

放学路边的那束花

周六中午，我从钢琴课回来，路过路边的时候，看见石缝里长着一丛小花。黄的，只有手指那么高，挤挤挨挨地排在路牙子边上，像谁撒了一把小灯。

我蹲下来。第一个念头就是送给妈妈。妈妈周六要上班，早上出门的时候眼睛还肿着，她从来不说累，只是她的包到了晚上好像总是更沉。

我想采，可是不知道采哪一朵。它们看起来都差不多。我就一朵一朵采下来，摆在手心里比。这一朵花瓣太小，那一朵低着头，像刚被谁批评过，这一朵颜色最亮，可叶子上有个洞。我在路边蹲了快十分钟，腿都麻了。

最后我挑了最高的那朵。它长在草边的最外头，茎是直的，花朝着太阳，中间有一点亮亮的金。我捏住茎一掐，啪的一声，脆得我愣了一下。

可是一朵好像有点少。我又采了两朵小白花配在旁边，用文具盒里的橡皮筋把它们捆在一起，成了一小束。橡皮筋是我扎头发用的，上面还有一点洗发水的味道。

回到家，妈妈还没回来。我把花插在饭桌上那个空玻璃杯里，看了一会儿，又撕了张纸条写：送给妈妈。不知道再写什么，想了半天，加了一句：放学路上，我看见它们开了。

晚上门锁一响，妈妈进来，放下包，在饭桌前停住了。她看那杯花看了很久，没有说话，然后她笑了，眼睛弯起来，眼角那些细细的纹路好像一起亮了一下。

她说：你怎么知道妈妈喜欢花？我说：我不知道，我就是想，你看见会笑。妈妈蹲下来抱住我，她的衣角扫过我的脸，凉凉的。

那天夜里，妈妈把那朵花夹进了一本书里，说要压起来收着。我站在旁边看她拿纸把花盖住，她做得很轻，像在给谁盖被子。

后来很多个周六，我从钢琴课回来都会看一眼路边那丛花。它们开了又谢，谢了又开。我再也没有采过。那朵就够了，妈妈已经把它收在书里了。

Wild Flowers by the Road on My Way Home

One Saturday at noon, on my way home from piano practice, I found a patch of tiny flowers growing in the cracks beside the road. They were yellow, no taller than a finger, crowded together along the curb like a handful of little lights someone had dropped.

I squatted down. My first thought was to give them to my mother. She works on Saturdays, and when she leaves home in the morning her eyes are still puffy with sleep. She never says she is tired, but her bag always looks heavier in the evening.

I wanted to pick one, but I did not know which one. They all looked the same to me. So I picked them one by one and laid them on my palm to compare. This one had petals that were too small. That one hung its head down, as if it had just been scolded. This one had the brightest color, but one leaf had a hole in it. I squatted by the road for almost ten minutes, and my knees went numb.

In the end I chose the tallest one. It stood at the very edge of the grass, its stem straight, its face turned toward the sun, with a dot of bright gold in the center. I pinched the stem and snapped it off. The sound was clean and made me start a little.

But one flower did not feel like enough. I picked two small white ones to go with it, tied them with a hair elastic from my pencil case, and made a tiny bouquet. The elastic was the one I used to tie my hair, and it still smelled faintly of shampoo.

When I got home, my mother had not come back yet. I stood the flowers in an empty glass jar on the dining table, watched them for a while, then wrote a note on a piece of paper: For my mother. I did not know what else to write. I thought for a long time and added one more line: I saw them blooming on my way home from school.

In the evening the door lock turned. My mother came in, put down her bag, and stopped in front of the dining table. She looked at the jar of flowers for a long time without speaking. Then she laughed, and the corners of her eyes crinkled up, as if all the small lines there lit up at once.

She asked how I knew she liked flowers. I said I did not know; I just thought she would smile if she saw them. She squatted down and held me, and the hem of her sleeve brushed my cheek, cool.

That night my mother put the flower into a book and said she would press it and keep it. I watched her lay a piece of paper over it. She did it so carefully, as if she were pulling a blanket up over someone.

Later, on many Saturdays on my way back from piano practice, I looked at that patch of flowers by the road. They bloomed and fell, fell and bloomed. I never picked them again. One flower was enough. My mother had already kept it safe inside a book.

