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.