

盒盖内侧的小鲸鱼

放暑假清书桌，那只蓝铁皮文具盒从床底滚出来，盒盖磕在地上，啪一声弹开。我弯腰去捡，先看见的不是灰，是盒盖内侧那张小鲸鱼贴纸。翘了边，颜色淡了，可它还贴在那儿，尾巴朝上，像浮在一片褪了色的海面上。

它不是我的。六年级生日那天，同桌林小满神秘秘塞给我一小张贴纸，摊开来七八只小鲸鱼，蓝的绿的都有。她说生日礼物就这个，别的都太贵。我当场不高兴了半分钟——别人送的都是笔袋、手账。她急了，说你会喜欢的。回家我随手把一只小鲸鱼贴进文具盒盖里侧，贴完才发现，她自己的盒盖里侧也贴了一只，尾巴朝上，跟我的一模一样。

第二天她凑过来看，眼睛弯起来：我们一人一只，凑一对。她伸出小拇指，我也伸出小拇指，两个文具盒并排摆在课桌中间，像两间挨着的小房子。她说，以后就算分到不同的中学，盒子也不许换，换了鲸鱼就没地方住了。我说好。那天放学我们各回各家，校门口挥的手比平时久一点。

后来真的分开了。她去了城西的中学，我留在城东。开学第一周我给她写信，问鲸鱼还在不在。她回：在，就是盒子旧了，你别嫌弃你的。我们没再提换盒子的事。见面少了，一年凑不齐几次，说话从一节课一节课地聊，变成节假日里匆匆的几句。我一度以为那份约定跟小学同学录一样，翻过就翻过了。

可此刻我蹲在床底的光里，捏着那只磕瘪的盒盖，发现鲸鱼没掉。胶都老了，边都翘了，它没掉。铁皮盒替我记着六年级的下午、两间挨着的小房子、校门口多挥的那几下。我把它放回书桌最上层。城西那个盒子里，鲸鱼应该也在。有些朋友不常见面，可约定贴在哪儿，人就没走远。

The Little Whale Inside the Lid

Summer break, cleaning the desk, the blue tin pencil case rolled out from under the bed, its lid hitting the floor with a snap. I bent to pick it up, and the first thing I saw was not the dust but the little whale sticker inside the lid. Its edges had curled, its color had faded, but it was still there, tail up, floating on a sea that had lost its blue.

It was not mine. On my birthday in sixth grade, my deskmate Lin Xiaoman slipped me a small sheet of stickers mysteriously. Spread out, seven or eight little whales, blue and green. She said that was the birthday gift, everything else was too expensive. I was unhappy for half a minute, since other people got pencil bags and journals. She panicked and said, you will like it. Home, I stuck one whale inside my pencil case lid on a whim, and only then noticed she had stuck one inside her own lid too, tail up, exactly like mine.

The next day she leaned over to look, eyes curving: one each, a pair. She held out her little finger; I held out mine. Our two cases sat side by side in the middle

of the desks like two adjoining little houses. She said, even if we go to different middle schools later, we are not allowed to change the cases, or the whales will have nowhere to live. I said okay. That day we each went home, and we waved at the school gate a little longer than usual.

Then it really happened. She went to a school in the west of the city; I stayed in the east. The first week I wrote her a letter asking whether the whale was still there. She wrote back: it is, the case is just old, do not be ashamed of yours. We never mentioned changing cases again. We met less, not even a few times a year; our talks went from whole class periods to hurried sentences on holidays. I began to think the promise had turned like a graduation autograph book, once turned, done.

Yet now I crouch in the light from under the bed, holding the dented lid, and find the whale has not fallen off. The glue is old, the edges are curled, and it has not fallen. The tin case keeps for me the sixth-grade afternoon, the two adjoining houses, the extra waves at the school gate. I put it back on the top shelf of my desk. In that case in the west of the city, the whale must be there too. Some friends are not seen often, but wherever the promise is stuck, they have not gone far.

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.

