

## 货架前的四十分钟

开学前一周，女儿说她的文具盒拉链坏了，要挑个新的。我以为这是趟快差：进店，拿一个，付钱，走人。结果文具店的货架前，我们站了四十分钟。

货架分三层。上层是带密码锁的、会发光的、印着卡通人物的，标价三四十。中层是硬壳塑料的，十几块。下层是布面的，最朴素。女儿先在上层转，拿起一个带密码锁的，拧了两下，放回去；又拿起会发光的，按亮，在货架的白光里看了看，也放回去。她每个都拿，每个都放，动作不快，也不犹豫，像在完成一件正经事。

最后她从中层拿下一个蓝格子布盒，拉到下层跟前比，又回去比。她把三个候选摆在货架隔板上：密码锁的、硬壳的、蓝格子的。她先按了按硬壳的边，又拉开蓝盒的拉链，拉了三次，每次都听那个声音。我在旁边站得腿酸，说要不就硬壳那个，结实。她摇头，说那个太响，班里午休的时候一拉开，半个班都抬头。

她选了蓝格子。回家路上我还想不通：三十八块的密码锁不选，选十九块的布盒。她倒没什么解释，进门第一件事是把旧文具盒里的东西全倒出来，铅笔按长短排，橡皮归橡皮，尺子归尺子，一样一样放进新盒。蓝盒内层有个松紧带，她把铅笔一支一支插进去，插完用手掌压了压，像验收。摆完她把旧盒也留在桌上，说拉链坏了可以修，里面还能放发卡。

那晚我坐在她书桌边上，看那个蓝格子盒立在台灯下，拉链顺顺地闭着。我忽然明白她在那四十分钟里做的事：她不是在挑好看的，是在挑一个不会在午休时吵到别人的、铅笔有地方插的、旧盒子还能接着用的。她的标准悄悄换了一套，换的时候没通知我。货架前那四十分钟，她掂量的不是盒子，是我还没习惯的那个她。

## Forty Minutes in Front of the Shelf

A week before school, my daughter said her pencil case zipper was broken and she needed a new one. I thought it would be a quick errand: walk in, grab one, pay, leave. Instead, we stood forty minutes in front of the stationery store shelf.

The shelf had three tiers. The top held cases with combination locks, glowing ones, ones printed with cartoon characters, priced thirty or forty yuan. The middle tier had hard plastic shells, a dozen yuan. The bottom tier had cloth cases, the plainest. She circled the top first, picked up one with a lock, twisted it twice, put it back; picked up a glowing one, pressed it lit, studied it in the shelf's white light, put that back too. She took each one down and returned each one, not fast, not hesitant, like someone finishing a serious task.

In the end she took a blue plaid cloth case from the middle tier, carried it down to compare with the bottom tier, then went back to compare again. She lined three candidates on the shelf divider: the locked one, the hard shell, the blue plaid. She pressed the rim of the hard shell, then pulled the blue case's zipper three times,

listening to the sound each time. My legs ached from standing. I said, how about the hard shell, it's sturdy. She shook her head and said it is too loud; pull it open during lunch break and half the class looks up.

She chose the blue plaid. On the way home I still could not work it out: skip the thirty-eight-yuan locked case for a nineteen-yuan cloth one. She offered no explanation. The first thing after walking in the door was emptying the old case completely: pencils sorted by length, erasers with erasers, rulers with rulers, each item placed into the new case one by one. The blue case had an elastic band inside; she inserted the pencils one at a time, then pressed them down with her palm, like an inspection. Afterward she left the old case on the desk too, saying its zipper could be fixed and it could hold hair clips.

That evening I sat beside her desk, watching the blue plaid case stand under the lamp, its zipper closed neatly. It struck me what she had been doing in those forty minutes: not choosing the prettiest, but choosing one that would not disturb others at lunch, one where pencils have a place to go, one where the old case could still be used. Her standards had quietly changed sets, and she did not notify me when it happened. In those forty minutes before the shelf, what she weighed was not cases. It was the daughter I have not yet gotten used to.