音乐停的那一拍

联欢会第二项是抢凳子。教室中间的地上摆着五把凳子，凳腿朝天围成一圈，像五个矮矮的蘑菇。规则谁都知道：八个人围着转，音乐一停就坐，没坐到的淘汰，每轮撤一把凳子。报名的人太多，学习委员用正字计数，最后按报名顺序取了八个，我在第四个名字上。

音乐是宣传委员用教室的旧音箱放的，一首儿歌，前奏很长。八个人开始绕着凳子走。老师说过不许提前坐，也不许把手搭在凳子上，我们只好把手背在身后，像一群巡逻的鸭子。我走在凳子的外圈，眼睛假装看天花板，其实全在凳子腿上。我听见自己心跳，咚、咚，比音箱里的鼓点还清楚。

音乐停得毫无预告。八把椅子只够五个人坐，我离最近那把凳子两步半，扑过去，屁股先蹭到凳面，再整个人坐实。同桌马小跳慢了半步，扶了一下凳子背，又讪讪地松开手，退到边上。第一轮淘汰他，他下场时故意一摇一晃，走到座位还冲我做了一个鬼脸。

第二轮我学乖了，不看凳子，看人。我盯着前面李多多，她屁股一沉我就提前挪脚。音乐响着，我绕到凳子侧面，手在身后攥紧。音乐停，我坐下了，李多多也坐下了，我们俩的手同时搭在同一把凳子边上，谁也没让谁，愣了两秒，全班起哄，学习委员过来判：我先到，她淘汰。我赢的时候其实有点心虚，因为我的脚踩了线，只有马小跳在台下喊：踩线了踩线了！老师摆摆手说不算不算，继续，我才把到嗓子眼的心咽回去。

最后一轮剩我和体育委员赵雷。一把凳子，两个人。音箱里换了首慢歌，故意拖，我们俩绕着那把凳子走了得有十几圈，我数着呢，十三圈。音乐停，我俩同时坐，屁股一人一半，凳面被我们一人占了一半，谁也没坐全。全班喊：重赛！重赛！班主任进来说别重赛了，今天人人有糖。赵雷跟我互相看了一眼，同时松手站起来，凳子晃了两下没倒。

发糖是联欢会的最后一项。班主任端着一个铁盒，盒里是水果糖，一人两块，从第一排往后传。传到我的时候盒里剩三块，学习委员把盒子往我这边倾了倾，多给我倒了一块。我把三块糖都塞进铅笔盒，想着留一块给妈，一块现在吃，一块留给明天。

同学表演排在抢凳子前面，我记不太清了，只记得有人唱歌跑调，全班跟着哼，跑调的那位反而越唱越大声。笑声这个东西很奇怪，在联欢会上它不挑理由，跑调能笑，踩线能笑，凳子晃两下没倒也能笑。我后来想起那个六一，最先想起来的就是音乐停掉的那一拍，和屁股蹭到凳面的那一下。

The Beat When the Music Stopped

The second item on the party was musical chairs. Five chairs sat in the middle of the classroom, legs up, arranged in a circle like five squat mushrooms. Everyone knew the rules: eight players circle around, sit when the music stops, the one left standing is out, and one chair gets removed each round. Too many signed up; the study monitor tallied with stroke-counting characters and took the first eight in order of

signup. My name was the fourth.

The music came from the classroom's old speaker run by the publicity monitor, a nursery rhyme with a long intro. The eight of us began circling the chairs. The teacher had said no sitting early, no hands resting on the chairs, so we clasped our hands behind our backs like a flock of patrolling ducks. I walked the outer ring, pretending to eye the ceiling while actually watching the chair legs. I could hear my own heartbeat, thud, thud, louder than the drumbeat from the speaker.

The music stopped with no warning. Eight of us, only five chairs: I was two and a half steps from the nearest one, lunged, my bottom grazed the seat first, then I planted myself solid. My deskmate Ma Xiaotiao was half a step slow, steadied the chair back, then sheepishly let go and stepped aside. He was out in round one; he left the circle deliberately swaggering, and from his seat he pulled a funny face at me.

In round two I got smarter - I stopped watching the chairs and watched the people. I fixed my eyes on Li Duoduo ahead, and shifted my feet early whenever her hips dipped. Music playing, I slid to the side of a chair, hands clenched behind me. Music stopped, I sat, Li Duoduo sat, our hands landing on the same chair edge at the same time, neither yielding, frozen two seconds while the whole class hollered. The study monitor came to judge: I got there first, she was out. I won feeling a bit guilty, because my foot had been on the line - only Ma Xiaotiao shouted from the seats: He stepped on the line! The teacher waved it off: doesn't count, keep going - and my heart slid back down from my throat.