门口那丛小黄花

周敏下班绕到学校门口接儿子，远远看见她儿子蹲在路牙子边上，背对着她，一动不动。她按了两声喇叭，儿子没听见。她走过去，看见他正盯着一丛小黄花，鼻尖离花快贴上去了。

她本想喊他上车，话到嘴边又咽回去了。她看见儿子伸手碰了碰这朵，又碰了碰那朵，嘴里念念有词，像在跟谁商量事情。后来他把三朵花并排放在手心里，歪着头看，看完一朵摇摇头，又看另一朵。周敏站在电动车旁边等，忽然觉得这个下午慢下来了。

儿子终于站起来，手里捏着一朵最高的，茎上还带着两片叶子。他跑过来，把花往书包侧兜里一插，说：妈，快走。周敏问：你蹲那儿干什么？儿子说：保密。风把他的话说得飘起来，周敏没再问。

第二天是周日。周敏在厨房洗碗，儿子一直磨磨蹭蹭在她身边转，一会儿摸摸冰箱，一会儿动动椅子，就是不出声。周敏说：有事就说。儿子说：你先闭上眼睛。周敏笑了，还是闭上了。

她感觉手里被塞进来一个东西，凉凉的，有点毛茸茸。睁眼，是一小束野花，一朵高的黄的，两朵小的白的，用她儿子的橡皮筋捆着，橡皮筋上还系了张纸条。纸条上是儿子那种歪歪扭扭的字：妈妈，这朵是我挑的，最好的一朵。路边有一大丛，我比了好久。

周敏拿着那束花，站在厨房的水声里，笑出了眼泪。她赶紧扭过头去擦，儿子没看见。她想起自己小时候，也这样给外婆摘过花，后来她忙读书、忙上班、忙孩子，再没有谁给她摘过路边的花，她自己也再没想过路边的花。

晚上儿子睡了，周敏把那束花插进罐头瓶，摆在儿子书桌上。儿子第二天醒来看见了，高兴得早饭多吃了一个鸡蛋。

再后来，那束花蔫了，周敏把花瓣收进一个铁盒。儿子长大以后翻到这个铁盒，问这是哪来的。周敏说：你小学二年级的时候，在路边挑了最好的一朵给我。儿子想了半天没想起来，周敏也没提醒他。她记得就行了。

The Little Yellow Flowers by the Gate

After work on Friday, Zhou Min rode her electric scooter to the school gate to pick up her son. From far off she saw him squatting by the curb, back to her, perfectly still. She honked twice. He did not hear. She walked over and found him staring at a patch of little yellow flowers, his nose almost touching them.

She was about to call him to the scooter, then swallowed the words. She watched him touch one flower lightly, then another, muttering to himself as if negotiating with someone. Then he laid three flowers side by side on his palm, tilted his head, shook it at one, and studied the next. Zhou Min waited beside the scooter, and suddenly the whole afternoon seemed to slow down.

At last her son stood up, holding one tall flower, two leaves still on its stem. He ran over, stuck it into the side pocket of his schoolbag, and said: Mom, let us go. Zhou Min asked what he had been squatting there for. He said: secret. The wind blew his words away, and she did not ask again.

The next day was Sunday. Zhou Min was washing dishes when her son kept drifting around her, touching the refrigerator, moving a chair, making no sound. She said: if you have something to say, say it. He said: close your eyes first. She laughed, but closed them anyway.

She felt something pressed into her hands, cool and slightly fuzzy. She opened her eyes. It was a small bouquet of wildflowers, one tall yellow one and two small white ones, tied with his hair elastic, a note tied to the elastic. The note read, in his crooked handwriting: Mom, this flower is the one I chose, the best one. There was a whole patch by the road. I compared them for a long time.

Zhou Min held the bouquet standing in the sound of the kitchen water, and laughed until tears came. She turned her head quickly to wipe them. Her son did not see. She remembered picking flowers for her own grandmother at that age. After that she had been busy with school, with work, with her child, and no one had ever picked her roadside flowers again, and she had never even thought of them herself.

At night, after her son fell asleep, she stood the bouquet in a jar can and put it on his desk. When he woke up and saw it the next morning, he was so happy he ate one extra egg at breakfast.

Later the flowers wilted, and Zhou Min kept the petals in a tin box. Years afterward, her grown son found the box and asked where they came from. She said: when you were in second grade, you picked the best flower by the road and gave it to me. He thought for a long time and could not remember. She did not remind him. It was enough that she remembered.

