

巷子尽头的那棵樱花树

巷子尽头有一棵樱花树，不归谁所有，也不归我所有。每天早上上学我都从它旁边过，可是真正看见它，是这周二早晨。

那天早晨我离它还有半条街，就先看见了它。天才亮透，巷子口悬着一大团粉色的云，浮在瓦房顶上，软得像不真。我停下脚步。这条路我走了三年，从没发现树可以有这么大。原来离得太近的东西反而看不见，要离远了才看得见。

走到树下，云变成了一朵一朵的花。每朵花有五个花瓣，白里透着粉，花瓣边上有一圈淡淡的红，像谁用彩铅描过又抹开了。中间的花蕊密密地挤在一起，顶着一粒一粒小黄点。我凑近去看，一只蜜蜂撞了一下我的鼻子，吓了我一跳。有的花开足了，花瓣平平地张开，像小盘子；有的半开，像不好意思；有的还是花骨朵，圆圆的，粉粉的，挂在枝头像一排小铃铛，风一吹，好像马上就要响。

从前爷爷陪我走这条路。三年级的时候，他老远指给我看：快看，樱花开啦。我跑过去把脸凑到一朵花跟前，他在后面喊我：先看远的，再看近的。那时我不懂，觉得凑近了看就是看得仔细。后来我才知道，这棵樱花树是爷爷年轻时栽的，树比咱家的房子岁数还大。如今爷爷进城去住了，我一个人走这条路，才看懂了——巷子口那一大团粉色的云，要离远了才看得见；花蕊上的小黄点，要凑近了才看得见。两种看法，都得有。

那天早晨我在树下站了很久，差点迟到。风一过，花瓣像下雪一样落，落在我的肩上、书包顶上。我没有拍掉。邻门的陈曦路过，说你摘樱花呀。我说我没摘，是它自己落下来的。去学校的路上，我觉得巷子口那团粉色的云跟着我走了一路，一直落到我的肩膀上。

The Cherry Tree at the End of the Alley

At the end of our alley stands a cherry tree that belongs to no one. I walk past it every morning on my way to school, but I did not truly see it until Tuesday morning.

That morning I first spotted it from half a street away. The sky had just brightened, and a big pink cloud hung at the mouth of the alley, floating above the tile roofs, soft and almost unreal. I stopped. I have walked this road for three years and never noticed the tree could be so big. It seems that when you are too close to something, you cannot see it at all; you can only see it from far away.

Under the tree, the cloud turned into one flower after another. Each flower has five petals, white touched with pink, with a faint reddish line along the edge, as if someone drew it with a colored pencil and then wiped it. The stamens in the middle crowd together tightly, each topped with a tiny yellow anther. I leaned in to look, and a bee bumped my nose and startled me half to death. Some flowers are fully open

with their petals spread flat like little plates; some are half open, as if shy; some are still buds, round and pink, hanging from the branch like a row of small bells that seem about to ring when the wind blows.

Grandpa used to walk this road with me. In third grade he would point from far away and say, look, the cherry blossoms are out. I would run over and press my face close to one, and he would call me back: look from far away first, then come closer. I did not understand then; I thought looking close up was looking well enough. Later I learned that Grandpa planted this cherry tree when he was young, and the tree is older than our house. Now he has moved to the city, and I walk the road alone, and I finally understand: the pink cloud at the mouth of the alley can only be seen from far away, and the tiny yellow anthers can only be seen up close. Both ways of looking are needed.

That morning I stood under the tree so long I was almost late for school. A gust of wind passed, and petals fell like snow, landing on my shoulder and on top of my schoolbag. I did not brush them off. Chen Xi from next door walked by and said, picking cherry blossoms? I said I did not pick any, they fell by themselves. On the way to school I felt that the pink cloud at the end of the alley had followed me all the way and settled on my shoulder.

