

路边的小花不着急

初春的早晨天还暗着，我背着书包走河堤那条路上学，路灯把影子拉长又缩短。走到第三个路灯底下，我踩到一小片凉，低头看，是露水打湿的白花，米粒大，贴着地开，一开就是一小片。我不知道它的名字，后来查了书才知道叫婆婆纳。

过了几天，蒲公英的黄花开出来了，也是沿着河堤，一小簇一小簇。又过了几天，婆婆纳谢了，花瓣掉在原来的位置上。我忽然意识到，它们没有一起开过。婆婆纳开的时候，蒲公英还顶着绿色的花苞；蒲公英开的时候，婆婆纳已经在结小小的果。谁也没有抢谁的日子。

那段时间我心情不好。月考数学砸了，卷子上红色的叉像一排栅栏。我总觉得自己慢了，同学已经开始预习下学期的内容，我还卡在上一章。那天早晨我又走到河堤，蹲下来看那些花。墙根的砖缝里钻出一株紫花，细得像一根线挑着，它开得那么小，那么稳，好像它根本不怀疑自己该不该开、该什么时候开。

我想起外婆家后园。园里的花是有排场的：迎春先开，开完桃花接上，桃花落了梨花才敢露面，满园从没有一起热闹过，可从没有空过。外婆说，花比人老实，时候到了就开，时候不到，憋着也不开。小时候我觉得这话没意思，那天早晨，我在河堤边上站了很久，觉得这话重得很。

我把书包放下，沿着河堤走了一趟。蒲公英的花苞顶开绿萼的过程我看得清清楚楚，一层一层，不急，也不停。它不看看旁边开没开，它只管把自己打开。

后来我在错题本的第一页写了一句话：花开不语，自有时节。写的时候我想起砖缝里那株紫花。它没有名字被人叫过，没有人为它停下来，可它到日子就开了，开得完完整整。

再后来数学单元测，我考得不算好，但比上次好。放学的路上我又去看婆婆纳结的果，一小粒一小粒，比花还不起眼。我知道它们在攒下一个春天的劲儿。我也在攒。路边的小花都不着急，我为什么要着急。

The Little Flowers by the Road Are in No Hurry

In early spring the mornings were still dark. I walked along the river embankment to school with my backpack on, the streetlights stretching my shadow long and then short. By the third lamp I stepped into a patch of cold. I looked down: tiny white flowers wet with dew, the size of a grain of rice, hugging the ground, blooming in little sheets. I did not know its name then. I looked it up in a book later and learned it was called speedwell.

A few days later the dandelions came out yellow, also along the embankment, cluster by small cluster. A few days after that, the speedwell faded, its petals falling right where they had grown. It struck me suddenly that they had never bloomed together. When the speedwell was out, the dandelion was still holding green buds;

when the dandelion opened, the speedwell was already setting its tiny fruit. None of them stole another's day.

My mood was bad those weeks. I had bombed the math exam, and the red crosses on the paper looked like a row of fence rails. I kept feeling I was slow, that my classmates were already previewing next term while I was still stuck in the previous chapter. That morning I squatted down by the embankment and looked at the flowers. In a crack of the brick wall a purple sprout had pushed through, thin as a thread holding up a bead, blooming so small and so steady, as if it never once doubted whether it should bloom, or when.

I thought of the backyard at my grandmother's house. The flowers there kept an order: winter jasmine first, then peach blossoms took over, and pear blossoms only dared appear after the peach had fallen. The garden was never loud all at once, and it was never empty either. Grandma used to say flowers are more honest than people: when the time comes they open, and when it has not come, they stay closed no matter how hard they strain. As a child I found that saying dull. That morning, standing a long time on the embankment, I found it heavy.

I set down my backpack and walked the length of the embankment once. I watched a dandelion bud push its green calyx apart, layer by layer, unhurried and unstoppable. It did not check whether its neighbors had opened. It only saw to opening itself.

Later I wrote one line on the first page of my mistake notebook: flowers bloom without speaking, each keeping its own season. As I wrote it, I saw the purple sprout in the brick crack again. No one had ever called its name, no one had ever stopped for it, yet when its day came it opened, whole and complete.

In the next unit test my math score was not great, but better than before. On the way home I went back to look at the speedwell's seeds, grain by grain, even less noticeable than its flowers. I knew they were saving up strength for the next spring. So was I. The little flowers by the road are in no hurry. Why should I be.

