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.