

花坛渴了的那个星期

四月连着两个星期没下雨，我们教室窗外那个花坛，土皮晒得发白，裂开一道道细缝。里面种的三色堇脑袋垂下来，叶子边上卷了黄边。值日的同学提水洒两下就走，谁也没多看一眼。

周三中午，我蹲在花坛边看。手指头抠进缝里，底下的土也是干的，硬得像砖。我想，这再不浇，花就死了。我举手跟班主任说：老师，我来管花坛吧，每天浇，草我也拔。老师说：好，那它就是你的了。就这一句，我忽然觉得自己名下有了产业。

当天下午我就开工。接水不能用消防龙头，我去一楼水房接了两桶，一路洒着抬上来，半路泼掉小半桶。水不能猛灌，我学着用瓢一点点沿着根浇，浇完一桶土皮才慢慢润湿。第一天的草最好拔，土一软，荠菜和牛筋草连根带出来，我拔了满满一个垃圾袋。

难的是第二天第三天。牛筋草的根白白的，一节一节往土里钻，拽上面断下面，我拿小铲子松了土再拔，指甲缝里全是黑泥。三色堇根边的草不敢用铲，只能手指头一点点抠。中午别人去操场玩，我蹲在花坛里，汗顺着脖子流。有同学路过说：你给花当保姆呢。我手上没停，说：它们渴了两周了。

一个星期后，三色堇的头抬起来了，黄叶子剪掉的地方冒出新芽，紫的、黄的花重新一朵一朵撑开。又过了几天，班主任在班会上说：咱们班的花坛这次拿了年级卫生评比加分，靠的是有人天天管。她看向我，同学们哗地鼓掌，我的耳朵烫了一下。

其实老师不知道的是，那两个星期我也没天天记着，是妈妈每天在门口放好水桶提醒我。也其实拔草拔到第三天我想过撂挑子，蹲在花坛边生了一会儿闷气，看见一朵紫花朝我立着，就接着拔了。

后来那个花坛一直归我管。我记住了一个理儿：东西坏了没人管，不是它不该坏，是还没人认领。花坛渴了，总得有人管，那个人可以是我。

The Week the Flowerbed Was Thirsty

April went two whole weeks without rain. The flowerbed outside our classroom window baked pale, its soil cracked into thin seams. The pansies inside hung their heads down, leaf edges curling yellow. Students on cleaning duty would fetch water, splash a little, and leave without a second glance.

One Wednesday noon, I squatted at the edge of the bed and looked. I dug my finger into a crack; the soil underneath was dry too, hard as brick. I thought: if nobody waters it now, the flowers will die. I raised my hand and told our teacher: Miss, let me take care of the flowerbed. I will water it every day and pull the weeds too. She said: all right, then it is yours. Just that one sentence, and suddenly I felt I owned property.

That afternoon I started work. I could not use the fire hydrant, so I filled two buckets at the first floor water room and carried them up, sloshing half of it away on the way. You cannot pour water wildly. I learned to ladle it slowly along the roots, and only after a whole bucket did the crust of soil darken with wetness. Weeding was easiest on the first day. Once the soil softened, wild shepherd purse and wire grass came out root and all, and I filled a whole garbage bag.

The hard days were the second and third. The roots of wire grass were white, joint by joint boring down into the soil; pull the top and the bottom snapped off. I loosened the earth with a small trowel first, then pulled, and my fingernails packed black with mud. The weeds right against the pansy roots could not be troweled, only pried out bit by bit with fingers. While others went to the playground at noon, I squatted in the flowerbed, sweat running down my neck. A classmate passed and said: are you the flowers nanny? My hands did not stop. I said: they have been thirsty for two weeks.

A week later the pansies lifted their heads again, new shoots pushed out where yellowed leaves had been trimmed, and the purple and yellow flowers propped themselves open one by one. A few days after that, our teacher said at the class meeting: our flowerbed earned bonus points in the grade cleanliness rating this time, because someone tended it every single day. She looked at me, the class burst into applause, and my ears went hot for a second.

What the teacher did not know is that even I did not remember every day those two weeks; my mother set the bucket by the door each morning to remind me. And on the third day of weeding I did think about quitting. I squatted at the edge of the bed sulking for a while, then saw a purple flower standing up straight toward me, and I went back to pulling weeds.

After that, the flowerbed stayed mine to keep. I learned one thing: when a thing falls apart untended, it is not because it deserved to, but because no one has claimed it yet. When a flowerbed is thirsty, someone has to look after it, and that someone can be me.

