气球、盒饭和一份礼物

六点四十，教室还没人来，我已经站在椅子上挂彩带了。彩带是昨晚在家剪的，红黄两色，剪的时候女儿笑我，你们老师过六一比学生还上心。我没答话，把最后一截双面胶按实了才下来。

黑板上的儿童节快乐是美术老师写的，我负责气球。气球吹到一半腮帮子发酸，隔壁班的王老师隔着走廊递过来一个吹好的，说搭把手。两个班共用一捆气球，年年如此，谁也没提过这个约定。

七点半孩子们陆续进来，门口那几个先是站住不动，眼睛瞪圆，然后哇地一声冲进来摸彩带。胆小的伸手碰一下气球又缩回去，像怕碰响。早读取消了，我让他们坐在位子上看黑板，看一分钟。有个孩子问，老师，今天真是我们的节吗。我说，是。他扭头跟同桌确认了一遍，同桌说，真的，我亲眼看见老师昨天在办公室吹气球。

中午订的盒饭，伙房送到教室。我站在讲台上看着他们吃。六一的盒饭多一个鸡腿，孩子们先啃鸡腿，把米饭留到最后。靠窗那个男孩把鸡腿让给同桌，说他不爱吃，同桌也不爱吃，两个人推来推去，最后掰成两半。我看见了，没出声。当老师这些年，课堂上学到的东西不少，可是最打动我的，常常是这种没出声的时刻。

下午发礼物。礼物是学校统一买的，一个书包挂件，我按名单念，一个孩子一个孩子上来领。念到小满，她上来以后不回去，从兜里掏出一张折好的纸递给我，说老师节日快乐。我打开，上面画了个举气球的小人，气球上写着我的姓。我把它夹进备课本。

放学清空教室，彩带不能摘，要挂一周。我踩着椅子把吹歪的一个气球扶正，底下几个没走的孩子仰头看着，有个说，老师你挂得真高。我下来，他们一窝蜂帮我把剩下的气球收进箱子。

锁门前我回头看了一眼。空教室，彩带在穿堂风里轻轻动，黑板上那六个字还没擦。教了二十多年书，六一对我来说从来不是放假，是站在边上看他们高兴。看得多了就会明白，孩子的节日里其实也有老师的一份，那份东西不发工资，可它一直在。

Balloons, Lunch Boxes, and a Gift

At twenty to seven, before any children arrived, I was already standing on a chair hanging streamers. I had cut them at home the night before, red and yellow. My daughter laughed at me while I cut, saying your teachers take Children's Day more seriously than the students do. I did not answer; I pressed the last piece of tape down firm before climbing down.

The Happy Children's Day on the blackboard was written by the art teacher. I was in charge of balloons. My cheeks ached halfway through blowing them, and Ms. Wang from the next class handed one over across the corridor, saying give me a hand. Two classes have shared one bundle of balloons for years, and nobody ever mentions the

arrangement.

By seven thirty the children came in one after another. The ones at the door stopped first, eyes round, then cried wow and rushed in to touch the streamers. A shy one tapped a balloon and pulled her hand back, afraid it might pop. Morning reading was canceled, and I let them sit and look at the blackboard for one minute. One child asked, teacher, is today really our holiday. I said yes. He turned to confirm with his deskmate, who said really, I saw the teacher blowing balloons in the office yesterday with my own eyes.

At noon the ordered lunch boxes arrived from the canteen, delivered to the classroom. I stood at the podium and watched them eat. The Children's Day box had an extra chicken drumstick, and the children gnawed the drumstick first and saved the rice for last. The boy by the window gave his drumstick to his deskmate, saying he did not like it; the deskmate said he did not either, and the two pushed it back and forth until they broke it in half. I saw it and said nothing. In all these years of teaching, a great deal of what I have learned happened in the classroom, but what moves me most is often these silent moments.

In the afternoon came the gifts. The school bought them in bulk, backpack charms, and I read the roster and handed them out one child at a time. When I reached Xiao Man, she came up and did not go back. She took a folded piece of paper from her pocket and gave it to me, saying Happy Children's Day, teacher. I opened it. On it was a little figure holding a balloon, and the balloon had my surname written on it. I tucked it into my lesson plan book.

After school I cleared the classroom. The streamers stay up for a week. I stood on the chair to straighten a crooked balloon, and a few children who had not left looked up at me. One said, teacher, you hang it really high. When I climbed down, they swarmed to help me pack the leftover balloons into the box.

Before locking up I looked back. Empty classroom, streamers stirring in the draft, the six characters on the blackboard still unwiped. After more than twenty years of teaching, Children's Day has never been a holiday for me. It is standing at the edge and watching them happy. Watch long enough and you understand that the children's holiday holds a share for the teacher too. That share never appears on a payslip, but it has always been there.