The final round left me and PE committeeman Zhao Lei. One chair, two of us. The speaker switched to a slow song, dragging it on deliberately; we circled that single chair thirteen times, I was counting. Music stopped, we sat together, one cheek each, the seat half and half, neither fully seated. The class chanted: Rematch! Rematch! Our homeroom teacher came in and said no rematch, today everyone gets candy. Zhao Lei and I glanced at each other and stood up at the same time; the chair wobbled twice and stayed upright.

Handing out candy was the party's last item. Our homeroom teacher carried a tin of fruit drops, two per student, passed from the front row back. When it reached me, three were left; the study monitor tilted the tin my way and poured me one extra. I stuffed all three into my pencil case, planning to save one for Mom, eat one now, and save one for tomorrow.

The student acts came before musical chairs; I don't remember them well - only that someone sang off-key and the whole class hummed along, and the off-key singer only sang louder. Laughter is strange: at a class party it needs no reason. Off-key singing gets laughs, a stepped-on line gets laughs, a chair wobbling without falling

gets laughs. Years later, what returns first when I recall that Children's Day is the beat when the music cut out, and that moment my bottom grazed the chair seat.

韩笑的那套纸牌魔术

韩笑为了联欢会练了两周纸牌魔术。他从家里拿来一副旧扑克，牌角都磨圆了。他在家里对着沙发练，他爸坐在沙发上当观众，他妈在厨房隔着门喊：别对着你爸练，你爸什么都不知道，你练给碗筷看。他不管，照练。两周里他把同一张红桃六从牌堆顶上变到牌堆底下，变了三百多回，闭着眼都能摸到那张牌的毛边。

联欢会那天，教室后墙的黑板上画着彩旗和六个大字：六一快乐。韩笑第三个上场。他穿了一件不太合身的西装外套，是他爸的，袖口长出来一截，他把袖口挽成三道。报幕员念完他的名字，他抱着扑克从座位上站起来，过道太窄，他的书包带挂住了同桌的笔袋，笔袋哗啦掉在地上，全班笑，他也笑，捡起来塞进桌肚接着往前走。

第一个节目顺利。他让观众随便抽一张，记住，插回牌堆，洗牌，切牌，然后把牌一张张摊开在桌面上——红桃六在最左边，抽的牌在最右边，他翻出最右边那张，全班哦了一声。第二个节目也顺利，他把牌扣在帽子里，说变，帽子里的牌变成了一张画着笑脸的硬纸片，是他提前藏在袖口的。这个节目他练得最多，所以做得最快，快得像赶时间。

第三个节目出事了。他要把红桃六从左手变到右手，左手攥紧，右手拍一下，摊开左手——红桃六不在。他右手摊开，红桃六也不在。那张牌在他攥牌的时候滑到了桌上，没人看见，他自己也没看见。他站在讲台上，两只手都摊着，讲台下安静下来。那几秒他听见自己的心跳，还听见后排有人小声说：失败啦。他喉咙发干，把两只手合上，又打开，还是什么都没有。

然后韩笑做了一件谁也没想到的事。他弯下腰，把西装下摆一撩，从裤兜里摸出那张红桃六——其实不在裤兜里，是他弯腰时眼角扫到桌上的牌，顺手捞的——举到头顶，喊：它在我裤兜里躲着呢！全班笑倒一片，连班主任都在后面拍桌子。他趁笑声把牌塞回牌堆，重新来了一遍，这一遍顺得像水，翻出红桃六的时候掌声和笑声一起炸开。

鞠躬下台的时候，他袖口挽的三道袖口散了一道，帽子里掉出一颗水果糖，是他变魔术用的道具糖，滚了两下停在过道。前排一个女生捡起来，剥开吃了，说：这个魔术变出糖来了。韩笑在过道那头听见了，摆手说那是赠品。

散会以后，没人记得那张滑到桌上的牌，大家记得的是裤兜里的红桃六、帽子里的糖、挽了三道的袖口。韩笑回家跟他妈说，魔术失败了。他妈问那观众怎么都笑了。他说，笑就是成功了呗。他妈说，那你这魔术还会变糖，比他爸那副牌强。他把那副磨圆了角的扑克收进抽屉，红桃六放在最上面。

Han Xiao's Card Trick

Han Xiao practiced his card trick for two weeks for the class party. He brought an old deck from home, its corners worn round. He rehearsed facing the living-room sofa with his dad as the audience, while his mom shouted from the kitchen through the door: Don't perform to your dad - he knows nothing; perform to the dishes. He ignored her and kept practicing. In two weeks he moved the same six of hearts from the top of the deck to the bottom over three hundred times; with his eyes shut he could feel that card's fuzzy edge.

