

旗杆下的第一朵郁金香开了

三月十七日，星期一，晴。清晨六点半，轮到我到操场值日。天还没有全亮，旗杆的影子横着铺在跑道上，一直伸到花坛边上。我拿着扫帚从花坛后面绕过去，扫帚头擦着冬青的叶子，沙沙响。就在我直起腰的那一下，我看见旗杆底下那排郁金香里，有一朵开了。

我蹲下来看。花瓣是淡粉色的，边上带一点白，还带着夜里留下的水汽，颜色比后来太阳晒过的时候要深。它不是猛地打开的，是一片一片慢慢松开的，最外面那两片往下垂，中间的花杯还半合着，像一只手刚松开拳头。我看了快十分钟，扫帚扔在地上也没管。值日本该二十分钟扫完，我那天扫到了七点十分。

英语老师抱着练习册从花坛边走过，也停下来。她说这排郁金香她看了十二年，每年都奇怪自己怎么恰好赶上第一朵。后来她想明白了，不是恰好，是花一直在开，只有停下来看的那个人，才会碰见第一朵。我听了没说话，把这句话记进了心里。

早自习前的升旗我没赶上，回教室的路上特意又从花坛绕过去。剩下的花苞还闭着，绿色的尖上有一点点粉色透出来，像攥紧的手指缝里漏出来的光。我数了数，一共八个花苞，加上开的那一朵，九支。我忽然想，去年这个时候我在干什么呢。我一点也想不起来去年春天校园里的花是怎么开的。不是花没开，是我从来没停下来看过。每天从花坛边上跑过去，眼睛盯着手表，盯着教学楼的门，花在开还是没开，跟我没有关系。原来日子就是这样从脚边溜走的，花替它们记着日子，一朵一朵，开一天，落一天，我们只顾着往前赶。

晚上回到宿舍，我翻开日记本，把白天的事写下来：第一朵郁金香，淡粉色，花杯半合，花坛边上的蓝瓷砖缺了一个角。写完我又加了一句：明年春天，我要每天都来看一眼。剩下的八个花苞，接下来几天会一朵一朵开。我知道它们会开，因为我已经在这里等它们了。

The First Tulip Under the Flagpole Bloomed

Monday, March 17, sunny. At half past six in the morning it was my turn to clean the playground. The sky had not fully brightened. The shadow of the flagpole lay across the running track and reached all the way to the edge of the flower bed. I swept behind the bed, the broom brushing the wintergreen leaves. Then I straightened up, and I saw it. Under the flagpole, among that row of tulips, one had opened.

I squatted down to look. The petals were pale pink with a little white at the edges, still holding the dampness of the night, deeper in color than they would be after the sun dried them. It did not open all at once. The petals loosened one by one, the outer two bending down, the cup in the middle still half closed, like a hand that had just let go of its fist. I watched for nearly ten minutes, the broom lying on the ground where I dropped it. Cleaning should have taken twenty minutes. That morning I finished at ten past seven.

Our English teacher walked past the flower bed carrying a stack of workbooks and stopped too. She said she had watched this row of tulips for twelve years and always wondered how she happened to catch the first bloom. Later she figured it out. It was not luck. The flowers had been opening all along, and only the person who stopped to look would ever meet the first one. I did not say anything, but I kept that sentence inside me.

I missed the flag raising before morning study. On the way back to the classroom I deliberately took the path past the flower bed again. The remaining buds were still closed, with a little pink showing through the green tips, like light leaking through the gaps of tight fingers. I counted them. Eight buds, plus the one that had opened, nine in all. I suddenly wondered what I had been doing at this time last year. I could not remember at all how the campus flowers had bloomed last spring. It was not that they had not bloomed. It was that I had never once stopped to look. Every day I ran past that flower bed with my eyes on my watch, on the door of the teaching building. Whether the flowers opened or not had nothing to do with me. So this is how days slip away at our feet. The flowers keep count of them for us, one blooming, one falling, while we only hurry forward.

That evening back in the dorm I opened my diary and wrote down what happened: first tulip, pale pink, cup half closed, a chipped corner on the blue tile by the bed. Then I added one more line. Next spring I will come and look every single day. The eight remaining buds will open one by one in the days ahead. I know they will open, because now I am here waiting for them.