办公室的最后一把椅子

入职第一年，我接二年级，六一归我张罗。早上六点五十到教室，彩带贴得不平，中间鼓出一个包，我揭下来重贴，双面胶粘住了黑板边的漆，我拿指甲抠，抠不掉，越抠越急。

李老师来得早，站在门口看了一会儿，进来说，彩带不能从两头拉，要从中间往两边赶，包就没了。她顺手帮我把气球按颜色间隔排开，说颜色要错开，挤一块儿显乱。她带班二十年，布置教室像批改作业，快，稳。我站在旁边递双面胶，忽然想起我上学时教室里的彩带，原来都是这样出来的。

孩子们进来以后，教室炸了锅。有个男孩把气球摘下来满教室跑，我张嘴要训，想起今天是他们的节，把话咽回去，改成，气球要回墙上睡觉。他真把气球贴回墙上，还拍了拍。

中午看他们吃饭，是我这年最安静的一顿。我坐在最后一排旁边，规定是看着，不管纪律。有个女孩吃得慢，米粒粘在嘴角，同桌帮她一粒一粒弹掉。靠门那桌把鸡腿骨头摆成一排，比谁的干净。平时最闹的三个凑在一桌，那天反而吃得规矩，像互相约定好了不能给班级丢人。我把要提醒的话都在心里咽了。原来不用管的一天，他们自己会走稳。

下午发礼物前，我把名单念了三遍，怕念错。真念的时候还是错了半个字，把浩浩念成浩文，他自己举手纠正，全班都笑，我耳朵热。轮到最后一个小男孩，礼物不够了，差一个，我早发现了，从办公室拿来一个备用的小熊挂件，是我自己买的，想着万一。他接过去，先说了声谢谢老师，声音比平时大。

放学送走最后一个孩子，我回办公室拿包。办公室黑着灯，只剩我那一把椅子，桌上剩半卷双面胶和一捆没用完的气球。隔壁桌的老教师留了张纸条，说布置得不错，明年就会更快了。

我坐在自己那把椅子上，腿一下子软下来，不是累，是一种说不清的松。早上抠漆的那股急已经忘了，记得的是咽回去的那句训斥，和那三个吃得规矩的孩子。当老师头一年，我以为节日是给孩子的，跟我没关系。那天晚上我发现不对，一天里我学到的，比一个月备课学到的都多。

The Last Chair in the Office

In my first year of teaching I took second grade, and Children's Day was mine to organize. I got to the classroom at ten to seven. The streamers would not lie flat; a bump bulged in the middle. I peeled it off and reapplied it, and the tape took the paint off by the blackboard. I picked at the paint with my fingernail and only made it worse, and the more I picked, the more flustered I got.

Ms. Li arrived early, stood in the doorway watching for a while, then came in and said you cannot pull streamers from the ends; you smooth them from the middle outward and the bump goes away. She helped me space the balloons by alternating colors, saying colors must alternate or they look crowded in clumps. She has taught for

twenty years, and decorating a classroom for her is like grading homework, fast and steady. I stood by handing her tape, and it suddenly occurred to me that the streamers in my own childhood classrooms had all come out of hands like this.

Once the children came in, the classroom erupted. A boy took a balloon off the wall and ran around with it. I opened my mouth to scold, remembered it was their holiday, swallowed it, and said instead, the balloon needs to go back to the wall to sleep. He really pressed it back onto the wall and patted it.

Watching them eat at noon was the quietest meal of my year. I sat beside the last row, and the rule was to watch, not to police. A girl ate slowly, rice grains stuck at the corner of her mouth, and her deskmate flicked them off one by one. The desk by the door lined up their chicken bones in a row, comparing whose was cleanest. The three noisiest boys in class sat together that day and ate well-behaved, as if they had agreed among themselves not to embarrass the class. I swallowed every remark I wanted to make. So a day without policing, and they walk steady on their own.

Before handing out gifts in the afternoon, I read the roster three times for fear of a mistake. When I actually read it, I still got half a name wrong, reading Haohao as Haowen. He raised his hand to correct me, the whole class laughed, and my ears burned. When the last little boy came up, we were one gift short. I had noticed it early and brought a spare bear charm from the office, one I bought myself just in case. He took it and said thank you, teacher, louder than usual.

After seeing off the last child, I went back to the office for my bag. The office was dark except for my one chair, half a roll of tape and a bundle of leftover balloons on the desk. The veteran teacher at the next desk had left a note: nice job decorating, next year you will be quicker.

I sat down in my chair and my legs went soft all at once. Not from tiredness, but from a looseness I cannot name. The panic over the blackboard paint was already forgotten. What stayed was the scolding I swallowed and the three boys eating well-behaved. In my first year I thought the holiday belonged to the children and had nothing to do with me. That evening I realized I was wrong. In one day I learned more than in a month of lesson planning.

