

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.