

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.