花坛边的周小舟

课间十分钟，周小舟没有回教室。他蹲在教学楼下的月季花坛边，像蹲在一件顶顶要紧的事情旁边。

起初我以为他在玩。后来发现他不是。他先看远处：整丛月季在太阳底下铺开，深红的、浅红的、奶白的，一丛一团，挤挤挨挨。然后他凑近其中一朵，眼睛几乎贴上花瓣。他一层一层地数花瓣，嘴里念念有词。数完了，他回头问我：你知道一朵月季有多少瓣吗？我说不知道。他说：我数了这朵，十七瓣。外头五瓣最大，越往里越小，最里头的小得像指甲盖。

他又去看花芯。花芯里一圈一圈立着细丝，顶上沾着金黄的粉。他说那是给蜜蜂准备的饭。有一只蚂蚁从花瓣上爬过，他盯着看了好久，也不赶。风一吹，整丛花一起点头，他跟着往后退了两步，又凑上去。有一片叶子背面有个小洞，边缘发黄，他说那是虫咬的，被咬过的花今年开得少。

上课铃响了，他还不走。我催他，他指着最大的那朵花骨朵说：你看它，外面还裹着青色的壳，壳尖上带一点红，再过几天才开。它不着急。

回教室的路上他告诉我，他姐姐在城市里当护士，去年过年都没回来，已经两年没回家了。这丛月季是学校在他姐姐走的那年春天栽的，栽的时候才一小棵，现在比他的腰还高。他说他每

天课间都来看一会儿，看着看着，就觉得姐姐也在看着这丛花。

那节课我坐在座位上，心还在花坛边。原来一个人看花的时候，心里想的是另一个人。第二天课间，我路过花坛，周小舟还蹲在那儿。这一回，我也蹲了下来。远处一丛一团，近处一层一瓣，我看见那朵花骨朵的青壳尖上，红的那一点，又深了一些。

Zhou Xiaozhou by the Flowerbed

During the ten-minute break, Zhou Xiaozhou did not go back to the classroom. He squatted beside the rose flowerbed under the teaching building, as if crouched next to something terribly important.

At first I thought he was just playing. Then I saw he was not. He looked from far away first: the whole bush spread out in the sun, deep red, light red, creamy white, one clump after another, crowded together. Then he leaned in to one flower, his eyes almost touching the petals. He counted the petals layer by layer, murmuring to himself. When he finished, he turned and asked me: do you know how many petals a rose has? I said no. He said: I counted this one, seventeen. The outer five are the biggest, and the inner ones get smaller and smaller, the very innermost as small as a fingernail.

Then he examined the heart of the flower. Ring after ring of thin filaments stood inside, their tips dusted with golden pollen. He said that was the meal prepared for bees. An ant crawled across a petal, and he watched it for a long time without shooing it away. When a gust of wind blew, the whole bush nodded at once, and he stepped back two paces and then leaned in again. On the back of one leaf there was a small hole with yellowed edges; he said a bug had bitten it, and flowers that get bitten bloom less this year.

The bell rang and he still would not leave. I hurried him, and he pointed at the biggest bud: look at it, still wrapped in its green shell, the tip of the shell touched with a little red, it will open in a few more days. It is not in a hurry.

On the way back to class he told me his older sister works as a nurse in the city. She did not even come home for New Year last year; it has been two years. The school planted this rose bush in the spring of the year his sister left; it was just a little sapling then, and now it is taller than his waist. He said he comes to look at it during every break, and while he looks, he feels his sister is watching this bush too.

During that lesson I sat at my desk with my mind still by the flowerbed. So when a person looks at a flower, what he is really thinking about is another person. The

next morning I passed the flowerbed, and Zhou Xiaozhou was squatting there again. This time, I squatted down too. From far away, clump after clump; up close, layer after layer. I saw that the red dot on the tip of the bud's green shell had deepened a little more.

