

枝头的第一朵花苞

我们教室的窗户正对着校园的花坛。花坛拐角处有一棵桃树，个子不高，比我矮一点，树干有点歪，歪向我们教室这一边。春分以前，它一直光秃秃的，灰褐色的一棵树，谁也没注意它。

第一个花苞是我在星期四发现的。那天课间我在窗边往外看，一根细枝的尖上有一个紫红色的小点点。我以为是虫子，伸手想去弹掉，手伸到一半发现它不动。它是花苞，只有米粒那么大，闭得紧紧的，颜色是深紫红，外面还有一层细细的绒毛。

从那天起，我每个课间都去看它。第二天，花苞大了一点，顶端透出一一点粉，像谁用笔尖蘸了粉颜色点了一下。第四天，花苞的缝上裂开一个小口，能看见里面是浅粉色的。我把脸凑近闻了闻，有一股淡淡的青草味。第六天，花瓣探出一个小角，还卷着，不敢张开。

那几天我一直在数日子，手指头在手心里划。同桌问我数什么，我说还有十二天，它就要开了。她说我吹牛，可是下一个课间，她也跟着我一起来看。

第十二天早上，我到学校往窗外一瞥，愣住了——花开了，就开了一夜。五个花瓣，粉里带白，中间是一小簇黄色的花蕊，蕊上还有更小的黄点点。它开的那根枝最低，离玻璃最近，我一低头就能看清楚。

第二节课间，同桌把同学们叫来了一群。大家围着花坛站一圈，都弯下腰看。有人说这花是四个瓣，有人说是五个，我们吵了几句。班长数了数，说是五个，旁边的花苞张开以后也都是五个。有个低年级的男生伸手想摸，我喊了一声别摸，他把手收回去，挠了挠头。花没有动，我们围着它叽叽喳喳，呼出的气把花瓣吹得轻轻晃。

到了下午，树上又有三个花苞松动了。我在自然课的课本上画了一棵桃树，把开的那朵涂成粉色，把没开的画成小圆点。老师走过来看见，问我画的是哪棵树，我说是窗外那棵。她看了一眼窗外，说那棵树明年会开得更多。

放学的时候我又去看了一次。第一朵还是那朵，没有掉，花瓣在傍晚的风里轻轻点着头。可是我心里还是觉得第一朵最好看。这朵花让我学会了一件事：天天看一样东西，就能看见它长大的那一天。第二天要是没人喊我，我自己也会跑去花坛边。

The First Flower Bud on the Branch

Our classroom window faces the campus flower bed. In the corner of the bed stands a peach tree, shorter than me, its trunk leaning a little toward our side. Before the Spring Equinox, it was just a bare grayish-brown tree that nobody paid attention to.

I first noticed the bud on a Thursday. During the morning break I was gazing out of the window when I saw a small purple-red dot at the tip of a thin branch. I thought it was a bug and reached out to flick it away, but halfway my hand stopped: it did not move. It was a flower bud, about the size of a grain of rice, tightly

closed, deep purple-red, with a thin layer of fine fuzz on it.

From then on I went to look at it during every break. On the second day the bud had grown slightly bigger, and its tip showed a little pink, as if someone had touched it with a brush dipped in pink paint. On the fourth day a tiny crack appeared at the seam, and I could see pale pink inside. I leaned close and sniffed, and there was a faint grassy smell. On the sixth day the petals poked out a small corner, still curled up, not yet daring to open.

During those days I kept counting, tracing numbers on my palm. My deskmate asked what I was counting. I said, twelve more days and it will bloom. She said I was bragging, but the next break she came to look with me.

On the morning of the twelfth day, I got to school, glanced out of the window, and froze: the flower had opened, opened in a single night. Five petals, pink touched with white, and a small cluster of yellow stamens in the center with even tinier yellow grains on them. The branch it grew on was the lowest one, right next to the glass, and I could see it clearly just by lowering my head.

During the second break, my deskmate called over a group of classmates. Everyone stood in a circle around the flower bed, bending down to look. Some said the flower had four petals, others said five, and we argued for a while. The class monitor counted and said it was five, and the buds next to it would open with five too. A boy from a lower grade reached out to touch it, and I shouted, do not pick it. He pulled his hand back and scratched his head. The flower did not move, but we stood around it chatting, and our breath made the petals tremble lightly.

By that afternoon, three more buds on the tree had loosened. But in my heart the first one was still the most beautiful. That flower taught me one thing: if you watch something every day, you can see the very day it grows up.

