

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，像等了很久的一封回信终于到了。

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.