种植角的那朵牵牛花

我们教室后面有一个种植角，窗台上摆了一排盆。三月初每人种一盆，我种的是牵牛花，老师发的种子黑黑的、硬硬的，像小石子。我把它按进土里，浇了水，心想明天就该发芽了吧。

明天没有发芽，后天也没有。第五天，土里拱出两片嫩叶，薄得能透光，我蹲在窗台边看了半节自习课。它的藤蔓一天一个样，顺着老师拉的绳子往上爬，卷须一圈一圈地缠，像小孩攥拳头，攥得紧紧的。我每天早上给它浇水，水从盆底的孔里滴出来，我把托盘里的积水倒掉，这是自然课老师教的。

四月底，刘一诺盆里的风仙花开了，粉色的，引来一只白粉蝶。全班的花盆陆陆续续都开了颜色，只有我的牵牛花还是满满一架子绿叶。有同学说，你这盆光长叶子啦。我心里发急，晚上特意多浇了半杯水，第二天又后悔，怕浇坏了。

五月初，藤蔓顶端终于结出花苞。花苞是拧着的，像一支支小喇叭倒挂着，外面裹着青绿的萼片，萼尖透出一点紫。我盯着那些花苞看了三天，它们一声不响。第五天早晨我进教室，靠窗那三朵开了。紫色的，花瓣薄得像湿的纸，上面的纹路一条一条，像叶脉，又像河的分叉。花芯是白的，一直白到喇叭口。花瓣上有一滴露水，滚了一下，没有掉。

那三朵花到中午就蔫了，下午彻底合上。我有点难过，刘一诺说，牵牛花就开一早上，明天还会有新的。第二天，果然又开了两朵，比头一天的还大。

后来我算过，从播种到第一朵花开，一共六十一天。这六十一天里它没有一天在闲着，只是把力气用在我看不见的地方——根往土里扎，藤往绳上缠。它不开花，不是忘了开，是在等它自己的时候。种植角那排花盆现在还在我眼前，我的那盆最绿，也开得最慢，但开得最久。

The Morning Glory in Our Planting Corner

At the back of our classroom there is a planting corner, a row of pots on the windowsill. In early March everyone planted a pot. Mine was morning glories. The seeds the teacher handed out were black and hard, like little pebbles. I pressed them into the soil, watered them, and thought they would sprout by tomorrow.

Tomorrow they did not sprout, nor the day after. On the fifth day two tender

leaves pushed out of the soil, thin enough for light to pass through, and I squatted by the windowsill and watched them through half a study period. Its vine changed every day, climbing up along the string the teacher had tied, its tendrils winding round and round like a child clenching a fist, clenched tight. I watered it every morning, let the water drip out of the hole in the bottom of the pot, and poured off the standing water in the tray, just as our science teacher taught.

By the end of April, the balsam in Liu Yinuo's pot had bloomed, pink, and attracted a white butterfly. Pot after pot in the class showed color, and only my morning glory was still a whole shelf of green leaves. A classmate said, yours just grows leaves. I got anxious and deliberately gave it half a cup of extra water that evening, then regretted it the next day, afraid of ruining it.

In early May, buds finally formed at the tips of the vines. The buds were twisted, like little trumpets hanging upside down, wrapped in green sepals with a hint of purple showing at their points. I stared at those buds for three days; they kept silent. On the fifth morning I walked into the classroom and the three flowers by the window had opened. Purple, with petals thin like wet paper, their veins running line by line like leaf veins, or like a river dividing. The throat of the flower was white, white all the way to the rim of the trumpet. A drop of dew sat on a petal, rolled once, and did not fall.

Those three flowers wilted by noon and closed completely in the afternoon. I felt a little sad, and Liu Yinuo said, morning glories only bloom in the morning; there will be new ones tomorrow. The next day, sure enough, two more opened, even bigger than the day before.

Later I counted: from sowing to the first flower, sixty-one days. In those sixty-one days it was not idle for a single day; it was just spending its strength where I could not see, roots driving down into the soil, vines winding up the string. It did not refuse to bloom; it was waiting for its own time. That row of pots in the planting corner is still before my eyes. Mine is the greenest and the slowest to bloom, but it blooms the longest.