红领巾折起来放进抽屉那天

升旗是在早上七点半。操场上的旗杆比去年高，或者说，是我比去年矮了。国歌响起来的时候，我站在初一一班的队列里，抬头看那面红旗顺着绳子往上走，风把它抖开，发出啪啪的声音。队伍要求行注目礼，不敬礼了。我下意识想抬手，手抬到一半，咽回去了，喉咙有点紧。旁边后排的男生站得笔直，下巴抬得很高，像是非要把这个注目礼站出个样子来。

升旗结束，退队仪式直接在操场上进行。大队辅导员念完一段话，说请全体同学解下红领巾。几千只手一起动起来，布料摩擦的声音很轻，像下了一场小雨。我把红领巾从领口解下来，它在我手里有点皱，左边角上还有五年级大扫除溅上去的一点油漆。我本想随手塞进口袋，手指摸到那个油漆点，忽然停住了，蹲在队列里，把红领巾摊在膝盖上，一点一点叠起来，叠成规规矩矩的三角形，放进校服上衣口袋。前排女生回头看我，我耳朵热了一下，没理她。

呼号是在退队之后。辅导员领呼：准备着，为共产主义事业而奋斗。几千人的声音撞在一起，我们班的声音从人群里顶出来，比小学任何一次都齐。喊完那一秒，操场安静了半秒，就半秒，然后脚步声、咳嗽声、拉链声一起响起来。回教学楼的路上，没人说话，楼道里安静得反常。到了教室，班主任站在门口，说了句：进班吧，都长大了。就这一句。

晚上我在书桌上铺开一张信纸，学校布置的任务：给三年后的自己写一封信。我写了很久。写我想考的高中，写我数学还不好，写我今天解下红领巾时手抖了一下，写我希望三年后的我别把今天忘了。写到结尾我卡住了，最后只写了一句：如果你还记得今天，就回信给我。把信折三折，装进信封，写上二零二九年六月一日启。抽屉拉开，信压在叠好的红领巾旁边，一个三角形，一个长方形，挨着。

妈问我今天怎么这么早关灯。我说困了。其实我躺在床上，一直在想那半秒的安静。几千个人同时安静半秒，原来这么响。童年不是被谁收走的，它是我自己叠成三角形，放进抽屉的。

The Day I Folded My Red Scarf into a Drawer

The flag-raising was at seven thirty in the morning. The flagpole on the sports field looked taller than last year - or rather, I had shrunk since last year. As the national anthem started, I stood in the line of Grade 7 Class 1, watching the red flag climb the rope while the wind snapped it open with sharp cracks. The formation called for a gaze salute, no hand salute. My hand rose halfway on instinct, then I swallowed it back down; my throat felt tight. A boy two rows behind stood ramrod straight, chin lifted high, as if determined to make this gaze salute count for something.

After the flag came the ceremony of leaving the Young Pioneers, held right there on the field. The youth counselor finished a passage and asked every student to remove their red scarf. Thousands of hands moved at once, the rustle of cloth as soft

as light rain. I untied the scarf from my collar; it was a little wrinkled in my hands, with a speck of paint from the fifth-grade spring cleaning still on its left corner. I meant to stuff it in my pocket, but my fingers found that paint speck and stopped. Right there in the formation I squatted down, spread the scarf on my knee, folded it bit by bit into a proper triangle, and placed it in my uniform's breast pocket. A girl in front turned to look at me; my ears went hot, and I ignored her.

The call-and-response came after. The counselor led: Ready, for the cause of communism! Thousands of voices collided in the air, and our class's voice pushed up out of the crowd, more unified than any time in elementary school. For half a second after we finished, the field went silent - just half a second - then footsteps, coughs, and zipper sounds all started at once. On the way back to the teaching building nobody spoke; the stairwell was quietly abnormal. Our homeroom teacher stood at the classroom door and said one line: come in, you've all grown up. That was all.

At night I spread a sheet of letter paper, the school's assignment: write a letter to yourself three years from now. I wrote for a long time. I wrote about the high school I want to get into, about my math still being weak, about how my hand trembled when I untied the scarf today, and about hoping the me of three years from now won't forget today. I got stuck at the ending and finally wrote one line: if you still remember today, write back to me. I folded the letter in thirds, sealed it in an envelope, and addressed it: to be opened June 1, 2029. I opened the drawer and laid the letter beside the folded scarf, a triangle and a rectangle, side by side.

Mom asked why I turned off the light so early tonight. I said I was sleepy. Really I lay in bed thinking about that half second of silence. Thousands of people going silent together for half a second - it turns out that is so loud. Childhood was not taken away by anyone. I folded it into a triangle myself and put it in the drawer.

