

存了三十年的柏木板

那块柏木板在我家柴房顶上躺了三十年。是我爹留下的。当年他给我打书桌，多开了一张板，说留着，以后总有用处。我留着，一留就是三十年。板子不响，也不坏，木纹里的油气一年比一年足。孙子开学前闹着要买会弹开的铁皮文具盒，我夜里翻来覆去，想起那块板。第二天一早，我把它请了下来。

擦净板子，我先蹲着看木纹。做木器的人都知道，木头是有脾气的，顺着它的性子来，它才服帖。墨斗线弹下去，锯口咬住黑线，咔咔地走。刨子是我结婚那年我爹置的，铁刨刃磨薄了一层又一层，推起来却比新的还听话。刨花一卷一卷飞出来，落在脚边。我在院子里刨木头，孙子蹲在旁边数刨花，数到六十七就不数了，改帮我把刨花拢成一堆。他说爷爷你刨得慢。慢有慢的道理。快刀劈不开木头的筋骨，慢刨子才能把日子推平。

盒子拼了三次才成。头一次接缝宽，第二次纹理别不过劲，第三次我干到天黑才收工。铜合页是镇上五金店配的，小小两片，拧上以后盒盖开合不严不松，正好。刻名字那天我戴了老花镜。刻刀走笔画，一笔都不能抖。名字刻深了费木，刻浅了藏不住漆。刻完，我用棉签蘸清漆，一点一点填进笔画缝里，名字立时亮了，像贴在盒子上的一小片灯。

孙子背着书包出门，走到院门口又回头，把文具盒从书包侧兜里掏出来举了举，像是在说，爷爷，我带着它。我点头，让他走。那一整天我在院子里坐着，总觉得木头盒子在孩子书包里一磕一碰地响。

傍晚孙子回来，一进门就把盒子掏出来，说全班都看了，同桌摸那朵刻的云，说比商店里的神气。他说完跑去洗手吃饭。我把盒子拿过来，对着光看那四个角。角上有一道新磕的小印子，不碍事，木头以后会把它包起来。我爹当年说，木头东西是活的，人用它，它也用人的一生慢慢回礼。如今这盒子替我陪着孙子念书，一天一天，颜色会越用越深。柴房顶上还剩下半块板，我想好了，等小孙女开学，再做一只。

The Cypress Board Kept for Thirty Years

That cypress board had rested on top of the woodshed in our yard for thirty years. My father left it behind. When he built my desk long ago, he cut one board extra and said, keep it, it will find its use someday. I kept it, and thirty years passed. The board never warped and never cracked; the oil in its grain grew richer year by year. The night before my grandson started school, he kept asking for a tin pencil case that springs open. I tossed in bed and thought of that board. Early next morning I brought it down.

I wiped the board clean and squatted to read its grain. Everyone who works with wood knows that timber has a temper; follow its nature and it will follow yours. I snapped the ink line, let the saw bite the black line, and cut. The hand plane was one my father gave me the year I married; its iron blade had been ground thinner year after year, yet it pushed more smoothly than a new one ever could. Shavings curled

out in rolls at my feet. My grandson squatted beside me counting them, stopped at sixty-seven, and started gathering them into a pile instead. He said, Grandpa, you plane slowly. Slow has its reasons. A fast blade cannot part the sinew of wood; only a slow plane can smooth a life flat.

The box took three tries. The first joints were too wide; the second grain would not cooperate; the third time I worked until dark. The brass hinges came from the hardware shop in town, two small pieces, and once screwed on, the lid opened and closed neither too tight nor too loose. The day I carved the name, I wore my reading glasses. The knife traced each stroke, and not one stroke could tremble. Carve too deep and you waste the wood; too shallow and the lacquer will not hold. When I finished, I filled the grooves with clear lacquer on a cotton swab, bit by bit, and the name lit up at once, like a small lamp set into the box.

My grandson left with his schoolbag, walked to the gate, turned back, and lifted the pencil case out of the side pocket as if to say, Grandpa, I am bringing it. I nodded and let him go. All day I sat in the yard, half hearing the wooden box knocking softly inside his bag.

He came back at dusk, pulled the box out at the door, and said the whole class had seen it, that his deskmate touched the carved cloud and called it grander than any shop box. Then he ran off to wash his hands for supper. I took the box and studied its four corners against the light. One corner had a fresh little dent. It did not matter; the wood would grow around it in time. My father used to say that wooden things are alive: people use them, and they repay a whole lifetime slowly. Now this box keeps my grandson company at his studies, day by day, its color deepening with use. Half of the board is still up on the woodshed. I have decided: when my little granddaughter starts school, I will make her one too.