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.