under the tree in the old hometown, my father's hands steady as a wall behind my back. Now it is my turn to be the wall.

We shared the fruit at dusk. Seven pomelos on the table. I imitated my father, scoring a cross on top; our daughter imitated me, peeling the rind back. When the white mist rose, she leaned in to smell it and said it smells like leaves and sugar put together. I said yes: a pomelo's fragrance is the tree's year of gathered speech. One segment each, pith stripped. Hers was sour. She screwed up her face, chased it with water, then reached for a second segment, saying: I will give it another chance. Her mother laughed beside us and said that sounds like her grandmother. Thirty years ago, my own mother did exactly this: gave the least sweet segments to the whole family, kept the sourest for herself, and said: give it another chance.

At night our daughter wrote in her composition: our pomelo tree bore fruit this year, and next year it will bear more. I copied that sentence into my diary. A tree takes seven years to learn to fruit; a person takes thirty years to understand one pomelo. Autumn comes every year, unhurried. It knows that someday a child will rise on tiptoe under the tree, accept the faintly sour, faintly bitter segment handed down from the generation before, and then look up and smile.