

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.