寄给三年后的信

信是下午投进教学楼门口那只绿色信箱的。铁盖子压下去咔哒一声，里面已经躺了十几封信，我的那张薄薄的一页压在别人厚厚的信上面，像一片叶子落在一堆叶子上。我盯着信箱口看了几秒，转身回班，走廊的风把国旗班的旗角吹得哗啦响。要明白这一页纸为什么这么薄，得回到那天早上。

早上七点半，全年级在操场集合，旗杆下的国歌比平时长，也可能是我站得直，觉得它长。旗升到顶，风正好把旗面展开，我们行注目礼。初一的学生了，不再戴红领巾敬礼，可队列里好几只手在半空停了一下又放下，包括我的。旗杆的影子落在跑道线上，我盯着那道影子，忽然想

起一年级入队那天，也是这片操场，老队员给我系红领巾，系得太紧，勒得我整个上午伸着脖子。

退队仪式紧接着进行。辅导员说，请解下红领巾。几千只手一起抬起来，我摸到领口那个结，结是四年级体育课后自己重新系的，打得太死，我抠了两下才解开。红领巾从领口抽出来的时候带着体温。周围全是布料摩擦的细响，像蚕吃桑叶。我把它对折，再对折，塞进口袋，口袋里的布料贴着胸口，凉下去得很慢。辅导员领着呼号，几千人的声音轰然撞在旗杆上，我们班喊得最响的那几个人我听得出来，老周的声音劈了，劈了也喊。喊完那半秒的安静，我后来想了很久。

回到教室发信纸。同桌郑一诺写得飞快，笔尖戳着纸，我瞥见她的信全是问题：你还长个子吗？你还跟小敏好吗？你数学及格了吗？你变成大人了吗？她写完塞进信封，又在外面写：必须回信。我的信纸空了二十分钟，最后只写了一句：如果你还记得今天，就回信给我。落款画了一个歪歪扭扭的三角形，像红领巾的形状。

现在信在信箱里，和十几封信挤在一起，据说学校会保管三年，初三那年发还。我有时候想，三年后拆开这封信的人，看这一句话会是什么表情。会不会也像我此刻想起操场那半秒安静一样，喉咙紧一下。童年告别原来不用仪式，仪式是给眼睛看的，真正的告别是一页纸投进铁盖子下面的那声咔哒。

A Letter Mailed to Three Years Later

The letter went into the green mailbox by the teaching building door in the afternoon. The iron lid clamped down with a click; inside lay a dozen letters already, and my single thin page landed on top of everyone else's thick stacks, like one leaf falling onto a pile of leaves. I stared at the mailbox slot for a few seconds, then turned back to class. Wind in the corridor made the flag-guard's flag corner flap and rattle. To understand why my page was so thin, we have to go back to that morning.

At seven thirty the whole grade assembled on the field. The anthem under the flagpole felt longer than usual - or maybe I stood so straight that it felt long. When the flag reached the top and the wind spread its face open, we gave the gaze salute. We were seventh graders now, no more saluting in red scarves, yet several hands in the formation hovered in midair for a moment before dropping, mine among them. The flagpole's shadow fell across the track lines, and staring at that shadow I suddenly remembered the day I joined the Pioneers in first grade, on this same field: an older member tied my red scarf too tight, and I walked the whole morning with my neck stretched.

The leaving ceremony followed immediately. The counselor announced: please remove your red scarves. Thousands of hands rose together. I found the knot at my collar - a knot I had retied myself after PE in fourth grade, pulled too fast and jammed tight; I picked at it twice before it came loose. The scarf came away from my neck still

carrying my body heat. All around was the fine rustle of cloth, like silkworms feeding on mulberry leaves. I folded the scarf once, then again, and tucked it into my pocket, where the fabric lay against my chest and cooled down very slowly. The counselor led the call-and-response, and thousands of voices crashed thunderously against the flagpole. I could pick out the loudest shouters in our class; Old Zhou's voice cracked, and he shouted through the crack. That half second of silence afterward stayed with me for a long time.

Back in the classroom, letter paper was handed out. My deskmate Zheng Yinuo wrote so fast her pen tip stabbed the page; I glimpsed that her letter was all questions: Will you still grow taller? Are you still friends with Xiao Min? Did you pass math? Have you become an adult? When she finished she stuffed it into the envelope and wrote on the outside: you must write back. My sheet sat blank for twenty minutes, and in the end I wrote one line: if you still remember today, write back to me. For a signature I drew a crooked triangle, the shape of a folded red scarf.

Now the letter is in the mailbox, squeezed among a dozen others; the school is supposed to keep them three years and return them in ninth grade. Sometimes I wonder what face the person who opens this letter in three years will make reading that one line. Will it tighten in the throat the way I feel now when I remember that half second of silence on the field? Saying goodbye to childhood turns out not to need a ceremony. Ceremonies are for the eyes. The real goodbye is the click of one page dropping under an iron lid.