礼物发完以后

傍晚我回教室取教案，讲台上落着一只气球，黄色的，不知道哪个孩子临走摘下来忘带的。我把它系在讲台角上，坐在我的位子上没走。

下午发礼物的场面还在眼前。学校发的是字典，一人一本，我念名字，孩子上来，我递过去，孩子说谢谢。四十多本，念了一个多钟头。轮到阿哲，他上来不接字典，先给我敬了个不太标准的队礼，全班鼓掌，我抬手回了一下，手有点抖。最后剩一本，是给请假在家的小宇的，我打算明天送过去。

中午那顿饭，我坐在教室后头。六一加菜，每个孩子多一个鸡腿。平时打饭最磨蹭的几个，那天自己把饭吃得干干净净。有个孩子举着骨头问我，老师，鸡小时候是不是也过儿童节。我顺着他说，过，鸡的节比你们多一天。他认真想了想，说那鸡比你幸福，你一年才过一次。后头的老师听见，笑出了声。

再往前，是早上。我六点半到教室，跟体育老师一起布置。他爬高挂彩带，我在底下扶椅子，他的鞋带开了，我喊他，他低头看我，椅子晃了一下，两个人都笑。教室后面的黑板报是昨晚出的，板报上画着气球和鼓，我画鼓画得歪，第二天没人提，孩子们只说好看。

七点多，教室空着，气球在讲台角上一鼓一鼓。我坐着想起一件事。三十年前我上小学，六一发礼物，发到手的是个塑料文具盒，我们班主任把自己那份让给一个没带文具盒的同学。我那时候不懂，只觉得那个老师真好看。现在我站在讲台上发字典，忽然就懂了，好看不是长相，是他肯把自己的那份让出去。

我把小宇那本字典放进包里，明天给他，扉页上写什么，我想了一路。写学习进步太官腔，写天天开心又太轻。最后写的是：这本字典陪你，就像今天陪你过的这个节。写完觉得还是别扭，又划掉重写，重写了两遍才满意。

锁教室门的时候，那只黄气球在风里碰着讲台角，发出很轻的声响。我把它取下来带走了，第二天挂在教室后面的黑板边上，底下贴了张小纸条，写着谁的气球。一个星期都没人来认领。后来它就一直挂在那儿，毕业那年，有个学生来摘走了，也没说是他的。

After the Gifts Were Handed Out

In the evening I went back to the classroom for my lesson plans, and a yellow balloon sat on the podium, left behind by some child who picked it off the wall and forgot to carry it out. I tied it to the corner of the podium and sat down at my desk without leaving.

The afternoon gift scene was still before my eyes. The school gave dictionaries, one each. I read names, children came up, I handed them over, children said thank you. Forty-some books took over an hour. When it was A Zhe's turn, he came up and did not take the dictionary first. He gave me a not-quite-standard salute, the class applauded, and I raised my hand in return, my hand shaking a little. One dictionary remained at the end, for Xiao Yu, who was home sick. I meant to deliver it tomorrow.

At noon I sat at the back of the classroom during lunch. The holiday added a dish, an extra drumstick for every child. The few who are always dawdling over their

trays finished everything that day. One child held up his bone and asked, teacher, do chickens have Children's Day when they are little. I played along: they do, chickens get one more day than you. He thought it over seriously and said then chickens are happier than you, you only get one a year. The teacher behind me heard that and laughed out loud.

Further back still was the morning. I arrived at six thirty and decorated with the PE teacher. He climbed high to hang streamers while I held his chair. His shoelace came undone, he looked down at me, the chair wobbled, and we both laughed. The back blackboard had been finished the night before, balloons and a drum drawn on it. My drum came out crooked. Nobody mentioned it the next day; the children only said it looked good.

After seven, the classroom empty, the balloon puffing gently at the corner of the podium, I remembered something. Thirty years ago, in elementary school, Children's Day gifts were plastic pencil boxes, and our homeroom teacher gave her own to a classmate who had none. I did not understand then. I only thought that teacher looked truly fine. Now I stand at the podium handing out dictionaries, and I understand at last. Looking fine is about the face; it is about being willing to give your share away.

I put Xiao Yu's dictionary into my bag. Tomorrow I will hand it over, and all the way home I thought about what to write on the flyleaf. Study harder sounds like an official notice; be happy every day is too light. What I finally wrote was: this dictionary will stay with you, the way today's holiday stayed with you. Then it still felt awkward, so I crossed it out and rewrote, twice, before I was satisfied.

When I locked the classroom, the yellow balloon tapped the corner of the podium in the draft, very softly. I took it home, and the next day I hung it by the back blackboard with a note under it: whose balloon is this. Nobody claimed it for a week. It stayed hanging there after that, and in graduation year a student came and took it down, without saying it was his.