

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，芥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，就又接着拔了。

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.