幕布后面的心跳

幕布是蓝格子的，边上有一道缝。我站在缝后面，能看见礼堂里黑压压的头。前面的节目还没完，话筒里传出笑声，一阵一阵的，每阵笑声过来，我的心就跟着紧一下。

我的手心全是汗，裙子上蹭了两下，还是湿的。同桌林小满站在我旁边，手里攥着节目单，攥出了褶子。她小声问：你紧张吗。我说：不紧张。说完我自己都听见声音在抖。

稿子我在心里默了不知道多少遍。春天在哪里呀，春天在哪里——不对，那不是我的，我的是一首关于春天的诗，一共四小节，第一句是：冬天还没走远的时候，我就听见了它的脚步。在家里对着镜子练过，在阳台上对着楼下的树练过，妈妈坐在小马扎上当观众，我念完她就鼓掌。

前面的节目报完了。主持人念到我们班的名字，幕布一开，灯光一下子打过来，亮得我眯起眼。我走到台中央站定，话筒是斜的，我扶正它，听见自己的鞋底在地板上蹭了一声。

我开口了：冬天还没走远的时候，我就听见了它的脚步。声音从话筒里传出来，大得吓了我一跳。第二句也顺顺当当。第三句——我张了张嘴，脑子里一片空白。昨天还在被窝里默的句子，一个字都想不起来了。

礼堂安静下来。那几秒特别长，长得我听见自己的心跳，咚、咚、咚，比鞋底蹭地板那声还清楚。我的脸烫起来，手指抠着话筒的边。台下第一排有同学开始小声说话。

就这时候，我听见一个细细的声音，从第三排传上来：春天在融化的溪水里。是林小满。我一下子想起来了，全想起来了。我接着念下去，声音又稳了，最后一句念完，我鞠了一躬。

直起身的时候，掌声起来了，哗啦啦的，比家里小马扎上那个妈妈的掌声大一百倍。我走下台，腿还有点软，林小满在过道里等我，冲我伸出一只手。我拍了一下，啪，两个人的手心都是汗。

回教室的路上，班主任说：中间那一下，处理得好。其实没人知道那一下有多险。但掌声是真的，心跳也是真的。那天晚上我把那首诗又念给妈妈听了一遍，念完，妈妈鼓掌，我在心里偷偷补上了礼堂里的那一片哗啦啦。

Heartbeats Behind the Curtain

The curtain was blue checked, with a slit along the edge. I stood behind the slit and could see the sea of heads packed dark in the auditorium. The previous act was not over; laughter came out of the microphone, wave after wave, and each wave made my heart tighten.

My palms were all sweat. I wiped them twice on my dress and they were still wet. My deskmate Lin Xiaoman stood beside me, clutching the program until it was wrinkled. She whispered: Are you nervous? I said: No. And I heard my own voice shaking.

I had recited the lines in my head who knows how many times. Where is spring, where is spring - no, that was not mine. Mine was a poem about spring, four stanzas, and the first line was: Before winter had gone far, I heard its footsteps. I had practiced facing the mirror at home, practiced on the balcony facing the trees downstairs. Mom sat on a little stool as the audience, and clapped when I finished.

The previous act ended. The host called our class's name, the curtain opened, and the lights hit me all at once, so bright I squinted. I walked to the center of the stage and stopped. The microphone was tilted; I straightened it and heard my shoe sole scuff the floor.

I began: Before winter had gone far, I heard its footsteps. My voice came out of the speaker, so loud it startled me. The second line went smoothly too. The third line - I opened my mouth, and my mind went blank. The lines I had been reciting under the covers yesterday - I could not remember a single word.

The auditorium went quiet. Those seconds were so long that I could hear my own heartbeat, thud, thud, thud, louder than the scuff of my shoe. My face burned, and my fingers picked at the rim of the microphone. In the front row, some classmates started whispering.

Just then I heard a thin voice rise from the third row: Spring is in the melting creek. It was Lin Xiaoman. Suddenly it all came back - all of it. I went on, my voice steady again, and when I finished the last line, I bowed.

As I straightened up, the applause came, roaring, a hundred times louder than the applause of Mom on her little stool at home. I walked off stage with still-soft legs. Lin Xiaoman waited for me in the aisle and held out one hand. I slapped it - smack - both our palms were sweaty.

On the way back to the classroom, our homeroom teacher said: That moment in the middle, well handled. Actually nobody knew how close it was. But the applause was real, and so was the heartbeat. That evening I recited the poem to Mom once more, and she clapped, and in my heart I quietly layered on the roaring of that auditorium.