On party day, the blackboard on the back wall carried painted pennants and six big characters: Happy Children's Day. Han Xiao went on third. He wore a suit jacket that didn't fit - his father's - sleeves hanging a good inch too long, which he rolled up into three bands. When the host read his name, he stood up clutching the deck. The aisle was narrow; his bag strap snagged his deskmate's pencil case, which crashed to the floor. The class laughed, he laughed, stuffed it back under the desk, and walked on.

The first trick went smoothly. A spectator picked a card freely, memorized it, pushed it back into the deck; he shuffled, cut, then spread the cards face-up across the desk - the six of hearts at the far left, the chosen card at the far right. He flipped the far-right card, and the class went oh. The second trick also worked: he placed cards into his hat, said abracadabra, and the cards inside turned into a stiff paper square with a smiley face - palmed in his sleeve beforehand. He had drilled that one the most, so he did it fastest, fast as if racing a clock.

The third trick fell apart. He was supposed to move the six of hearts from his left hand to his right. Left hand clenched, right hand slapped it, he opened the left hand - no six of hearts. He opened the right hand - no six of hearts either. The card had slid onto the desk while he gripped the deck; nobody saw it, least of all him. He stood on the platform with both hands open. The classroom went quiet. In those seconds he heard his own heartbeat, and heard someone in the back row whisper: It failed. His throat went dry. He closed his hands, opened them again - still nothing.

Then Han Xiao did something nobody expected. He bent down, flipped his jacket hem, and fishing out the six of hearts from his trouser pocket - actually it wasn't in his pocket; bending, his eye caught the card on the desk and he snatched it up - held it over his head and shouted: It was hiding in my pocket! The class collapsed laughing; even the homeroom teacher was pounding the desk at the back. Riding the wave of laughter he slid the card back into the deck and ran the trick again, this time smooth as water; when the six of hearts surfaced, applause and laughter burst together.

Bowing on his way off, one of his three sleeve rolls came undone, and a fruit drop fell out of his hat - a prop from the trick - rolling twice before stopping in the aisle. A girl in the front row picked it up, unwrapped it, ate it, and said: This trick produced candy. Han Xiao heard him from down the aisle and waved: That's a freebie.

After the party nobody remembered the card that slid onto the desk. Everyone remembered the six of hearts in the pocket, the candy in the hat, the three rolled-up sleeves. Going home, Han Xiao told his mom the trick had failed. She asked why the audience was laughing then. He said: laughing means it worked. She said: well, your trick even produces candy - better than your dad's deck. He put the worn-cornered deck into a drawer, the six of hearts on top.

班主任铁盒里的四十八块糖

联欢会前一晚，宋老师在办公室数糖。水果糖一袋一袋倒出来，数四十块，不够，四十八个人一人两块要九十六块。她把数法改了：一人两块太多，一人一块加两块备用。她数到四十八，装进那个印着饼干图案的铁盒，盖上盖子，摇了一下，糖在盒里哗啦响。她想了想，又把盒里两块换成了两块牛奶糖，搁在盒子最边上——她记得第四组靠窗那个女生不吃水果糖，只吃牛奶的。

第二天下午两点，教室的课桌被推到四周，中间空出抢凳子的场地。宋老师站在教室后头，手里捧着铁盒。音乐是宣传委员放的，她没管，由他们去。八个人绕着凳子走，她看见自己班的孩子把手背在身后，走得像巡逻的鸭子，嘴角压不住。音乐停，她班那个瘦小的男生扑过去坐下了，她差点跟着扑，手在铁盒盖上按了一下。

抢凳子最后一轮只剩两个人，一把凳子，音乐拖得老长，绕到第十三圈，宋老师看出那两个孩子谁也不敢先坐，谁先坐谁像抢。她正要开口，音乐停了，两人一人一半坐下，全班喊重赛。她走过去说：不重赛，今天人人有糖。话出口她自己先愣了一下——糖的数法她昨晚改过，一人一块加两块备用，她刚才是按老规矩说的。她低头看铁盒，盒里四十八块，备用两块在牛奶糖的位置上。她抬眼扫了一圈教室，四十八个孩子，一人一块，正好。刚才那句人人有糖，说得不多也不少。

