

书架最里面的铁皮盒

年末大扫除，我从书架最里面摸出一个冰凉的物件。是铁皮文具盒，磁吸的搭扣，盒身印着一列绿皮火车。它在我书架最高层待了多少年，我算不清，只记得它比我的许多课本都活得久。

盒盖右下角贴着一张贴画，是那种九十年代小卖部里五分钱一张的塑料贴画，一只白兔子坐在蘑菇下面。颜色褪得差不多了，兔子只剩轮廓，蘑菇红成一块淡淡的斑。我记得贴上它的那个下午，也记得它翘起一角后，我用透明胶带仔细压住的样子。胶带黄了，贴画倒还平整，像被谁小心按住了时间。

打开盒子，凹槽里还有浅浅的铅笔灰，一块用剩的橡皮硬得像小石子。搭扣一合，啪的一声，和三十年前一模一样。就是这一声响，把我拽回那条上学路。

那时的路是土路，两边是麦子。春天麦子青，夏天麦子黄，我背着书包走在田埂边，铁皮盒在书包里咣当咣当响，像给自己伴奏。冬天路冻得硬邦邦，走到学校手是红的，到了教室第一件事是把文具盒从书包里掏出来，摆在桌角，好像摆上它，人才算坐稳。路上有座石板小桥，下雨天桥面滑，我奶奶不放心，跟了一段又一段，后来她眼睛不好了，我只能自己走，走到桥头总要回头看一眼，村子在雾里慢慢变小。

如今土路成了水泥路，小桥翻新了栏杆，麦子地只剩一小块。我在城里有了书桌、台灯和一整柜的文具，可那个铁皮盒始终没扔。它旧，旧得理直气壮：盒角磕掉漆的地方，是摔过；火车图案磨白的地方，是摸过。

我把铁皮盒放回书架第二层，不再是最里面。兔子贴画朝外。有些东西不需要用，摆在那里，就是一条回家的路。

The Tin Case at the Back of the Bookshelf

During the year-end cleaning, I felt my way to a cold object at the back of the bookshelf. It was a tin pencil case with a magnetic clasp, its body printed with a green train. I cannot count how many years it has sat on the top shelf; I only know it has outlived many of my old textbooks.

On the lower right corner of the lid clung a sticker, the kind of plastic picture that cost five cents in the little shops of the 1990s: a white rabbit sitting under a mushroom. Its colors had faded almost away; the rabbit was only an outline, the mushroom a pale red blot. I remembered the afternoon I pasted it on, and how, after its corner curled up, I pressed it down carefully with clear tape. The tape has yellowed, but the sticker lies flat, as if someone had gently held time in place.

Opening the case, I found faint pencil lead in the grooves and a leftover piece of eraser hard as a small stone. When the clasp snapped shut, it made the same pop as

thirty years ago. That single sound pulled me back to the road to school.

The road then was dirt, with wheat on both sides. In spring the wheat was green; in summer it turned gold. I walked along the ridge of the field with my schoolbag on my back, the tin case clanking inside it, keeping time for me like an accompaniment. In winter the road froze hard, my hands were red when I reached school, and the first thing in the classroom was to take the pencil case out and set it on the corner of the desk, as if only then was I properly seated. On the way there was a small stone-slab bridge, slippery on rainy days. My grandmother worried and walked part of the way with me again and again. Later her eyes grew weak, and I had to go alone; at the bridge I always looked back once, watching the village shrink slowly into the mist.

Now the dirt road is concrete, the little bridge has new railings, and only a patch of wheat field remains. In the city I have a desk, a lamp, and a whole cabinet of stationery, yet I never threw the tin case away. It is old with good reason: the chipped paint on its corners came from falls, and the worn-white part of the train came from my hands.

I put the tin case back on the second shelf, no longer at the very back, with the rabbit sticker facing out. Some things do not need to be used. Placed where they are, they are a road home.