坐在后排的写花日记的人

三月十九日，星期三，阴。我在日记里写：同桌今天又在本子上写花了。林小棠坐在教室后排靠窗的位置，每天早读前都要写几行，字很小，写在一个深蓝色的本子上。我以为她记的是单词，直到昨天她借我半块橡皮，我看见了本子的另一页，上面写着：三月十四日，跑道边花坛，开了四朵，落了两个花苞。

今天课间我向她借那个本子。前面几页记得稀稀拉拉，三月初只有几行，写着土里冒出了芽，芽是紫红色的。往后翻，字忽然密起来。三月十四日那天写了大半页，字比平时大，末尾还画了一个感叹号。她念给我听：今天开了四朵，黄色的，比我以为的早了四天。她说那天她站在花坛边愣了很久，上课铃响了都没动。她给花坛里开过的花一朵一朵起了名字，最大的那朵叫大王，歪着长的那朵叫拐。早读的时候她念给同桌听，两个人蹲在花坛边对着花一本正经地核对，被值周生看了一眼，以为我们在打架。

她翻到去年三月的一页给我看，那里写着：花开了，比今年早。她说花不记得谁看过它，可

是它年年都记得时间，是我们不记得。她指着去年那行字说，你看，去年这个时候也有一群人站在这个花坛边，可是今年站在这里的换了一批，谁也不知道去年是谁在这儿看过花。她说这话的时候语气很平，像在说一件早就想明白的事。我听了心里动了一下，赶紧回到座位，在日记本上写下她这句话。

其实我自己也记日记，记的都是作业、考试、谁跟谁吵架。花的事一行也没有。原来同一个春天，在她那里是一天一天数出来的，在我那里是一晃就过去了。本子翻到最后一页，今天的日期下面还空着。她说等放学再去看看，数一数今天开了几朵，回来补上。

放学的时候她在本子上写下新的日期，我站在旁边看。她抬头问我，明年还想不想看花。我说想。她说那这个本子要传下去，传给谁，她还没想好。我在自己的日记里写：她替花记着日子，我替她记着这件事。窗外花坛边的灯柱上，最后一点天光暗下去，本子上那行新写的字还没干。

The Girl in the Back Row Who Keeps a Flower Diary

Wednesday, March 19, cloudy. I wrote in my diary today: my deskmate wrote about flowers in her notebook again. Lin Xiaotang sits in the back row by the window. Before morning reading she writes a few lines in tiny characters in a dark blue notebook. I thought she was memorizing words, until yesterday she lent me half an eraser and I saw the other page. It said: March 14, flower bed by the track, four opened, two buds fell.

At the break today I borrowed the notebook. The first pages were sparse. Early March had only a few lines, noting that sprouts came out of the soil, purple-red sprouts. Turning further, the writing suddenly grew dense. On March 14 she filled most of a page, the characters bigger than usual, with an exclamation mark at the end. She read it to me: four opened today, yellow ones, four days earlier than I expected. She said she stood by the flower bed in a daze for a long time that day and did not move even when the bell rang. She had named every flower that had ever opened there. The biggest one was called the King, the crooked one was called Bend. During morning reading she recited the names to her partner, and the two of them crouched by the flower bed solemnly checking the flowers against the notebook, earning a stare from the duty student who thought they were fighting.

She turned to a page from last March and showed me one line: flowers opened, earlier than this year. She said the flowers do not remember who watched them, but they remember the time every year. It is we who do not remember. Pointing at last year's line she said, look, at this time last year a group of people also stood by this flower bed, and this year a different group stands here, and nobody knows who saw the flowers here last year. She said it in a flat voice, like something she had figured out long ago. Something moved inside me, and I hurried back to my seat and

wrote her sentence down in my diary.

I keep a diary too, full of homework, exams, and who argued with whom. Not one line about flowers. So the same spring was counted day by day in her notebook, and in mine it flashed by and was gone. On the last page, under today's date, the lines were still empty. She said she would go look after school, count how many opened today, and add it when she came back.

At dismissal she wrote the new date in her notebook while I stood beside her. She looked up and asked if I would still want to see the flowers next year. I said yes. She said the notebook would be passed on, and she had not decided to whom. I wrote in my diary: she keeps the days for the flowers, and I will keep this about her. Outside, the last daylight faded on the lamp post by the flower bed, and the fresh line in her notebook had not dried yet.