书里夹着一朵干花

搬家整理书架的时候，一本旧字典从顶上滑下来，啪地摔开。书页里掉出一样东西，轻得落地几乎没有声音。是一朵干花，黄色的，压得扁扁的，颜色褪成了浅米色，花形还完整。花瓣底下压着一张小纸条，纸都黄透了，上面两行铅笔字：送给妈妈。放学路上，我看见它们开了。

我把纸条捏在手里，一下子回到了很多年前的那个周六。那天钢琴课放学，路边石缝里有一丛小黄花。我蹲下去，把它们一朵一朵采下来摆在手心里比。花瓣小的不要，低头的不要，叶子有洞的也不要。蹲到腿都麻了，才挑出最高的一朵，茎直直的，花朝着太阳。

我又配了两朵小白花，用扎头发的橡皮筋捆起来，插在饭桌的空玻璃杯里，写了那张纸条。晚上妈妈下班回来，在饭桌前站了很久，然后笑了，眼睛弯成两道月牙。她问我怎么知道她喜欢花，我说我不知道，我就是想你看会笑。

那天夜里她拿来字典，把花夹进去，上面又盖了张纸，动作轻得像盖被子。我在旁边看着，

问为什么要压起来。妈妈说：花会谢，压起来就能一直留着。我当时似懂非懂，只觉得大人真奇怪，一朵蔫掉的花也要留。

现在我懂了。花瓣褪了色，纸条黄了边，可那个周六还在：路牙子边上的小黄花，手心里比来比去的十分钟，橡皮筋上洗发水的味道，妈妈眼角一起亮起来的细纹。全都被这朵干花收着，一收就是这么多年。

我把干花放回字典，合上，塞进新家的书架，放在最顺手的那一层。妈妈从客厅探头问：捡到什么宝贝了？我说：一朵花，你儿子挑了好久的那朵。妈妈走过来看了一眼，没说话，眼睛又弯成了两道月牙，和那个周六一模一样。

窗外正好是春天，楼下的花坛里开着一丛小黄花。我和妈妈都看见了，谁也没有去采。有些花采一朵就够了，剩下的，让它们开着更好看。

A Dried Flower Pressed in a Book

While sorting the bookshelves during our move, an old dictionary slid down from the top shelf and snapped open on the floor. Something fell out of the pages, so light it made almost no sound when it landed. It was a dried flower, yellow, pressed perfectly flat, its color faded to pale beige, its shape still whole. Under the petals was a small note, the paper yellowed through, with two lines of pencil writing: For my mother. I saw them blooming on my way home from school.

I held the note and was thrown straight back to that Saturday years ago. Piano practice had ended, and by the road there was a patch of small yellow flowers in the stone cracks. I squatted down and picked them one by one, laying them on my palm to compare. Not the ones with small petals, not the ones hanging their heads, not the ones with holes in their leaves. My legs went numb from squatting before I finally chose the tallest one, its stem straight, its face toward the sun.

I added two small white flowers, tied them with a hair elastic, stood them in an empty glass jar on the dining table, and wrote that note. In the evening my mother came home from work, stood by the table for a long time, then laughed, her eyes curving like two crescents. She asked how I knew she liked flowers. I said I did not know; I just thought she would smile if she saw them.

That night she fetched the dictionary, pressed the flower inside, covered it with another sheet of paper, her hands as gentle as when pulling up a blanket. I watched and asked why she had to press it. She said flowers fade, but pressed they can be kept forever. I only half understood then, thinking grown-ups were strange to keep even a wilted flower.

Now I understand. The petals faded, the note yellowed at the edges, but that

Saturday is still there: the small yellow flowers along the curb, the ten minutes of comparing them on my palm, the smell of shampoo on the hair elastic, the fine lines at the corners of her eyes lighting up together. This dried flower has kept all of it, kept it all these years.

I put the flower back in the dictionary, closed it, and set it on the most reachable shelf in our new home. My mother peeked in from the living room and asked what treasure I had found. I said: a flower, the one your son spent a long time choosing. She came over, took one look, said nothing, and her eyes curved into two crescents again, exactly like that Saturday.

Outside the window it was spring, and a patch of small yellow flowers was blooming in the flowerbed downstairs. We both saw them, and neither of us went to pick any. Some flowers only need to be picked once. The rest look better left where they are.