新同桌问我的盒子为什么这么旧

新同桌盯着我的文具盒看了三天，第四天终于开口：这盒子怎么这么旧？蓝铁皮都磨出银边了。我正要答，话到嘴边拐了个弯：旧才用得顺手。她还想问，上课铃响了。她不知道，盒盖内侧还住着一只鲸鱼。

那只鲸鱼是六年级生日时同桌林小满送的贴纸。一小张贴纸，七八只小鲸鱼，她说是生日礼物。我当时嫌小，不高兴了半分钟。她没争，把一只贴进自己盒盖里侧，我回家也贴了一只，尾巴朝上，一模一样。第二天我们并排摆好盒子拉钩：上不同中学也不换，换了鲸鱼没地方住。前排的人笑我们幼稚，我们把盒子往中间又挪了半寸。那半寸，是我整个小学里最认真的一次挪动。

后来她去了城西，我来了这所城东的学校。两年里见面凑不齐几次。写信的那年她还回我：鲸鱼在，盒子旧了，你别嫌弃你的。再后来消息也少了，各自被新学校的新课表填满。我有时怀疑那个约定是不是只有我一个人当真。可我的盒子一直没换。不是舍不得，是不敢换。换了，我就没有证据了——证据是盒盖里侧那只翘边的鲸鱼，证明十二岁的我说过话、拉过钩、把朋友认真安排进过一只铁皮盒里。

新同桌后来还是看见了。那天借橡皮，她掀开盒盖，咦了一声：贴纸？我说是，一只鲸鱼。她问谁的。我说，一个朋友的，我们一人一只，她的在城西。她哦了一声，没再追问，把橡皮还给我，动作比平时轻。第二天她没再提盒子旧不旧的事，反而把她自己的笔袋挪到桌子中间那条缝上，说放这儿稳当。我心里动了一下，没说话。

放学我又给城西发了一条消息：鲸鱼今天被新同桌看见了。她回得很快：它认识新朋友了。我盯着这行字笑了，笑完把盒盖合上。铁皮盒里的蓝又淡了一点，鲸鱼还在。旧友情靠新记忆养着，反而活得比从前好。

Why Is Your Case So Old, Asks My New Deskmate

My new deskmate stared at my pencil case for three days. On the fourth she finally spoke: why is this case so old? The blue tin is worn to silver at the edges. The answer came to my lips and then turned: old ones fit the hand. She wanted to ask more, but the bell rang. She does not know that a whale still lives inside the lid.

The whale was a sticker from my deskmate Lin Xiaoman, a birthday gift in sixth grade. One small sheet, seven or eight little whales, she said it was the present. I thought it too small and sulked for half a minute. She did not argue; she stuck one inside her own case lid, and I went home and stuck one inside mine, tail up, identical. The next day we set the cases side by side and hooked little fingers: even at different middle schools, no changing them, or the whales lose their home. The kid in front laughed at us; we shifted the cases another half inch toward the middle. That half inch was the most serious move of my entire primary school.

Then she went west and I came to this school in the east. In two years we met fewer times than one hand can count. The year we wrote letters, she replied: the whale is here, the case is old, do not be ashamed of yours. Later even messages thinned out, each schedule filled by a new school. Sometimes I wondered if I was the only one who took the promise seriously. But I never changed my case. Not out of thrift, out of fear. Change it and I lose the evidence, and the evidence is that curled-edge whale inside the lid, proof that twelve-year-old me spoke, made a pact, and housed a friend carefully inside a tin box.

The new deskmate saw it after all. Borrowing an eraser that day, she flipped the lid open and said: a sticker? Yes, I said, a whale. Whose, she asked. A friend's, I said, one each; hers is in the west of the city. She said oh, asked nothing further, and returned the eraser more gently than usual. The next day she never mentioned the old case again. Instead she moved her own pen bag onto the seam in the middle of the desk, saying it sits steady there. Something moved in me. I said nothing.

After school I sent a message west: my new deskmate saw the whale today. She replied fast: it has made a new friend. I stared at that line and laughed, then closed the lid. The blue inside the tin has faded a little more; the whale is still there. An old friendship fed by new memories, it turns out, lives better than before.