去年我也在这里赌过花

三月十九日，星期四，晴。我在日记第一行写：去年今天，我也在这里赌过花。

事情要从今天清晨说起。六点半到校，我把书包扔在教室就下了楼，想去花坛看看。昨天傍晚我数过，石凳边那排连翘上有八个花苞，紧得像铁锈色的小钉子。我想赌一把，赌今早会不会开出一个。跑到跟前，何止一个，五个都开了，黄色的花瓣薄得能透光。我蹲下来数，剩下三个还闭着，尖上挂着水珠。值日生推着车从后面经过，问我蹲着干什么，我说数花。他愣了一下，也蹲下来一起数，数完说，开了五个，挺准的，然后推车走了。我掏出日记本，记下时间、气温、开花的方位，笔尖走得很快，怕慢一点就漏掉什么。写日记的心情和昨天完全不同，昨天是等，今天是追。

上楼的时候，一本旧日记从抽屉里掉出来，是七年级下学期的，里面还夹着去年三月包书皮的纸。翻开掉开的那一页，日期是去年三月十九日，那一天我写的是：今天冷，花没开，我赌明天。我站在走廊上看了很久。原来去年我也在这里赌过花。那本日记后面几页写的都是考试、换座位、跟同学闹别扭，花的事只占了那一行，可花把那一天记得清清楚楚，今年照样在差不多的日子开出来，一天也没有早，一天也没有晚。

早读前我又去了一次花坛。五个开的在风里点头，三个闭着的还是那么紧。我蹲下来把今天的样子写进日记：今年开了五个。去年我赌明天，今年我赌剩下的三个。写完我加了一句：花不写日记，可它一天都没有迟到过。我们总说明天再看，可明天看花的人，已经不是今天的人了。这句话我没敢让同桌看见。

早读铃响了，我把两本日记摞在一起塞进抽屉，最上面压着去年那张包书皮的纸。窗外那排玉兰的叶子已经长得很密，花早谢了，可我知道它们明年还会来。就像我知道，明年三月，我也会站在这里，赌下一个花苞。

Last Year I Bet on the Flowers Here Too

Thursday, March 19, sunny. On the first line of my diary I wrote: last year on this day, I also stood here betting on the flowers.

It started this morning. I got to school at half past six, dropped my schoolbag in the classroom, and ran downstairs to the flower bed. Yesterday evening I had counted eight buds on the row of forsythia by the stone bench, tight like little rust-colored nails. I wanted to make a bet, to bet whether one would open this morning. When I got there, far more than one had opened. Five were out, their yellow petals thin enough to let light through. I squatted and counted. The remaining three were still shut, water beads hanging on their tips. The student on cleaning duty pushed his cart past behind me and asked what I was crouching for. I said I was counting flowers. He froze for a second, then crouched down and counted with me. Five opened, he said, pretty close guess, and pushed his cart away. I took out my diary and wrote down the time, the temperature, which side the flowers faced. My pen moved fast, afraid that if I slowed down I would miss something. My mood while writing was completely different from yesterday. Yesterday I was waiting. Today I was chasing.

Going upstairs, an old diary fell out of my desk, the one from seventh grade, second term, with last year's brown-paper book cover still tucked inside. The page it landed open on was dated March 19 of last year. That day I had written: cold today, flowers did not open, I bet on tomorrow. I stood in the corridor and read it for a long time. So last year I had also stood here betting on the flowers. The pages after that line were all about exams, seat changes, and quarrels with classmates. The flowers took up only that one line, yet the flowers remembered that day perfectly. This year they opened on nearly the same date, not a day early, not a day late.

Before morning reading I went to the flower bed once more. The five opened flowers nodded in the wind; the three closed ones were still tight. I squatted and wrote today's scene into my diary: five opened this year. Last year I bet on tomorrow; this year I bet on the remaining three. Then I added a line: the flowers keep no diary, yet they have never been late for a single day. We always say we will look tomorrow, but the person looking tomorrow is no longer the person of today. I did not dare let my deskmate see that sentence.

The reading bell rang. I stacked the two diaries, pushed them into my desk, and pressed last year's brown paper on top. Outside the window the leaves of the magnolia row had grown thick. Their flowers were long gone, but I know they will come back next year. Just as I know that next March I will stand here again, betting on the next bud.

