

女儿当小老师

上周末在公园，我看见女儿在给一个比她小的小孩讲花。她指着花坛边一棵开满粉白花的树，说这是海棠，西府海棠，花是香的，果子红了能吃，酸的。小小孩仰着头哦哦地应。女儿讲得有模有样，我在几步外站着，忽然想起一年前的同一个地方，也是这棵树，她问过我一个问題。

那天也是春天，她蹲在花坛边的草地上，抬头问我：爸爸，这棵树叫什么？我张口就来：桃花。她说不像，桃花没有这么白，也没有果子。我又看了看，说那就是梨花。她说梨花是纯白的，这个底下带粉。父女俩一人一句，谁也说服不了谁。最后她拍拍膝盖站起来，说：走，咱们查去。

我们就蹲在树底下查。她举着我的手机，够着树枝拍花，又蹲下去拍掉在地上的花和叶子，拍完还捡了一片完整的叶子夹在书里当标本。手机识别出来是西府海棠，她不信，又翻出公园门口的植物介绍牌，一块一块找，找到海棠那一块，指着学名那一行给我看。那天下午，我们在花坛边站了小半个钟头，路人都当我们在看花，其实我们在跟一块牌子较劲。

从那以后她上了瘾。小区里的玉兰、路边的连翘、绿化带里的红叶石楠，见一个问一个，问完就查，查完非给我讲一遍。有的名词我也记不住，她就第二天在饭桌上考我。我答不上来的时候，她学着我一年前的口气说：没关系，咱们查去。

所以今天，听见她给别的小孩讲海棠，我一点也没觉得稀奇。只有我自己知道，那些花名不是她背下来的，是我们蹲在花坛边、站在介绍牌前、翻着手机一页一页查出来的。她讲给那个小孩听的每一句，背后都站着一年前那个蹲在草地上提问的她，和答不上来话的我。

回去的路上她问我：爸爸，明年咱们还去那个花坛吗？我说去。她说那明年她就能讲更多花了。我看着窗外，春天正从路边的连翘枝上一朵一朵过去。陪孩子认花这件事，起头是一个问不出答案的问题，后头是一整条长长的路，而我们俩都还在路上。

My Daughter the Little Teacher

Last weekend in the park, I watched my daughter explaining flowers to a child younger than her. She pointed at a tree by the flower bed covered with pink-white blossoms and said: this is crabapple, West Prefab Crabapple, the flowers are fragrant, and the fruit turns red and is edible, sour. The little child looked up and answered oh, oh. I stood a few steps away, and it suddenly struck me that a year earlier, in the same spot, by the same tree, she had asked me a question.

That day it was spring too. She crouched on the grass by the flower bed and looked up at me: Dad, what is this tree called? I blurted out: peach blossom. She said no, peach blossoms are not this white and do not bear fruit. I looked again and said then it is pear blossom. She said pear blossoms are pure white, and these have pink at the bottom. Father and daughter, one line each, neither convincing the other. Finally she brushed off her knees, stood up and said: come on, let us go look it up.

So we crouched under the tree and searched. She held up my phone, reaching toward

the branches to photograph the flowers, then crouched to photograph the fallen flowers and leaves, and afterward picked up one whole leaf to press in a book as a specimen. The phone identified it as West Prefab Crabapple. Not trusting it, she went to find the plant information boards at the park gate, reading them one by one until she found the crabapple board, then pointed at the line of scientific names to show me. That afternoon we stood by the flower bed for nearly half an hour; passersby thought we were admiring the flowers, when really we were wrestling with an information board.

After that she got hooked. The magnolias in our neighborhood, the forsythia by the road, the red-tip photinia in the green belts, she asked about each one, looked each one up, and then insisted on explaining it to me. Some names I could not remember either, so at dinner the next day she quizzed me. When I could not answer, she copied my tone from a year ago: it is fine, let us go look it up.

So today, hearing her tell another child about crabapple, I was not surprised at all. Only I know that those flower names were not memorized by her; we found them crouching by flower beds, standing before information boards, turning phone pages one by one. Behind every sentence she told that little child stands the girl who once crouched on the grass asking questions, and the me who had no answer.

On the way home she asked: Dad, will we go to that flower bed again next year? I said yes. She said then next year she will be able to talk about even more flowers. I looked out the window, where spring was passing blossom by blossom along the forsythia branches by the road. Accompanying a child to learn flowers begins with a question nobody can answer, and behind it stretches a long, long road, and the two of us are still on it.