

教学楼前的梅花开过三次了

教学楼前的那棵梅树，是建校那年栽的。学校比我大，梅树比我的教龄大得多。我来这所学校教书的秋天，它刚结过果；今年春天，是我陪它开的第三次花。

三月初的一个课间，班长跑进办公室喊：开了开了，就开了一朵。几十个孩子呼啦一下涌到教学楼前，把梅树围了个里三层外三层，谁也不敢伸手，都踮着脚往里看。那朵花真的只有一朵，在最高的枝子上，粉白的，小得很，风一吹抖两下。孩子们看它的样子，像看一个刚睡醒的同学，屏着气，生怕吵着它。

接下来的两个星期，梅树成了全校的闹钟。今天谁先看见开了五朵，明天谁发现树下落了一层花瓣，都要报告。有孩子拿手机拍，被没收了两部；有孩子在树下背书，说沾沾花香背得快；花坛边的台阶不知什么时候被擦得干干净净，成了固定的看花位。我不止一次把他们从树下赶回教室，转过身，自己又忍不住多看两眼。

花最盛的时候是三月下旬，正好赶上毕业班的百日誓师。年级组同意孩子们到梅树下来合影。六月的风已经热了，梅树满树是叶子，花一朵也没有。孩子们不在乎，照样在树下站成几排，喊完口号，有个平时最调皮的男生忽然说：老师，明年这个时候，我们就看不上了。全年级安静了一瞬，然后快门声响成一片。

那天晚上我批改日记，一个女孩写：梅树开花的时候我们还在读一年级，现在我要毕业了，花还是那样开。它不记得我们，可我记得它。我把这句话读了三遍。

今年三月，花开得比去年早。课间孩子们照旧涌过去，照旧一层一层围着，照旧为谁先看见第一朵争得脸红。我站在办公室窗前看他们，忽然明白这棵树真正开的是什麼。它每年开一次花，提醒我一次：讲台下面这批孩子也会像花一样，开过，谢过，然后长成满树的叶子，散到很远的地方去。我要做的，就是在他们还在树下的日子里，陪他们把每一朵花开的时候都看清楚。

The Plum Tree in Front of the Teaching Building Has Bloomed Three Times

The plum tree in front of the teaching building was planted the year the school was founded. The school is older than I am, and the plum tree is far older than my years of teaching. The autumn I came to this school, it had just fruited; this spring is the third time I see it bloom.

One break in early March, the class monitor ran into the office shouting: it opened, it opened, just one flower. Dozens of children surged out to the front of the teaching building and surrounded the plum tree in layer after layer, nobody daring to reach out, all on tiptoe peering in. That single flower really was single, high on the topmost branch, pink-white, very small, trembling twice in the wind. The way the

children looked at it was like looking at a classmate who had just woken up, holding their breath, afraid to disturb it.

For the next two weeks the plum tree became the alarm clock of the whole school. Who first saw five flowers today, who found a layer of petals under the tree tomorrow, everyone reported it. Some children took out phones to photograph it and had two confiscated; some recited textbooks under the tree, claiming the scent made them memorize faster; the steps by the flower bed were cleaned spotless at some point and became the fixed flower-watching spot. More than once I shooed them back to class from under the tree, then turned around and stole another look myself.

The flowers were at their peak in late March, just in time for the graduating class's hundred-day pledge ceremony. The grade office agreed to let the children take group photos under the plum tree. The June wind was already hot; the tree was full of leaves and had not a single flower left. The children did not care. They still lined up in rows under the tree, and after shouting the slogans, the most mischievous boy in the grade suddenly said: Teacher, this time next year, we will not be here to see it. The whole grade went quiet for a moment, and then shutters clicked in a wave.

That night while correcting diaries, I read one girl write: when the plum tree bloomed we were still in first grade, now I am about to graduate, and the flowers still bloom the same way. It does not remember us, but I remember it. I read that sentence three times.

This March the flowers came earlier than last year. At break the children still surged over, still surrounded it layer by layer, still argued red-faced over who saw the first blossom. Standing at the office window watching them, I suddenly understood what this tree truly blooms. It flowers once a year and reminds me once: the children below my podium will also bloom like flowers, fade, then grow into a tree full of leaves and scatter to faraway places. What I can do is, while they are still under the tree, accompany them so they see every blossom clearly.