升旗手的那根绳子

林昊被定为升旗手，通知是前一天放学时体育老师口头说的，就一句：明天你拉绳子。他回家练了一晚上，把一根晾衣绳绑在门框上，手一松一紧地拽，拽得掌心发红。他奶奶在旁边择菜，问他拉这绳子挣不挣钱，他说这是升旗，奶奶哦了一声，又问升一次几毛钱。他没答，回屋继续练。

早上七点半，他站在旗杆底座旁边，袖标别在校服左臂，别针硌着肩膀。国歌响起，他右手一松一紧地送绳子，红旗顺着杆子往上爬，爬到顶正好和国歌最后一个音碰头，这是他昨晚练了几十遍算好的数。风来了，旗面在他头顶哗地展开，绳子的震动从掌心一直麻到胳膊肘。他仰头看旗，余光里全年级几千个人站成方块，安静，笔立。

退队仪式开始，他站在旗杆边没动，位置离人群最近。辅导员说请解下红领巾，他听见了那场小雨一样的布料声，几千只手同时抬起来，然后几千条红领巾从几千个领口抽出去。离他最近的一个男生解完，把红领巾攥成一团塞进裤兜，塞到一半又掏出来，抖开，叠了两下，叠得笨手笨脚。林昊看见那个男生耳朵红了，跟自己今早照镜子时一个颜色。呼号开始，他张了嘴，声音

混进几千人的声浪里，旗杆嗡嗡地跟着响。喊完那半秒，他忽然觉得旗杆的影子比平时长。

回教室的路上袖标被同班女生借去戴了一圈，传着戴，人人都在左臂上摸一下，像摸一个勋章。下午写信，信纸发到手里，林昊写了三行：我今天升了旗。我今天退队了。三年后的你要是没当上升旗手，也别难过。写完他把袖标摘下来，和信一起塞进信封，封口按了三遍。同桌说袖标怎么也封进去，他说这是今天的一半。

放学他最后一个走，绕到旗杆边站了一会儿。底座上有块水泥补过的疤，绳子还挂在滑轮上轻轻晃。他伸手把绳子攥了一下，松手，绳子哗地滑下去一截。他想起奶奶问的几毛钱，笑出声来。升一次值多少钱他不知道，他只知道自己手心的红印子三天都不会退。

The Flag Raiser's Rope

Lin Hao was picked as the flag raiser. The PE teacher told him verbally after school the day before, one sentence: tomorrow you work the rope. He practiced all evening, tying a clothesline to his doorframe, hauling it loose-tight, loose-tight until his palm turned red. His grandmother sat nearby shelling vegetables and asked whether pulling that rope paid money. He said it was raising the flag. She said oh, then asked how many cents per raise. He did not answer and went back to practicing.

At seven thirty in the morning he stood beside the base of the flagpole, his armband pinned to the left sleeve of his uniform, the pin digging into his shoulder. When the anthem began, his right hand eased the rope loose-tight, and the red flag climbed the pole, reaching the top exactly as the anthem's last note landed - a number he had calculated through dozens of practice rounds the night before. The wind came, the flag's face snapped open above his head, and the rope's vibration traveled from his palm all the way numb to his elbow. He tilted his face up to the flag, and in his peripheral vision thousands of students stood in squares, silent, upright.

The leaving ceremony began, and he stayed at his post by the flagpole, closest to the crowd. When the counselor said please remove your red scarves, he heard that rain-of-cloth sound: thousands of hands rising, thousands of scarves sliding out of thousands of collars. The boy nearest to him finished, balled his scarf up and shoved it into his pants pocket, then pulled it halfway back out, shook it open, and folded it twice, clumsily. Lin Hao saw the boy's ears go red - the same color he had seen in his own mirror that morning. The call-and-response started; he opened his mouth, his voice dissolving into the wave of thousands, the flagpole humming along. In the half second after the shouting ended, he suddenly felt the flagpole's shadow was longer than usual.

On the way back to class, a female classmate borrowed his armband and wore it around; it passed from arm to arm, everyone patting their left sleeve once, as if

touching a medal. In the afternoon came the letter. When the paper reached his hand, Lin Hao wrote three lines: Today I raised the flag. Today I left the Pioneers. You of three years from now, if you never become a flag raiser, don't be sad. When he finished, he unpinned the armband and sealed it in the envelope with the letter, pressing the flap down three times. His deskmate asked why the armband went in too. He said it was half of today.

He left last after school and detoured to stand by the flagpole for a while. The base bore a patch of repaired cement, and the rope still hung from the pulley, swaying lightly. He reached out, gripped the rope, let go, and it hissed down a length. He remembered his grandmother's question about how many cents per raise and laughed out loud. He did not know what one raise was worth. He only knew the red marks on his palms would not fade for three days.