

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.