三十年的那树梨花

教学楼前的梨树今年五十三岁，比我的年纪还大。我调到这所学校的头一年，它就已经是现在这个个头了，春天一开，满树白，白得教学楼的水磨石地面都反光。三十年了，我在它底下送走了二十六届毕业生。

梨树开花有个脾气：不声不响。头天放学还是满树骨朵，第二天早读，靠窗的孩子忽然叫起来，整班人脑袋齐刷刷扭向窗外。早读声停了半分钟，我没喊安静，因为他们都在屏着气看，那样子像迎接一个了不起的人物。下课铃一响，教学楼前就站满了人，高年级的挤不进去，就站在

台阶上远远地看。有个学生伸手接住一瓣落花，夹进了语文书里，我看见了，没管。

梨花落的时候更好看。风一过，花瓣一片一片往下旋，落在孩子们的头发上、肩膀上，落在花坛沿上。那几天校园里没人追跑，都走得很慢，好像怕踩坏了地上的白。有年春天正赶上市里检查卫生，花瓣扫不完，我拦住了扫地的校工：让他开完，让他落完，地晚一天扫不要紧。

毕业季的时候，梨树早绿透了。可总有孩子到树下站着不走。有一届一个男生，毕业那天在树下站了很久，后来给我写信说：老师，我那天是想跟树告个别，我在这儿六年，它看着我从一年级到六年级，它是我待得最久的同学。我把这封信在班会上念了，念完没人说话，窗外正好有风。

前年春天，两个毕业多年的学生回母校，专门去梨树下照相。他们如今比我高了，站在树下找当年的位置，比划了半天。临走其中一人摸着树干说：树没变。我听见了，心里动了一下。树当然没变，变的是树下的人，和树下站着的那个我——一年比一年矮下去，一年比一年更会看花。

今年梨花又开了，课间照旧站满了人。我站在走廊上看，忽然不想催他们回教室了。让他们看吧。他们将来会记得很多事，也许不记得我讲过的每一篇课文，但会记得某个春天的早晨，全班一起扭过头去看窗外，记得花瓣落在课本上的那半天课。这就够了。树替学校记着年头，我替孩子们记着他们。

The Pear Tree of Thirty Years

The pear tree in front of the teaching building is fifty-three this year, older than I am. The first year I was assigned to this school, it already stood at its present height; when it blooms in spring, the whole tree is white, so white that the terrazzo floor of the building reflects it. In thirty years, I have seen twenty-six graduating classes off beneath it.

The pear tree has a temperament about blooming: it does it quietly. One day after school the branches are full of buds; the next morning during reading period, a child by the window suddenly cries out, and every head in the class turns toward the window in one motion. The reading stopped for half a minute. I did not call for silence, because they were all holding their breath, the way one greets a truly important person. When the bell rang, the front of the building filled with people; the older students who could not push in stood on the steps and watched from afar. One student caught a falling petal in his hand and pressed it into his Chinese textbook. I saw it and let it go.

The falling of the petals is even more beautiful. When the wind passes, petals spiral down one by one, landing on children's hair, on their shoulders, on the edge of the flower bed. For those days nobody ran in the schoolyard; everyone walked slowly, as if afraid to step on the white on the ground. One spring a city inspection

happened to fall then, and the petals could not be swept up in time. I stopped the caretaker with his broom: let it finish blooming, let it finish falling. Sweeping a day late is no matter.

By graduation season the pear tree is deep green. Yet children always linger under it. One year a boy stood under the tree for a long time on graduation day, and later wrote me: Teacher, that day I wanted to say goodbye to the tree. I spent six years here; it watched me from first grade to sixth grade; it is the classmate I have known longest. I read that letter at a class meeting. When I finished, nobody spoke, and there happened to be wind outside the window.

The spring before last, two former students long graduated came back to the school and went straight to the pear tree for photos. They are taller than I am now; they hunted for their old positions under the branches and gestured for a long while. As they left, one of them touched the trunk and said: the tree hasn't changed. I heard it, and something stirred in me. Of course the tree hasn't changed. What changes are the people under it, and the me standing under it — sinking a little year by year, and getting better at watching flowers year by year.

The pear blossoms came again this March, and the front of the building filled with people at break as always. I stood in the corridor watching, and suddenly did not want to hurry them back to class. Let them look. In years to come they will remember many things; perhaps not every text I taught, but they will remember a spring morning when the whole class turned to the window together, and the half lesson when petals fell onto their textbooks. That is enough. The tree keeps the school's years; I keep the children for them.