花坛边的那堂课

三月的最后一个星期二，科学课没有去实验室。老师抱着一沓纸说，今天在外面上一节观察课，地点是教学楼前面的花坛。我们排着队下去，心里都在猜要看什么。

花坛不大，边上砌着一圈水泥，里面种着红叶石楠和几棵小树。老师停在花坛东边那棵桃树前面，问我们：这棵树和上周有什么不同？我们你看我、我看你。上周它也是光秃秃的，这周好像还是光秃秃的。有个同学小声说，没不同。老师没反驳，只让我们分成小组，每组盯住一根枝条，从根部往梢上看。

我们小组盯的是中间那根斜着长的枝条。看第二遍的时候，有人叫起来：这里有包！是花苞，一

个挨着一个，靠梢头的那几个已经发紫，越往下越小，最小的要眯起眼睛才看得见。老师走过来，让我们把手垫在枝条下面，轻轻托起来凑近看。花苞外面包着两层壳，壳边上有一圈毛，顶上裂了一道细缝，缝里露出一一点粉。老师说，这叫花苞，花瓣就在里面叠着，还没长够个头。

老师问，你们猜一朵桃花从花苞到开放要几天？有人说一天，有人说一个星期。老师说她也不确定，让我们自己数：从今天起，每天来看一次，记下花苞的变化，直到它开。我们蹲在花坛边，把日期写在纸上，又画了那个花苞的样子。画得不像，壳上的毛画成了锯齿。

第二天我们去看，花苞没大多少，可是颜色深了一点。第三天，靠梢头那个花苞的缝变宽了，能看见里面一层一层的花瓣，挤在一起。第五天早上，我们几个刚进校门就跑去花坛——开了，最上面那个花苞开了，花瓣还是卷的，颜色比晚上看照片里浅。我们几个蹲成一排，谁也不说话，后来还是值日生喊我们回去早读，我们才站起来，膝盖上全是土。

又过了四天，那根枝条上的花苞开了大半。那天课间，同学们围了一圈，从看花变成找花，这个说这根枝上有六个包，那个说我数的是七个。老师站在圈外面，不数，只看我们。

后来我在观察纸上写了一句话：我以为花是一夜开的，其实它准备了很久，只是我们没天天看。科学课结束的时候，老师把我们的观察纸都收了，说下学期花苞再鼓起来，我们还去花坛。

The Lesson Beside the Flower Bed

On the last Tuesday of March, science class did not go to the lab. Our teacher carried a stack of papers and said, today we have an observation lesson outside, at the flower bed in front of the teaching building. We lined up and walked down, guessing what we would look at.

The flower bed was not big, edged with a low cement border, planted with red-tip photinia and a few small trees. The teacher stopped in front of the peach tree on the east side and asked us: what is different about this tree from last week? We looked at each other. Last week it was bare, and this week it still seemed bare. One classmate whispered, nothing is different. The teacher did not argue. She just told us to split into groups, each group picking one branch and looking from its base to its tip.

Our group watched the slanted branch in the middle. On the second look, someone cried out: there are bumps here! They were flower buds, one after another. The ones near the tip had turned purple; the lower ones were smaller, and the smallest could only be seen by squinting. The teacher came over and told us to put our hands under the branch, lift it gently, and bring it close. Each bud was wrapped in two layers of husk with a ring of fuzz along the edge. A thin crack ran across the top, and a bit of pink showed through the crack. The teacher said, these are flower buds; the petals are folded inside, not yet grown big enough.

She asked us to guess how many days it takes a peach flower to go from bud to bloom. Someone said one day, someone said a week. The teacher said she was not sure either, and told us to count it ourselves: come and look once a day from today, write down how the buds change, until they open. We squatted by the flower bed, wrote the date on paper, and drew the bud. The drawing was not quite right; I turned the fuzz on the husk into sawtooth lines.

The next day we went to look. The bud had not grown much, but its color was a little deeper. On the third day the crack on the topmost bud had widened, and we could see the petals inside, layer upon layer, packed together. Early on the fifth morning, the moment we passed the school gate we ran to the flower bed. It had opened: the topmost bud was open, its petals still curled, its color lighter than in the photo we had taken the night before. We squatted in a row, nobody talking. Only when the duty student called us back for morning reading did we stand up, our knees covered in dirt.

Four more days later, most of the buds on that branch had opened. During the break that day, classmates gathered in a circle, and watching the flowers turned into hunting for flowers: one said this branch had six buds, another said I counted seven. The teacher stood outside the circle, not counting, just watching us.

Later I wrote one sentence on my observation sheet: I used to think flowers open in one night; actually they prepare for a long time, we just did not look every day. At the end of the lesson the teacher collected all our sheets and said that next term, when the buds swell again, we will go back to the flower bed.