演樵夫的那个小男孩

马小跳在课本剧里演樵夫。樵夫一共三句台词，第一句是：我的斧子掉进河里了。班主任选他的时候说，你个子结实，像樵夫。他站在讲台上应了一声好，回到座位才开始慌。

候场的时候，别的节目在台上闹，笑声一阵一阵传过来。马小跳蹲在侧幕后面，把三句话念了四十遍。第一句，我的斧子掉进河里了。第二句，河神爷爷，你把我的金斧子银斧子都捞上来

吧。第三句，我还是要把原来的那把拿回去。念到第三十遍，旁边的道具斧子都显得熟了。

轮到他班。幕布拉开，聚光灯打过来，白得晃眼，台下黑乎乎的看不见脸，只能看见一排排反光的手机屏。马小跳拎着道具斧子走出去，斧子的木柄在手里滑了一下，他攥紧了，站定。

他张开嘴。第一句没了。脑子里那四十遍像被人一下子抽走了，一个字都不剩。他站在灯底下，听见自己的呼吸，听见台下有人咳嗽。侧幕后面班主任的手抬起来，又放下。

半秒，一秒。马小跳憋出半句：我的……斧子……河里的……声音又小又干。台下静得可怕。这时候演河神的同学往前抢了一步，接住话：哦？你的斧子掉进河里啦？马小跳顺着她的话找回了调门：掉、掉进去了！金斧子银斧子——他接上了，全接上了，第三句说得又响又稳。

戏演完，他们手拉手出来谢幕。台下掌声起来，哗啦啦，比排练时响任何一次都实在。马小跳鞠躬，直起身，看见第三排他爸爸举着手机在拍，冲他竖大拇指。

回后台，演河神的同学用胳膊肘捅他：刚才吓死我了。马小跳说：我也是。两个人对视了一眼，笑出声。道具斧子靠在墙角，木柄上有一道他攥出来的汗印。

晚上他爸把演出的视频给他看，卡住的那一段只有四秒，视频里他愣在灯下，半句台词含在嘴里。他爸说：这四秒我看了五遍，后面接得漂亮。马小跳把手机还回去，心里那四秒还是长的，可它到底过去了。

The Boy Who Played the Woodcutter

Ma Xiaotiao played the woodcutter in the class play. The woodcutter had three lines in total. The first was: My axe fell into the river. When the homeroom teacher picked him, she said: You are sturdy, you look like a woodcutter. He stood at the podium and said okay, and only started to panic after getting back to his seat.

While waiting backstage, other acts made noise on stage, and laughter drifted over in waves. Ma Xiaotiao crouched behind the side curtain and recited the three lines forty times. Line one: My axe fell into the river. Line two: God of the River, please fish up my gold axe and silver axe. Line three: I still want my old axe back. By the thirtieth round, even the prop axe beside him felt familiar.

It was his class's turn. The curtain opened, the spotlight hit, white and blinding. Downstairs he could not see faces in the dark, only rows of phone screens glowing. He walked out carrying the prop axe; its wooden handle slipped once in his hand, he gripped it tight, and stopped.

He opened his mouth. Line one was gone. The forty recitations seemed yanked away all at once, not a word left. He stood under the light, hearing his own breathing, hearing someone downstairs cough. Behind the side curtain, the homeroom teacher raised her hand, then lowered it.

Half a second. One second. Ma Xiaotiao forced out half a line: My... axe... in the river... The sound was small and dry. The silence downstairs was terrifying. Then the classmate playing the River God stepped forward and caught his words: Oh? Your axe fell into the river? Ma Xiaotiao climbed back onto the track from her line: It fell, it fell! The gold axe and the silver axe - he caught up, caught up with all of it, and said the third line loud and steady.

When the play ended, they came out hand in hand to take a bow. The applause rose downstairs, roaring, more solid than any rehearsal. Ma Xiaotiao bowed, straightened, and saw his dad in the third row holding up a phone, giving him a thumbs-up.

Backstage, the classmate playing the River God nudged him with her elbow: I nearly died back there. Ma Xiaotiao said: Me too. They looked at each other and laughed out loud. The prop axe leaned against the corner of the wall, a sweat mark from his grip on its handle.

At night his dad showed him the video of the performance. The frozen part was only four seconds: in the video he stood dazed under the light, half a line stuck in his mouth. His dad said: I watched those four seconds five times, and the recovery after was beautiful. Ma Xiaotiao handed the phone back. Those four seconds still felt long inside him - but they had passed.

