升旗台上的三百秒

六一前的那个礼拜，我每天写完作业就对着卧室的镜子讲一遍。稿子是班主任陪我改了四稿的，第一稿里全是大人爱听的话，什么花儿啊园丁啊，改到第四稿，全换成了我自己的事。班主任说，国旗下讲话最要紧的不是漂亮，是真的。你讲真的，三百多个人就听得进去。

升旗是八点整。六点四十我就到了学校，礼堂后台候场，手里捏着稿子，纸边被我捏出了毛。前面是四年级的护旗队入场，脚步声整整齐齐，我的心跳比他们的脚步还响。轮到我上台，台阶一共五级，我记得很清楚，因为我数着走的。站上升旗台，全校的人都在下面，太阳刚好在国旗旁边，照得我眯眼。第一句话出口的时候声音有点抖，我说：老师们、同学们，早上好。第二句开始就稳了。

我讲了我的童年。我讲我们家楼下有一棵歪脖子枣树，我五岁爬上去过一次，下不来了，是爸爸搬梯子来把我抱下来的，我在梯子上搂着他脖子，闻到满鼻子他衣服上的洗衣粉味。现在那棵树被砍了，小区修了停车场，可是每年六月，洗衣粉味一钻进鼻子，我就回到那架梯子上。我讲我要谢谢两个人：谢谢我的爸爸，那天在梯子上一直说没事没事；谢谢我的班主任，她把一篇全是空话的稿子退给我四次，说重写，你能找到更好的。

我还讲了我们的约定。我跟全校的同学说：童年是有期限的，我们谁也没法让它停下来，可是可以让它记得住。这个六一，去做一件你长大了会想起来笑的事。去爬一次树，去放一次风筝，去跟好朋友在操场上转圈转到头晕。我在台上说这句话的时候，下面三年级那一片先笑出了声，然后整个操场都在笑。那不是起哄，那是听懂了。

讲完是三百零几秒，我记不太清。下台阶的时候腿还是软的，回到队伍里，班主任朝我竖了一下大拇指。后来一个三年级的男生跑过来跟我说，他真的打算去放风筝。那天下午我把稿子叠成纸飞机，从教室窗口放出去。它没有飞远，落在操场边的花坛里，被风翻过来，正面朝上，像它本来就该待在那儿。

Three Hundred Seconds on the Podium

The week before June First, I gave my speech to the bedroom mirror every evening after homework. Our homeroom teacher sat with me through four drafts. The first was full of grown-up phrases about flowers and gardeners; by the fourth, every line was something that actually happened to me. She said the most important thing in a flag speech is not beauty but truth — speak truly, and three hundred people will listen.

The ceremony was at eight sharp. I arrived at six forty and waited backstage in the hall, clutching my script until its edges frayed. Ahead of me the fourth-grade flag guard entered, footsteps perfectly even, and my heart beat louder than they did. When my turn came, I climbed onto the podium — five steps, I remember clearly, because I counted each one. Up there, the whole school below me, the sun right beside the flag, making me squint. My voice trembled a little on the first sentence: Teachers and fellow students, good morning. By the second sentence it steadied.

I told them about my childhood. Under our old apartment building stood a crooked jujube tree. At five I once climbed it and couldn't get down; my father brought a ladder and carried me off it, and up on the ladder I hugged his neck with his laundry detergent filling my nose. The tree is gone now, replaced by a parking lot, but every June, the moment that detergent smell reaches me, I am back on that ladder. I said I wanted to thank two people: my father, who kept saying it's okay, it's okay up on the ladder; and my homeroom teacher, who returned my empty-worded script four times saying rewrite it, you can find something better.

I also told them about our promise. I said to the whole school: childhood has a term limit, none of us can make it stop, but we can make it memorable. This June First, go do one thing you will smile about when you are grown. Climb a tree, fly a kite, spin in circles on the playground with your best friend until you are dizzy. As I said this from the podium, the third-graders' section laughed first, and then the whole playground laughed. That wasn't heckling. That was understanding.

The speech lasted just over three hundred seconds; I don't remember exactly. My legs were still weak coming down the steps, and back in line our homeroom teacher gave me a thumbs-up. Later a third-grade boy ran up to tell me he really was going to fly a kite. That afternoon I folded my script into a paper airplane and launched it from the classroom window. It didn't fly far — it landed in the flowerbed by the playground, turned over by the wind, face up, as if that was where it belonged.

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