同学表演她站在原地没挪窝。纸牌魔术失败那几秒，全班安静，她听见后排那句失败啦，手心在铁盒上攥出了印子。她想着要不要上去救场，还没迈步，那个穿大人西装的男孩自己把失败变成了笑料，她把手从铁盒上松开，掌心一圈红。后来那颗道具糖滚到过道上，被前排女生捡来吃了，她假装没看见——联欢会的规矩，糖归糖，道具归道具，这一颗不算破例。

发糖从第一排往后传。她捧着铁盒走到中途就不用管了，孩子们自己传，自己拿两块。她退到后墙黑板底下，看铁盒从一排一排桌上传过来，盒里的糖越来越少，哗啦声越来越薄。传到最后一排，铁盒回到她手里，她打开盖子——里面躺着两块糖。不是剩的，摆得整整齐齐，一块水果糖一块牛奶糖，牛奶糖底下压着一小条纸，四个铅笔字：宋老师吃。她站在黑板底下没动，把

铁盒盖上了。过了几秒才想起来，全班四十八双眼睛从后墙这边看她，她冲他们摆摆手，把那块水果糖剥开，吃了。

散会后她回办公室，铁盒放在办公桌抽屉上，那两块牛奶糖她没舍得吃，后来搁在办公桌上批作业时吃了一块，另一块留到第二天。她跟同桌的数学老师说，今年这糖发得怪，发到最后多发两块。数学老师说那你亏了。她想了想，说，不亏，四十八块换五十块的笑声，这买卖上哪儿找。

Forty-eight Candies in the Teacher's Tin

The night before the party, Teacher Song counted candies in the staff room. She poured the fruit drops out bag by bag, counted forty - not enough; forty-eight students at two each would need ninety-six. So she changed the math: two each is too many, one each plus two spares. She counted out forty-eight and put them into the biscuit-tin with its printed lid, shook it once, and the candies rattled inside. Then she swapped two of them for milk candies and set them at the tin's edge - she remembered the girl by the window in Group Four who wouldn't eat fruit drops, only milk ones.

At two in the afternoon the desks were pushed to the walls, clearing the middle for musical chairs. Teacher Song stood at the back of the classroom, tin in hand. The publicity monitor ran the music; she let them be. Eight children circled the chairs, hands clasped behind their backs, walking like patrolling ducks, and she couldn't keep the corners of her mouth down. When the music cut, her class's scrawny boy lunged into a seat, and she nearly lunged with him, pressing her hand down on the tin lid instead.

The last round left two students and one chair. The music dragged on, thirteen laps, and she could see neither child dared sit first - whoever sat first looked like a grabber. She was about to speak when the music stopped and they sat half and half, the class chanting for a rematch. She walked over and said: No rematch - today everyone gets candy. The words surprised even her; she had changed the candy math the night before, one each plus two spares, and she had just spoken by the old rule. She looked down at the tin: forty-eight candies, the two spares sitting where the milk candies were. She scanned the room - forty-eight children, one each, exact. That line about everyone getting candy had been neither too much nor too little.

She stood her ground through the student acts. During the seconds the card trick failed and the class went silent, she heard the whisper from the back row - it failed - and her palm left a ring on the tin. She considered going up to rescue the act, but before she moved, the boy in the grown-up suit turned the flop into a joke on his

own. She unclenched her hand from the tin; a red circle sat in her palm. Later the prop candy rolled into the aisle and a girl in the front row picked it up and ate it, and she pretended not to see - party rules: candies are candies, props are props, and this one broke nothing.

The candy pass started from the front row. Halfway through she could let go of the tin; the children passed it themselves and took their pieces. She retreated under the blackboard on the back wall and watched it travel row after row, the candies dwindling, the rattle thinning. When it came back to her from the last row, she opened the lid - two candies lay inside. Not leftovers: arranged neatly, one fruit drop, one milk candy, and under the milk candy a slip of paper with four penciled characters: For Teacher Song. She stood under the blackboard without moving and closed the tin. Only after a few seconds did she remember that forty-eight pairs of eyes were on her from across the room. She waved at them, unwrapped the fruit drop, and ate it.

After the party she returned to the staff room and set the tin on her desk drawer. She couldn't bring herself to eat the milk candies right away; one went with her homework marking that evening, the other she saved for the next day. She told the math teacher beside her that this year's candy distribution was odd - two extra came back at the end. The math teacher said: so you lost out. She thought a moment and said: No loss. Forty-eight candies traded for fifty portions of laughter - try finding that deal anywhere.