阳台上的两盆花吵架了

阳台上并排放着两盆花。靠墙那盆是妈妈的，卖花的叫它长寿梅，枝干灰扑扑的，买回来三个月，一个芽都没冒，像一截烧火棍。靠栏杆那盆是我的，一颗风信子种球，紫皮，丑得像洋葱，我按说明书把它架在水瓶上，盼它开花。

二月中旬，风信子先开了。花箭从种球中间顶出来，一串小花挨着开，紫得发亮，写作业时满鼻子都是香。我得意，隔着阳台冲妈妈喊：妈，你那截木头什么时候开？妈妈浇着她的空盆，

头也不抬：快了。

妈妈浇得很勤。她每天早上拿喷壶喷两下，隔几天浇一次透水，还转盆，把背朝墙的那面转过来晒。长寿梅一点反应没有。我有时候替它着急，那么勤的水，换我早感动了。妈妈不急，她说卖花的讲过，这东西性子慢，根没长好之前，浇再多也不开。

三月底，学校开运动会，我下午没课，回家拿水。路过阳台，我停住了。长寿梅的枝干上，不知什么时候鼓出了一排小疙瘩，指甲盖大小，褐色的壳包着，壳缝里透出一点粉。我蹲下去看，那些疙瘩硬硬的，排列得很规矩，像枝干上长出了一排小小的拳头。

妈妈从厨房出来，也蹲下来，看了半天，没说话。她伸手想碰又缩回来，最后只说了一句：根长好了。那语气，像等了很久的一封信终于到了。

四月第一个星期的早上，长寿梅开了。不是开一朵，是满枝一起开，粉白的花瓣一层一层，把整截灰枝干盖住。花瓣薄，风一过就颤，颤得很有耐心。我看了它一早上，上课都走神。它用两个月的沉默，换了一整个星期的满枝。

那天我在生物课的笔记边上写：我的风信子开得早，香得张扬，可它开完就谢了，种球瘪下去一半；长寿梅开得晚，开得沉，开了就是满枝。它们没有谁对谁错，根长好了才开，是它们共同的规矩。

现在两盆花都在阳台上。风信子的叶子黄了，妈妈没有扔，说养一养明年还可能开；长寿梅谢了花，又变回那截灰枝干，妈妈照旧每天喷两下。我不再笑它了。我知道那些看不见的地方，根一直在长。等待不是没有发生，等待有自己的刻度。

The Two Flowerpots on the Balcony

Two flowerpots sat side by side on our balcony. The one against the wall was mom's, sold under the name long-life plum. Its branches were dusty gray, and three months after we brought it home it had not pushed a single bud, like a stick of firewood. The one by the railing was mine, a hyacinth bulb, purple-skinned, ugly as an onion. I set it on a glass bottle according to the instructions and waited for it to bloom.

In mid-February the hyacinth went first. The flower spike pushed up through the middle of the bulb, a string of small flowers opening one after another, glossy purple, filling the desk with scent while I did homework. I was smug. Across the balcony I called out, mom, when does your firewood stick bloom? Mom was watering her empty pot and did not look up. Soon.

She watered diligently. Two spritzes from the spray bottle every morning, a thorough soaking every few days, and she rotated the pot so the side facing the wall got its turn in the sun. The long-life plum gave no sign. Sometimes I got impatient

for it, with that much water, I would have been moved already. Mom was not. The florist had told her, she said, this one is slow by nature. Before the roots are grown, no amount of watering will make it bloom.

At the end of March our school held its sports meet, I had no afternoon classes, and I went home to fetch water. Passing the balcony, I stopped. On the gray branches of the long-life plum, sometime without notice, a row of small lumps had swelled up, the size of a fingernail, wrapped in brown shells, with a hint of pink showing through the seams. I squatted down. The lumps were hard, arranged in neat order, like a row of tiny fists grown along the branches.

Mom came out of the kitchen and squatted down too. She looked for a long time without speaking. She reached out to touch one and pulled her hand back, and finally said just one line: the roots have grown. Her tone was like a long-awaited reply letter finally arriving.

On the morning of the first week of April, the long-life plum bloomed. Not one flower, but the whole tree at once, pink-white petals layer upon layer, covering every gray branch. The petals were thin and trembled whenever the wind passed, trembling with great patience. I watched it all morning and daydreamed through class. It had traded two months of silence for one week of a tree in full bloom.

That day I wrote in the margin of my biology notes: my hyacinth bloomed early, fragrant and showy, but it faded quickly and its bulb shrank by half; the long-life plum bloomed late and heavy, and when it opened it opened on every branch. Neither was right or wrong. Blooming only after the roots are grown is the rule they both keep.

Both pots are still on the balcony. The hyacinth's leaves have yellowed, and mom has not thrown it away, saying with care it may bloom again next year. The long-life plum has dropped its flowers and gone back to being a gray stick, and mom still gives it two spritzes every morning. I do not laugh at it anymore. I know that where nothing is visible, the roots have been growing all along. Waiting is not nothing happening. Waiting has its own scale.