妈妈留给我的铁皮文具盒

升六年级前的那个夏天，妈妈从衣柜顶上搬下一个纸箱，从里面取出一个铁皮文具盒，递给我。她说，她用这个盒子念完了小学和初中，现在轮到我。

盒子是长方形的，蓝铁皮，搭扣是铁片弹的那种，按下去要用力，弹开时嗡的一声。盒盖正中贴着一张贴画，一只仙鹿站在松树底下，鹿身上的白斑点磨得只剩几粒。妈妈说贴画是她同桌给的，那年她们为半块橡皮吵了一星期，和好的那天，同桌把贴画撕下来贴到她盒盖上。贴画的边翘过很多次，妈妈就用蜡一点一点压实。我摸那些蜡痕，像摸一行看不见的字。

妈妈那会儿的上学路要翻一道坡。坡上是草，坡下有一条河，河上有石墩，踩着石墩过河，冬天水瘦，石墩露得高，夏天涨水，石墩只剩一线，她书包里装着鞋，脱了鞋蹚过去，到了对岸再穿上。她说最难走的是下雪天，坡上的草坡滑，她连滚带爬上去，铁皮盒在书包里叮叮当当，像替她喊疼。她讲这些的时候语气很平，像在说别人。可我摸着盒盖上那圈蜡痕，手心发烫。

我用了她这个盒子一年。它的搭扣确实紧，它的铁皮确实凉，可它摔不坏——土路年代它都没摔坏，水泥路上更不会。我把它放在笔袋外面，写作业时它立在台灯边。有同学说它旧，我说不扔。他们不懂，这个盒子的磕碰是两条上学路叠在一起：一条是妈妈翻过的坡，一条是我走过的街。

去年寒假，我陪妈妈回外婆的村子。坡上的草没了，修了台阶，河上架了桥。妈妈在桥头站了一会儿，说石墩还在，在桥下游一点，露出水面半截。我也看见了。那么小的石墩，她当年是怎么踩过去的。

如今铁皮盒在我抽屉里，仙鹿朝上。它装过妈妈的铅笔，也装过我的。岁月这个东西，说不清道不明，可它确实在一只铁皮盒上留下了形状：两处磨白，一圈蜡痕，一声嗡的弹响。

The Tin Pencil Case My Mother Left Me

The summer before I entered Grade 6, my mother brought down a cardboard box from the top of the wardrobe, took out a tin pencil case, and handed it to me. She said she had finished elementary and middle school with this case, and now it was my turn.

The case is rectangular, of blue tin, with a spring clasp of bent sheet metal that takes force to press and hums when it pops open. In the middle of the lid is a sticker: a fairy deer standing under a pine tree, its white spots worn down to a few specks. My mother said the sticker was given by her deskmate. That year the two of them had quarreled for a whole week over half an eraser, and on the day they made up, the deskmate peeled the sticker off her own case and pasted it onto mine. The edges of the sticker curled up many times, and my mother pressed them down with wax, little by little. When I touch those wax traces, it is like reading a line of invisible writing.

My mother's road to school crossed a slope. The slope was grass, and below it ran a river with stone piers in it. You crossed by stepping from pier to pier. In winter the water ran low and the piers stood high; in summer the flood left only a thread of stone, and she carried her shoes in her schoolbag, waded across barefoot, and put them on at the far bank. She said the hardest days were snowy ones: the grass slope turned slick, and she climbed up half rolling, half crawling, the tin case clanging in her bag as if crying out her pain for her. She told all this in a flat voice, as if about someone else. But as I touched the ring of wax on the lid, my palm grew hot.

I used her case for a year. Its clasp is indeed tight, its tin indeed cold, but it cannot be broken by falling — it survived the dirt-road years, and it surely will the concrete ones. I keep it outside my pen bag, standing beside the lamp while I do homework. Some classmates said it was old; I said I would not throw it away. They do not understand: the dents and worn spots of this case are two roads to school layered into one — the slope my mother crossed, and the streets I walk.

Last winter break I went with my mother back to my grandmother's village. The grass on the slope was gone, replaced by steps, and a bridge spanned the river. Mother stood by the bridgehead for a while and said the stone piers were still there,

a little downstream, half of them showing above the water. I saw them too. Such small piers — how did she step across them back then?

Now the tin case lies in my drawer, the fairy deer facing up. It has held my mother's pencils and mine. The years are hard to describe, yet they have truly left a shape on a tin case: two worn-white patches, one ring of wax, one humming pop.

