

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.