掌声落下来之前

掌声是在我唱完最后一个音、退后半步的时候落下来的，哗啦啦，从礼堂四面八方盖过来。我站在台上，胸口还在剧烈起伏，手心湿得像刚洗过手没擦。没有人知道，就在半分钟前，我差点把整个合唱队晾在台上。

事情要从候场说起。合唱队二十几个人在侧幕后面站成一排，老师挨个检查领结。我站在最前面，立式话筒就立在幕布边上，我离它三步远。前一个节目下台，掌声把幕布拍得咚咚响，我的胃里像有东西在翻。带队老师拍拍我的肩：就一段领唱，你练了两个月。

我练了两个月。放学留在音乐教室，钢琴弹前奏，我对着二十几个空椅子唱。领唱那段是：山上的雪化了，河就醒了。我唱给空椅子听，唱给钢琴听，唱给窗外做操的初一学生听。闭着眼睛都能唱出来，这是我自己给这句话下的保证。

幕布开了。灯光白晃晃的，我走到立式话筒前，听见自己的布鞋踩在地板上，一步，两步。指挥的手抬起来，前奏从钢琴里流出来，一个音一个音往前走。全队跟着拍子轻轻晃。前奏过去，指挥的手落向我。

我张嘴。词没了。旋律还在，我哼得出每一个音高，可是那一句词，像被人从脑子里整条抽走了。我张着嘴，喉咙里只出来一点气声。一拍，两拍。指挥的手没有停，稳稳地打着拍子，眼

睛在灯光外面看着我。台下开始有细碎的动静。

第三拍上，我顺着旋律先哼了半句，把调子搭起来，词就跟在调子后头回来了——山上的雪化了。声音从话筒里传出去，又轻又稳。河就醒了。我唱出来了，全唱出来了。声音一句比一句站直，最后一段全队接上去，二十几个声部叠在一起，礼堂里嗡嗡地震。

最后一个音收住，指挥的手停在半空。一秒，两秒。然后掌声落下来，从四面八方盖过来。我退后半步，胸口起伏，手心全是汗。

回后台，带队老师什么都没说，只把我的领结正了正。音乐老师站在幕布后面，眼睛有点红。那两拍的空场，后来我再没跟别人提过。可每次路过音乐教室，听见钢琴弹那句前奏，我的脚还是会不由自主地停在门口——三步远，就是立式话筒的位置。

Before the Applause Fell

The applause fell the moment I finished the last note and stepped back half a pace. It came roaring at me from every side of the auditorium. I stood on stage, my chest still heaving, my palms wet as if I had just washed them and not dried them. Nobody knew that half a minute earlier, I had nearly left the whole choir stranded on stage.

It starts with the wait backstage. The choir of twenty-some stood in a row behind the side curtain, and the teacher checked our bow ties one by one. I stood at the front, the upright microphone planted at the curtain's edge, three steps from me. The previous act came off, and applause beat the curtain thump thump. Something was turning over inside my stomach. The teacher in charge patted my shoulder: Just one solo section. You have practiced for two months.

I had practiced for two months. I stayed in the music room after school, the piano playing the prelude, me singing to twenty empty chairs. The solo line was: When the snow on the mountain melts, the river wakes up. I sang it to the empty chairs, to the piano, to the seventh-graders exercising outside the window. I could sing it with my eyes closed - that was the promise I had made to that line.

The curtain opened. The lights were blinding white. I walked to the upright microphone and heard my cloth shoes on the floor, one step, two. The conductor's hand rose; the prelude flowed out of the piano, note by note moving forward. The whole choir swayed gently on the beat. The prelude ended, and the conductor's hand came down toward me.

I opened my mouth. The words were gone. The melody was still there - I could hum every pitch - but that one line of lyrics had been pulled out of my head whole, as if by hand. My mouth stayed open, and only a breath escaped my throat. One beat. Two.

The conductor's hand did not stop; it beat the time steadily, eyes watching me from outside the light. Faint rustlings began downstairs.

On the third beat, I hummed half a line along the melody, building the tune up, and the words came trailing behind it - When the snow on the mountain melts. The sound went out through the microphone, light and steady. The river wakes up. I sang it. I sang all of it. Voice by voice it straightened up, and in the last section the whole choir joined in, two dozen parts stacked together, the auditorium humming and trembling.

The last note closed. The conductor's hand hung in midair. One second. Two. Then the applause fell, covering me from every side. I stepped back half a pace, chest heaving, palms all sweat.

Backstage, the teacher in charge said nothing and only straightened my bow tie. The music teacher stood behind the side curtain, eyes a little red. I never told anyone about those two beats of silence afterward. But every time I pass the music room and hear the piano play that prelude, my feet still stop by the door on their own - three steps away, exactly where the upright microphone stands.