搬桌子时，我从床底下推出一个铁皮盒

昨天家里换书桌。旧书桌抬出去的时候，卡在桌腿和墙缝之间的东西哗啦掉了一地：弹珠、断尺、图钉。最后从床底下慢慢推出来的，是一只铁皮文具盒，积的灰像下过一场小雪。

我把它拿到水龙头底下冲。铁皮的盒子，本来印着卡通猫，可盒盖上大半被一张贴画盖住了。那不是买的贴画，是我自己画的：蜡笔涂的一个太阳，加一只歪腿的风筝，剪下来，用米汤糊上去的。贴画湿透了，泡得发软，我把它小心揭下来，晾在窗台上。盒子露出原来的卡通猫，猫的一只眼睛磨没了，倒像在冲我眨眼。

这只盒子是一年级用的。那时每天上学，爸爸送我。我们那条路穿过老菜场，卖鱼的摊子把地面冲得湿亮，我总绕着走；再经过一家修车铺，打气筒哐当哐当响，我数着声音走，数到七就到巷口。冬天早上黑，爸爸的手大，我的手小，他牵着我，我另一只手挎着书包，书包里的铁皮盒一步一响。到了校门口，他总蹲下来替我拉拉链，说拉好了，别丢。后来三年级我就不让送了，他站在巷口看我去，我假装不看回头。

铁皮盒在床底下待了四年。它装过我的第一支钢笔，那支笔漏水，把盒底染了一小片蓝，冲不掉。我把它擦干，摆在书桌抽屉的第一层。窗台上那张蜡笔贴画干了，颜色淡了些，太阳还是那个太阳，风筝还是那条歪腿。

我把贴画重新糊回盒盖上，用的是胶水，比米汤牢。糊好我忽然明白了一件事：盒子还是那个盒子，可我已经不用数打气筒的声音走到巷口了，也不用等谁蹲下来替我拉拉链。岁月不是悄悄走的，它把东西留在床底下，等你搬桌子的时候，它再哗啦一声，全部倒给你看。

Moving the Desk, I Rolled a Tin Case Out from Under the Bed

Yesterday our family replaced the study desk. When the old one was carried out, everything wedged between its legs and the wall came tumbling down: marbles, a broken ruler, thumbtacks. Last of all, rolled slowly out from under the bed, came a tin pencil case, its dust like a light snowfall.

I took it under the tap. It was a tin case, printed with a cartoon cat, but most of the lid was covered by a sticker. It was not a bought sticker; I had drawn it myself: a sun in crayon plus a kite with a crooked leg, cut out and pasted on with rice water. Soaked through and soft, the sticker came off carefully in my hands, and I set it on the windowsill to dry. The case showed its cartoon cat again, one of the cat's eyes rubbed away, as if winking at me.

I used this case in Grade 1. Every school morning my father walked me. Our road cut through the old vegetable market; the fish stalls washed the ground shiny wet, and I always walked around it. Then came a bicycle repair shop whose pump went clang-clang; I counted the clangs as I walked, and at seven I reached the mouth of the lane. Winter mornings were dark. My father's hand was big and mine was small; he held my hand while my other arm carried the schoolbag, and the tin case inside it rang one step at a time. At the school gate he always crouched to zip my bag for me and said: zipped tight, don't lose anything. By Grade 3 I would not let him come; he stood at the lane's mouth watching me go, and I pretended not to look back.

The tin case had stayed under the bed for four years. It once held my first fountain pen, which leaked and dyed a small patch of the bottom blue; it would not wash off. I dried the case and placed it in the first layer of my desk drawer. On the windowsill the crayon sticker had dried, its colors a little paler, but the sun was still that sun and the kite still had its crooked leg.

I pasted the sticker back onto the lid, with glue this time, stronger than rice water. When it was done, I suddenly understood something: the case is still the same case, but I no longer count pump clangs to reach the lane's mouth, nor wait for anyone to crouch and zip me up. The years do not leave quietly. They leave things under the bed, and when you move a desk, they tumble out with a crash and show you everything at once.