

迟开的映山红开得最盛

四月中旬学校春游，我们去城郊那座矮山。爬到半山我就泄气了：漫山的桃花早过了花期，只剩一地粉白，老师说的映山红更是一朵没见着，枝头全是青绿的骨朵。同行的同学一路抱怨白来了，我也闷闷的，觉得这个春天跟我没关系，好看的花都赶在我来之前开完了。

返程时生物老师指着那些青骨朵说，映山红要半个月后才开，山上最晚的花往往开得最久。我当时没往心里去。五月初放学路过山脚，隔着车窗我忽然看见整座山的南坡烧红了——映山红全开了，一丛挤着一丛，开得比桃花烈得多，也久得多，后来整整两个星期那片红都没有褪。春游那天扫的兴，原来是被一整个盛大的春天攒着赔给我的。

那天晚上我趴在桌上想了很久，想到的却是我的作文。开学初班里评选阅读之星，同桌三年级就拿过区里的作文奖，她的作文常被当堂念，我的作文本上常年只有四个字：中心明确。我也试过着急，听说要多练，一个礼拜硬写了四篇作文塞给语文老师，她批改完说，都是空话，越写越急。那阵子我一看见作文题就头皮发麻，觉得有些人天生会写，我天生不会。

可是映山红让我重新看这个慢字。桃花开得早，谢得也早；映山红憋了半个月，一开就开满整个初夏。同桌的作文好，是她从三年级起每年读几十本书换来的，我只看见她开花，没看见她前几年一直在长。而我那四篇急就章之所以全是空话，恰恰因为我总想一步开出花，不肯老老实实攒叶子。

想通之后我换了办法。不再突击写作文，改成每天睡前读二十分钟课外书，每周写两则观察日记，只写真实看到的东西，不堆好词好句。头两个月我的作文没有任何起色，分数照旧。变化发生在四月：语文老师把我在周记里写菜市场卖鱼老头的一段话当堂念了出来，说这叫有生活。期末我的作文第一次被扣了很少的分，老师批了四个字：有自己的话。

我的打算是这样写的。一，阅读每天二十分钟不断线，把它当呼吸而不是任务。二，观察日记每周两则坚持到初三毕业，攒下的本子就是将来的底气。三，下次再羡慕别人早早开花，就想南坡那片烧了两个星期的红。花开有先后，我先长我的叶子，花迟早会来。

The Late Azaleas Bloomed the Most Furiously of All

In mid-April our school took a spring field trip to a low hill outside the city. By the time we climbed halfway I had lost all spirit: the peach blossoms were long past, leaving only pink-white petals on the ground, and the azaleas the teacher had promised were nowhere to be seen, every branch full of green buds. Classmates complained all the way that the trip was wasted, and I sulked too, feeling spring had nothing to do with me, that every beautiful flower had finished opening before I arrived.

On the way down, our biology teacher pointed at those green buds and said azaleas open half a month later, and the latest flowers on a mountain usually bloom the longest. I did not take it to heart then. Passing the foot of the hill after school

in early May, I suddenly saw the whole south slope burning red through the bus window: the azaleas had all opened, cluster pushing against cluster, fiercer than peach blossoms and far longer-lasting, the red holding for two full weeks. The disappointment of the field trip, it turned out, had been saved up and repaid to me by a grander spring.

That evening I lay on my desk thinking for a long time, and what I thought of was my composition. At the start of the term our class chose its reading star; my deskmate had won a district writing prize in third grade, her essays were often read aloud in class, while my exercise book carried the same four comment words year after year: clear central idea. I had tried hurrying. Hearing that practice matters, I forced out four essays in one week and handed them to our Chinese teacher; she marked them all hollow, written more frantically with each try. For a while my scalp went numb at the sight of an essay topic, convinced some people are born to write and I was born unable.

But the azaleas made me re-read the word slow. Peach blossoms open early and fall early; azaleas hold back for half a month, then fill the whole early summer in one go. My deskmate writes well because dozens of books a year since third grade bought that; I only saw her bloom, never the years of growing before it. And my four rushed essays were hollow precisely because I wanted to burst into flower in one step and refused to honestly grow leaves.

After that I changed methods. No more cram-writing; instead twenty minutes of outside reading before sleep every day, two observation diary entries a week, writing only what I truly saw, never piling up pretty phrases. For the first two months my essays showed no improvement, scores unchanged. The turn came in April: our Chinese teacher read aloud in class a paragraph from my weekly journal about the old fish-seller at the market, saying this is what real life looks like. In the final exam my essay lost very few points for the first time, with four comment words: a voice of your own.

Here are my plans. One, never break the twenty-minute daily reading; treat it as breathing, not a task. Two, keep the weekly observation diaries through the last year of junior high; the notebooks saved up will be my confidence later. Three, next time I envy someone for blooming early, think of that south slope burning red for two whole weeks. Flowers open in turn; I will grow my leaves first, and the bloom will come in time.