花讯员

教学楼前的贴梗海棠是三月十四日开的。那天我进教室，发现讲台上多了一张纸条：老师，海棠开了第一朵，我们班的观察角归我。字迹是小满的。小满是个平时连回答问题都要脸红半天的孩子，我没反对，在班上宣布：行，小满当花讯员，每天报一次花。

贴梗海棠开在老枝上，一朵一朵贴着枝干，红得实在。小满的报告一天比一天像样。头几天只是数字：今天三朵，明天七朵。后来添了细节：向阳那面开得快，背阴那面还睡着；有两只蜂，一早就来；花落了一地，花瓣边上卷起来了。他每天早读前把纸条压在讲台上，字越写越大，像怕谁看不见。

孩子们很快迷上了这件事。课间教学楼前总围着一圈人，男生们装得不在乎，只问小满：今天几朵了？小满答得神气。有孩子提议给海棠起名字，全班投票，选了个土得可爱的：铁杆红。那几天，铁杆红成了我们班暗号，谁上课走神，同桌就小声提醒：铁杆红今天八朵了，你听了吗？

四月下旬花谢，小满的报告换成：花谢了，果子出来了，绿豆大。再后来是：果子有花生大了。他把每一张纸条都留着，攒了厚厚一沓，说毕业的时候送给大家看。

毕业前最后一周，孩子们在教学楼前拍毕业照，海棠树满树叶子，绿得发亮。拍完照，小满把那一沓纸条装订好的小册子放在讲台上，又在底下压了一张纸条，只有一行字：老师，花替我们开着，果子替我们长着，我们毕业了。我捏着那张纸条站在讲台上，底下乱哄哄的，孩子们抱着互相签名，没人知道我在看什么。

今年三月十四日，我提前到了教学楼前。第一朵花还没开，枝子上鼓着骨朵。我站在那儿等了一会儿，身后陆陆续续来了几个孩子，不知谁喊了一声：开了开了。其实没开，只是有一个骨朵裂了条细缝。可孩子们都笑了，挤着去看那条缝。我忽然想起小满，想起那沓纸条。花讯员这个差事，我原本只想让一个孩子看看花，没想到花把整个班都看了个遍，也把那个脸红的孩子，看得站到了讲台前。

The Flower Reporter

The flowering quince in front of the teaching building bloomed on March fourteenth. That day when I entered the classroom, I found a note on the podium: Teacher, the quince opened its first flower, and our class observation corner is mine now. The handwriting was Xiaoman's. Xiaoman is a child who normally blushes for half a day just answering a question. I did not object, and announced to the class: fine, Xiaoman is our flower reporter, one report a day.

Flowering quince blooms on old branches, each flower hugging the stem, a solid kind of red. Xiaoman's reports grew better day by day. The first few days were only numbers: three today, seven tomorrow. Then details appeared: the sunny side blooms faster, the shady side is still asleep; two bees came early in the morning; petals fell all over the ground, their edges curling. He pressed a note on the podium before reading period every day, and his handwriting grew larger and larger, as if afraid someone would not see it.

The children were soon captivated. There was always a ring of people in front of the building at break; the boys pretended not to care and just asked Xiaoman: how many today? Xiaoman answered grandly. Someone proposed giving the quince a name, the class voted, and chose a homely, lovable one: Iron Stem Red. For those days, Iron Stem Red became our class code; when a child drifted off in class, the deskmate would whisper: Iron Stem Red has eight flowers today, did you hear?

In late April the flowers faded, and Xiaoman's reports changed to: flowers gone, fruits out, mung-bean sized. Later: the fruits are peanut-sized now. He kept every note, a thick stack, and said he would hand them out to everyone at graduation.

In the last week before graduation, the children took their class photo in front of the teaching building, the quince tree full of glossy green leaves. Afterward, Xiaoman placed on the podium a small booklet bound from that stack of notes, and under it one more note with a single line: Teacher, the flowers kept blooming for us, the fruits kept growing for us, and now we graduate. I stood at the podium holding that note; below, the children were in an uproar, hugging each other and signing shirts, and nobody knew what I was looking at.

This year on March fourteenth, I arrived at the front of the teaching building early. The first flower had not opened; the branches were swollen with buds. I waited a while, and children trickled in behind me. Someone shouted: it opened, it opened. It had not — only one bud had split a hairline crack. But everyone laughed and squeezed in to look at the crack. I suddenly thought of Xiaoman, and of that stack of notes. The job of flower reporter, I had only meant as a way for one child to look at flowers. I never expected the flowers would take a good look at the whole class instead — and would lift that blushing child, all the way to the front of the podium.