

笔袋是面镜子

期中考试的成绩单发下来那天，我把笔袋从书包里拽出来，扔在桌上。数学六十八，英语七十四，物理刚过及格线。我妈在客厅问我考得怎么样，我说还行。这个谎说得我胸口发闷，可是比起分数，我更说不清的是另一种东西：我明明每天都坐在书桌前，为什么什么都抓不住。

那天晚上我找错题本，把笔袋整个翻过来。笔袋是初一开学买的，帆布的，本来有三个隔层。到初二下学期，三个隔层早就混成了一个洞：黑笔红笔铅笔挤在一起，两支笔帽不见了，红笔干得写不出水；数学的三角板和语文的书签缠在一块；里面还有上学期用剩的半管胶水、三张揉成团的纸条、一颗不知道什么时候滚进去的纽扣。我一样一样往外掏，掏了十分钟，桌上多出一座小山。错题本没找到，倒是找到一张初一第一学期的课程表，边角已经磨圆了。

我坐在那座小山前面，忽然想起这半年。笔袋不是突然变乱的。初一的时候，笔袋里每个隔层装什么我记得清清楚楚，红笔只在改作业时用，用完就放回中间那层。初二开始，我上课走神的次数多了，笔记记得断断续续，笔袋里的笔也开始乱住：红笔跟黑笔混在一起，因为我已经有两个星期没改过自己的笔记；三角板跟杂物混在一起，因为几何课我听不懂，书翻到那一页就合上了。笔袋里的每一次混乱，都对应着我学习里的一次放弃。我以为笔袋乱只是习惯问题，原来它是面镜子，我学习上的失序，它早就一件一件替我记着。

那个周末我做了两件事。第一件，把那座小山重新清点：写不出的笔扔掉，纽扣胶水归到杂物抽屉，课程表压在笔袋的透明网袋里。三个隔层重新分工，写字的一层，改错和工具一层，备用一层。第二件，我翻开那本找到的错题本，从数学第六章的第一道错题开始补。错题本里的空白页像笔袋里的空隔层，我一道一道往里填，一周填三页，不多，但是每页都自己重做一遍。

改变不是一夜之间发生的。十二月的月考，数学八十一。分数不算高，可是那天放学我收拾书包，笔袋里的东西各在各的隔层，拉链一拉就合上了。这个动作半年以前我要按两下才能完成。我发现顺序是会互相传染的：笔袋归位，笔记跟着归位，错题跟着归位，上课的时候手知道找什么，脑子就知道听什么。

现在我的笔袋还是那个旧帆布笔袋。每次月考完我都把它倒在桌上清一遍，像擦那面镜子。它干净，我就知道自己最近没偷懒；它开始乱，我就知道有一门课我又在躲。这个办法不高级，但是对我有用：管不住思路的时候，先管住手边这一小片地方。

My Pencil Pouch Is a Mirror

The day the midterm report came out, I yanked my pencil pouch out of my bag and threw it on the desk. Math sixty-eight, English seventy-four, physics barely passing. My mother asked from the living room how I did. I said fine. The lie sat heavy in my chest, but harder to explain than the scores was something else: I sat at my desk every single day, so why could I not hold onto anything?

That night, hunting for my mistake notebook, I turned the whole pouch upside down. I had bought it canvas-made at the start of seventh grade, with three

compartments. By the second half of eighth grade those three compartments had merged into one cave: black pens, red pens, and pencils jammed together, two caps missing, the red pen too dry to write; my math set squares tangled with a Chinese bookmark; plus half a tube of old glue, three crumpled notes, and a button that had rolled in at some unknown date. I dug things out one by one for ten minutes, and a small mountain grew on the desk. The mistake notebook never surfaced; instead I found my class schedule from the first term of seventh grade, its corners worn round.

Sitting before that mountain, the past half year came back to me. The pouch did not get messy overnight. In seventh grade I knew exactly what lived in each compartment; the red pen came out only for correcting my own notes and went back to the middle layer. In eighth grade, I drifted in class more often, my notes grew patchy, and the pens began cohabiting carelessly: red mixed with black, because I had not corrected my notes in two weeks; set squares mixed with junk, because I could not follow geometry and closed the book whenever that chapter came. Every mess inside the pouch matched one surrender in my studies. I had thought a messy pouch was just a habit problem. It was a mirror. My academic disorder had been recorded inside it, item by item, all along.

That weekend I did two things. First, I inventoried the mountain: dead pens into the trash, button and glue into the junk drawer, the old schedule tucked into the pouch's clear mesh pocket. The three compartments got new jobs: writing tools in one, correction and instruments in one, spares in one. Second, I opened the mistake notebook I finally found and started repairing errors from the first problem of chapter six in math. Its blank pages were like the empty compartments of my pouch. I filled three pages a week, not many, but redoing every problem myself.

The change did not happen overnight. At the December monthly test I scored eighty-one in math. Not a high score, but that afternoon as I packed up, everything sat in its own compartment and the zipper closed in one pull. Half a year ago that same motion needed two presses. I found that order is contagious: when the pouch returns to order, the notes follow, the mistakes follow, and when the hand knows what to reach for, the mind knows what to listen for.

My pouch is still that old canvas one. After every monthly test I dump it on the desk and clean it, like wiping that mirror. If it is clean, I know I have not been slacking lately; if it starts to mess up, I know there is a subject I am hiding from again. The method is not sophisticated, but it works for me: when I cannot control my thinking, I start by controlling the small patch of order within reach of my hand.