校园后墙的那排花期

学校后墙外是一条旧马路，路边种着一排花树，没人打理，年年自己开。我骑车上学从那里过，第一年只记得好看，第二年才开始数它们。

最先的是玉兰。三月初，别的树还黑着，那几棵玉兰已经举了一树白花，大得像停着一群白

鸟。可它开得急，一场倒春寒就打掉大半，剩下的撑不到两个星期，地上全是摔烂的花瓣。我在树下捡过一朵完整的，握在手里，花茎断口是绿的。

玉兰落尽的时候，桃花才上色。粉的一排，从墙根开到电线杆底下，开得慢条斯理，从花苞到全开拖了将近一个月。海棠挨着桃花，红的花苞开成粉白的花，风一吹掉进墙根的草里，也不心疼。最晚的是墙根的蔷薇，五月上旬才开，一墙一墙地爬，开得不管不顾，香气浓得骑车经过都得屏一下气。

第二年春天，我在后墙外停过一次车。那天放学早，我坐在路边的石墩上看那排花。玉兰只剩叶子，绿得发亮；桃花谢了大半，枝头有了小青果；海棠正开着；蔷薇打着密密麻麻的骨朵。同一排树，同一天，各有各的阶段，谁也没抄谁的答案。

我忽然想起自己。初一那年我急着参加物理竞赛班，跟不上，一个学期下来笔记抄了半本，题还是不会，后来退回普通班，反而把力学学扎实了。当时我觉得那半年是浪费，是落后。那天坐在石墩上，我看着那排各开各的花，忽然觉得那半年像玉兰的倒春寒——打掉的花不是白开，它把根往土里又按深了一截。

花期这东西，细想很讲规矩。早开的不一定先谢，晚开的未必不如人。玉兰抢了春天最前面的半个月，代价是挨一场寒流；蔷薇压轴，把整个五月都占了。没有哪棵树能全年都开，也没有哪棵树因为开得晚就少结果。

毕业前的那个五月，蔷薇开得最盛。我推着自行车从墙根走过去，花瓣落在书包上，落在车筐里。我摘了一朵压在字典里，没跟任何人说。

后来很多年，我大概还会路过各种各样的春天。有的春天轮到我开花，有的春天我只配长叶子。我都记得后墙那排花：花开不语，自有时节。轮到谁，谁就开；没轮到，就扎根。

The Row of Blooms Behind the School Wall

Behind the school's back wall ran an old road, and along it stood a row of flowering trees, untended, blooming on their own every year. I biked to school past them. The first year I only remembered that they were pretty. The second year I started keeping count.

The magnolias went first. In early March, when every other tree was still black and bare, those magnolias held up whole trees of white flowers, big as a flock of white birds at rest. But they bloomed in a rush. One late cold snap knocked down most of them, and the rest lasted less than two weeks, the ground under them littered with bruised petals. I once picked up a whole one under the tree and held it in my hand, its broken stem green at the cut.

Just as the magnolias finished, the peach blossoms took on color. A row of pink, running from the wall root all the way to the telephone pole, opening at a slow,

unhurried pace, taking nearly a month from bud to full bloom. The crabapples stood next to the peaches, their red buds opening into pink-white flowers, dropping into the grass by the wall when the wind came, without any regret about it. The last were the roses climbing the wall, blooming only in early May, spreading row after row, reckless, their scent so thick that passing on a bike you had to hold your breath for a moment.

In the second spring, I stopped my bike once outside the back wall. School let out early that day, and I sat on a stone block watching the row. The magnolias had only leaves left, glossy green; the peach blossoms were mostly gone, tiny green fruits on the twigs; the crabapples were in full bloom; the roses wore dense buds all along the wall. The same row of trees, the same day, each in its own stage, none copying another's answers.

I thought of myself suddenly. In seventh grade I had rushed into the physics competition class, could not keep up, filled half a notebook with copied notes yet still could not solve the problems, and was eventually moved back to the regular class, where my mechanics quietly turned solid. Back then I counted that half year as wasted, as falling behind. Sitting on that stone block, watching the row of trees each in its own bloom, I suddenly felt that half year had been the magnolia's late cold snap. The knocked-down blossoms had not opened in vain. They had pressed the roots one notch deeper into the soil.

Flowering seasons, thought through carefully, keep strict order. The early bloomer is not always the first to fade; the late one is not necessarily the loser. The magnolia grabbed the first half month of spring and paid for it with a cold wave; the roses took the finale and owned all of May. No tree blooms all year, and no tree bears less fruit for blooming late.

In that May before graduation, the roses were at their peak. I walked my bike along the wall, petals landing on my backpack, landing in the basket. I picked one and pressed it inside my dictionary, and told no one.

For many years to come, I will probably pass through all kinds of springs. Some springs it will be my turn to bloom; some springs I will only be fit to grow leaves. I will remember that row behind the back wall: flowers bloom without speaking, each keeping its own season. When it is someone's turn, they bloom. When it is not, they put down roots.