错过花开的那三天

三月里我感冒了，喉咙疼，请了三天假。在家的那三天，我一边吃药一边惦记学校的事，惦记数学作业，还惦记一件事：花坛那棵桃树的花苞。放假前一天我刚看见它裂了缝，按同桌电话里的说法，再过两三天它就要开了。我偏偏在这两三天里回不了学校。

病假最后一天，我退烧了。妈妈问我要不要再歇一天，我说不用。其实我早上醒来第一个念头就是那朵花——它会不会在我睡着的时候开？开的时候只有它自己知道，那多可惜。

回到学校，我把书包放进座位，第一件事是跑到走廊上往花坛看。桃树上有一朵花开过了，花瓣已经全张开，颜色有点发白，边上有一片卷了起来。它不是刚开的。我站在走廊上，心里空了一下。我错过了它张开的那一下。

同桌看我站着不动，过来说，你走以后第二天它就开了，是我们班先看见的，后来同学们围过来，半个班的人都蹲在花坛边上。她说他们数过，那朵花有五个花瓣，还说要摘，被劳动委员

拦住了。她一边说一边比划，说它开的时候太阳刚好照到那根枝。我听着，又可惜又羡慕。那一下我没看见，就永远没看见了。

不过她说完，指着旁边一根枝：还有一个包，给你留着。我跑下去蹲在花坛边看，那个花苞比前几天那个小一点，紫红色，壳边上有一圈毛，顶上还没裂缝。它在枝头晃，我蹲着看它，心里慢慢好受了一点。它还没开，我这次不走了。

从那天起我每天课间都来看它。第一天没变化，第二天缝裂开一条线，第三天花瓣露出一一点粉，卷着。我数得很仔细，因为我不想再错过。第四天中午，风比较大，花瓣张开了一半。放学前的最后一节课间，同学们又围过来，这次我站在最前面。太阳下去一点，光照在花坛的水泥边上。就在那群人中间，那个花苞的缝越裂越大，花瓣一层一层往外翻，最后整朵立起来了。有人喊开了开了，声音不大，但是全班都听见了。

这朵花开的时候，我眼睛一直睁着。我这才明白，花不等人，可是花也不只开一次。第一朵我错过了，第二朵我等到了。以后花坛里的花一朵一朵开，我打算一朵也不错过。

The Three Days I Missed the Bloom

In March I caught a cold, my throat hurt badly, and I asked for three days off. At home, between doses of medicine, I worried about school: about the math homework, and about one more thing, the flower bud on the peach tree by the flower bed. The day before I left, I had just seen a crack open on it, and according to my deskmate on the phone, it would bloom in two or three days. Of all times, I could not go to school in exactly those two or three days.

On the last day of my sick leave, my fever broke. My mother asked if I wanted to rest one more day. I said no. Actually, my first thought when I woke up was that flower. What if it opened while I was asleep? It would open with nobody seeing, and that would be such a pity.

When I got back to school, I dropped my bag at my seat and ran straight to the corridor to look at the flower bed. On the peach tree one flower had already bloomed: its petals were fully spread, the color fading to pale, one edge curling up. It was not freshly opened. I stood in the corridor and felt a hollow in my chest. I had missed the moment it opened.

My deskmate saw me standing there and came over. She said the flower opened on the second day after I left, and our class saw it first; then classmates gathered around, and half the class squatted by the flower bed. She said they counted five petals, and someone tried to pick it but the labor committee member stopped them. She gestured as she talked, saying that when it opened, the sunlight fell right on that branch. I listened, feeling sorry and jealous at the same time. That moment I did not

see, I would never see.

Then she pointed to a branch nearby: there is still one bud, saved for you. I ran downstairs and squatted by the flower bed. This bud was a little smaller than the one from before, purple-red, with a ring of fuzz on the husk, its top not yet cracked. It swayed on the branch while I squatted and watched it, and I felt a little better. It had not opened, and this time I would not leave.

From that day on I came to look at it during every break. Nothing changed on the first day; on the second a thin line split open; on the third the petals showed a bit of pink, still curled. I counted carefully, because I did not want to miss it again. At noon on the fourth day the wind was strong and the petals had opened halfway. During the last break before school ended, classmates gathered around again, and this time I stood in front. The sun had sunk a little, and the light fell on the cement edge of the flower bed. Right there among the crowd, the crack in the bud widened, the petals turned outward layer by layer, and at last the whole flower stood up. Someone whispered, it is opening, not loudly, but the whole class heard.

This flower opened with my eyes wide open. I finally understood: flowers do not wait for people, but flowers do not bloom only once. I missed the first one; I caught the second one. From now on, as the flowers in the bed open one by one, I plan not to miss a single one.