蹲在花坛里的那个人

周小舟最先发现不对的是那排三色堇。它们从周一开始就耷拉着脑袋，到周五已经蔫成一片。四月底，两周没下雨，花坛的土晒出一层白壳，踩上去沙沙响。值日的同学提桶水来，哗啦泼两下，人跟着就跑了。周小舟也泼过，泼完心里咯噔一下，觉得这水跟挠痒痒似的。

下周一开始，班里安静的小个子赵一凡接管了花坛。谁也没注意他是什么时候举的手。周小

舟只注意到，从那天起，每天中午别人往操场去，他往水房去。两桶水，一路洒，桶底磕在楼梯上咚咚响。他把水沿着花根慢慢浇，浇完就蹲下来拔草，一蹲一个中午。

周小舟起初觉得他傻。第三天中午，周小舟站在花坛边看他拔草。牛筋草的根断在土里，赵一凡用小铲子一块一块撬土，指甲缝里都是黑的。周小舟说：又不是你种的花。赵一凡头也不抬：是我们班的呀。周小舟张了张嘴，没接上话，蹲下来帮他拔了两棵草，就两棵，站起来跑了。跑向操场的时候他心里有点别扭，像欠了什么东西。

五月第二周，三色堇重新立起来，一朵一朵开得紫红锃亮。年级卫生评比，我们班因为花坛加分，流动红旗回了教室后墙。班会上班主任点名表扬赵一凡，掌声炸开的时候，周小舟看见赵一凡的耳朵红了，手在裤缝上蹭了两下，好像那只沾过泥的手不知道往哪儿放。

散会回座位，周小舟路过花坛，停了一下。土松松的，草几乎没了，花根边干干净净。他想起自己那两下哗啦的泼水，想起自己帮拔的那两棵草。第二天中午，他出现在水房门口，正好碰见提桶的赵一凡。周小舟接过一只桶：我帮你抬。赵一凡看了他一眼，笑了，把重的换了轻的给他。

从那以后花坛有了两个人管。期末的时候班主任问谁愿意认领冬天的浇水，教室里刷刷举起几只手，周小舟举得最高。他后来跟妈妈说：以前我觉得班里的事有班长管就行了，后来才明白，花坛不认得班长，它只认得提桶来的人。

The Person Squatting in the Flowerbed

Zhou Xiaozhou was the first to notice something wrong with the row of pansies. They began drooping on Monday, and by Friday they lay wilted in a sheet. It was late April, two weeks without rain, and the flowerbed soil had baked into a white crust that rustled underfoot. Students on duty fetched buckets, splashed water twice, and ran off. Zhou Xiaozhou had splashed too, and afterward his heart gave a small jolt, feeling the water was like scratching an itch through a boot.

Starting the next Monday, the quiet small-framed Zhao Yifan took over the flowerbed. Nobody noticed when he had raised his hand. Zhou Xiaozhou only noticed that from that day on, while everyone headed to the playground at noon, Zhao Yifan headed to the water room. Two buckets, sloshing all the way, bucket bottoms thudding on the stairs. He watered slowly along the roots, then squatted to pull weeds, squatting the entire noon.

At first Zhou Xiaozhou thought he was a fool. On the third noon, Zhou Xiaozhou stood at the edge of the bed watching him weed. When wire grass roots snapped off in the soil, Zhao Yifan pried the earth up shovel piece by shovel piece, his fingernail crevices black with dirt. Zhou Xiaozhou said: you did not plant those flowers. Zhao Yifan did not lift his head: our class did. Zhou Xiaozhou opened his mouth, found no

reply, squatted down and pulled two weeds for him, just two, then stood up and ran. Running toward the playground he felt a twist inside, as if he owed something.

In the second week of May the pansies stood up again, each one blooming glossy purple-red. In the grade cleanliness rating our class earned bonus points for the flowerbed, and the rolling red flag came back to the wall behind the classroom. At the class meeting the teacher praised Zhao Yifan by name. When the applause burst out, Zhou Xiaozhou saw the ears of Zhao Yifan go red, his hand rubbing twice against his trouser seam, as if that mud-touched hand did not know where to rest.

After the meeting, on his way back to his seat, Zhou Xiaozhou passed the flowerbed and paused. The soil was loose, the weeds nearly gone, the ground around the roots clean. He remembered his own two splashy pours, and the two weeds he had helped pull. The next noon he appeared at the door of the water room just as Zhao Yifan came out with the buckets. Zhou Xiaozhou took one: let me carry it for you. Zhao Yifan looked at him, smiled, and swapped the heavy bucket for the light one to give him.

From then on the flowerbed had two keepers. At term end the teacher asked who would claim the winter watering, and hands shot up across the room, and it was Zhou Xiaozhou who raised his the highest. He later told his mother: I used to think class affairs were the business of the class monitor. Then I understood that a flowerbed does not know the monitor. It only knows the person who comes with a bucket.

