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.