

两间挨着的小房子

六年级三班的教室中间，有两间小房子。说是房子，其实是两个文具盒，一个蓝铁皮，一个白铁皮，并排摆在两张课桌拼起来的缝上，谁也不越界。班里人早习惯了：那是周航和林小满的界碑，两人从三年级同桌到六年级，中间没红过脸。

生日贴纸是那年春天出现的。林小满送周航一小张贴纸，七八只小鲸鱼。周航当场愣了愣，嫌礼物小。林小满也不争，转头把一只鲸鱼贴进自己盒盖里侧。周航看了一会儿，回家也贴了一只进去，尾巴朝上，跟她那只一模一样。第二天两人把盒子并排一放，伸出小拇指：以后上不同的中学，盒子不许换，换了鲸鱼没地方住。这话被前排的人听见，笑他们幼稚。两人不理睬，把盒子往中间又挪了半寸。

后来毕业，一个城东一个城西，那半寸的界碑拆了。再后来，班里传过一些话，说周航换了新文具盒，又说林小满跟新同桌很好。传话的人没见过，只是传。两个盒子其实都还在，鲸鱼也还在，只是没人再并排摆它们。铁皮上的蓝一天淡过一天，贴纸的边一天翘过一天，像两个小孩各自长大时，谁也没顾上回头的那段路。

同学聚会在多年后的寒假，小学全班凑齐大半。周航迟到了，进门先看见林小满，愣了半秒，坐下。聊到一半，他从书包侧袋摸出那只蓝铁皮盒，磕瘪了一角。林小满看了一眼，从包里拿出白的。两个盒子并排放桌上，放在当年那条不存在的缝上。她打开盒盖，鲸鱼翘着边贴在里侧；他也打开，他的鲸鱼也还在。满桌人起哄，两人都不躲，也不解释。散场时他们在楼道挥手，挥得比当年校门口还久。

那两间小房子后来搬进了各自的书桌抽屉，还是挨着放，中间隔着一层布。鲸鱼贴着，约定就没散。

Two Little Houses Side by Side

In the middle of Class Three, Grade Six, there were two little houses. Houses, in quotes: two pencil cases, one blue tin, one white tin, side by side on the seam where two desks met, neither crossing the line. The class long ago got used to it. They were the boundary stones of Zhou Hang and Lin Xiaoman, deskmates from third to sixth grade, who never once fell out.

The whale stickers appeared that spring. On his birthday, Lin Xiaoman gave Zhou Hang a small sheet of stickers, seven or eight little whales. He froze for a moment, unimpressed by such a small gift. She did not argue; she stuck one whale inside her own case lid. Zhou Hang watched it a while, went home, and stuck one inside his lid too, tail up, exactly like hers. The next day they set the cases side by side and held out little fingers: when we go to different middle schools, no changing the cases, or the whales will have nowhere to live. The kid in front heard this and laughed at them for being childish. They ignored him and shifted the cases another half inch toward the middle.

Then graduation came, one to the east of the city, one to the west, and that half-inch boundary was dismantled. Later, talk went around the class that Zhou Hang had bought a new case, that Lin Xiaoman got along with her new deskmate. The talkers had not seen anything; it was just talk. Both cases were actually still there, and the whales too; no one just set them side by side anymore. The blue on the tin faded a little more each day, the sticker edges curled a little more each day, like the road two children walked as they grew, neither turning back in time.

The class reunion was years later, in winter break, most of the class gathered. Zhou Hang arrived late, saw Lin Xiaoman first, froze half a second, sat down. Midway through the talk he took a blue tin case from his bag, one corner dented. She glanced at it and took a white one from her bag. The two cases went side by side on the table, on the seam that no longer existed. She opened her lid, the whale curled at the edges inside; he opened his, his whale still there. The whole table teased them; neither dodged, neither explained. At the end they waved goodbye in the stairwell, longer than at the school gate all those years ago.

The two little houses later moved into separate desk drawers, still stored side by side, a layer of cloth between them. With the whales still stuck on, the promise never came apart.