流动红旗回到后墙那天

流动红旗重新挂上教室后墙那天，班主任在班会上说，这次年级评比加分，加在我们班的花坛上。全班鼓掌，几十双眼睛齐刷刷看向我。我的手指头在课桌上来回抠，指甲缝里那点没洗净的黑印子露在外面。我小声说了句：是我该做的。声音小得前排的同学都探着头听。

可是把日子往回倒一个月，这个花坛差点没人要。四月中旬开始不下雨，土晒出一层白壳，裂缝能塞进小拇指。三色堇一朵一朵垂下头，叶子卷得像烤焦的纸。值日的同学提水来泼两下，水在硬壳上打转，半天渗不下去。谁路过都摇头，可谁也没多说一个字。

那天中午我蹲在花坛边，掰开一块干土，底下的土也是白的。不知道哪来的勇气，我跑去办公室，举手跟老师说：我来管花坛，每天浇水，草我也拔。老师只说了句：好，那它就是你的了。就这一句，我那天放学路上腰板挺得笔直。

认领容易，养难。一楼水房到三楼教室，两桶水，洒一路，桶底磕楼梯，咚咚咚。第一天我学着沿根慢浇，一桶水浇完，土皮才润出深色。拔草更磨人，牛筋草的根一节一节往土里钻，拽断上面剩下面，只能拿小铲松土再拔。根贴着花的地方不敢动铲，指头一点点抠。第三天中午我

蹲在花坛里直不起腰，汗流进领子，心里冒过火：凭什么是我。可一低头，一朵紫花直挺挺立在我手边，像特意撑给我看的。我把火咽下去，接着拔。

那一个月，我中午没下过几次操场。妈妈每天早上在门口摆好水桶，我忘的日子她提醒。慢慢地，值日的同学开始把水桶顺手灌满；后排的胖子路过花坛，会绕开那几株苗走。没人号召过，花坛就是慢慢变干净了。

五月底，三色堇开得紫红锃亮，评比的老师在花坛前站了好一会儿。于是就有了开头那一幕，掌声，还有老师那句：靠的是有人天天管。只有我知道，红旗背后没有一句大话，全是中午：抬水的咚咚声，指甲缝的黑泥，咽下去的那点火，和一朵特意撑给我看的紫花。

散会以后我绕到花坛边蹲下来，跟它说了句只有我们俩听得见的话：下个月换我管浇水，冬天也别怕渴。

The Day the Rolling Red Flag Came Back

The day the rolling red flag went back up on the classroom wall, our teacher announced at the class meeting that our bonus points in the grade rating came from our flowerbed. The whole class applauded, dozens of eyes swinging to me at once. My fingers picked back and forth on my desk, the black marks I had not scrubbed off showing in my nail crevices. I said quietly: it was what I should do. So quiet that the front row leaned in to hear.

But wind the calendar back one month, and this flowerbed nearly had no one left to want it. From mid-April the rain stopped, and the soil baked into a white crust with cracks wide enough to fit a little finger. The pansies hung their heads down one by one, their leaves curled like scorched paper. Students on duty fetched water and splashed twice; the water spun on the hard crust, refusing to sink. Everyone who passed shook their head, yet no one said an extra word.

That noon I squatted at the edge of the bed and broke open a lump of dry earth; the soil inside was white too. I do not know where the courage came from, but I ran to the office, raised my hand, and told our teacher: let me take care of the flowerbed, water it daily, pull the weeds too. She only said: all right, then it is yours. Just that, and on the way home that day I walked with my back ramrod straight.

Claiming it was easy; keeping it alive was hard. From the water room on the first floor to our classroom on the third, two buckets sloshing the whole way, bucket bottoms thudding on the stairs. On the first day I learned to water slowly along the roots; only after a full bucket did the soil crust darken with wetness. Weeding wore a person down. Wire grass roots bored down joint by joint; pull the top and the bottom stayed behind, so I had to loosen the soil with a trowel first. Where roots

touched the flowers I dared not use the trowel, only pry with my fingers. On the third noon I squatted there unable to straighten my back, sweat running into my collar, anger welling up: why me. Then I looked down, and a purple flower stood stiff and straight right beside my hand, as if it had propped itself up just for me to see. I swallowed the anger and kept pulling.

That month I went down to the playground only a few noons. My mother set the bucket out by the door every morning and reminded me on the days I forgot. Little by little, students on duty started filling my bucket on their way past; the big boy in the back row walked around the seedlings when he passed the bed. No one had called for it. The flowerbed simply grew clean on its own.

By late May the pansies bloomed glossy purple-red, and the teachers doing the rating stood before the bed for a long while. Which brings us back to that opening scene: the applause, and the words of our teacher, because someone tended it every day. Only I know there was no grand talk behind that red flag, only noons: the thud of carried buckets, the black mud in my nail crevices, the swallowed flare of temper, and one purple flower propped up just for me.

After the meeting I squatted down by the flowerbed and said something only the two of us could hear: next month watering is still mine, and you need not be thirsty in winter either.