

半块橡皮的急行军

期中考试数学卷，第三大题我算错了一整片，铅笔一划，卷子上黑压压一片。我伸手去文具盒摸橡皮，摸了个空，这才想起来，橡皮昨天落在书桌上，笔袋拉链拉得太快，它没挤进去。

监考老师从讲台走下来，过道里来回踱步。我把铅笔头在指头上转，手心全是汗。前桌的背、后桌的笔袋，都离我那么远，这时候开口借，声音再小也会整个教室听见。

同桌林小满看见了。他什么也没说，从文具盒里拿出他昨天刚拆封的新橡皮，白白的，还带着包装纸的压痕。他把橡皮按在桌缝中间，两只手一掰，咔哒一声，掰成两半，大的那半推到我卷子边上，小的那半自己留着。橡皮屑崩到他的袖口上，他吹了一下。

我擦完了整片错题，铃也响了。收卷之后我把那半块橡皮放在他桌上，说还你。他摇头，说本来就是掰给你用的，你要还，就还个别的。我们趴在桌上想，想出来一个约定：以后谁的文具缺了，不用开口，另一个人先递过去，递的人不许要回去，接的人也不许说谢谢，说谢谢就罚扫一次教室。他伸出小拇指，我也伸出小拇指，两个手指头在卷子堆上钩了一下。钩完他还在卷子上写了个日期，说哪天谁先违反约定，就按日期算账。我拿铅笔在我那半块橡皮背面也划了个杠，免得将来两块橡皮混在一个盒里说不清是谁的。

后来那只半块橡皮一直待在我文具盒最里面，边角用圆了，谁也没再动它。上学期林小满忘带尺子，我的尺子在他桌上，谁也没开口，也没人说谢谢。橡皮在两个文具盒之间走过一次，就再没回来过，可我觉得它哪儿也没去，就搁在我们桌子中间那条缝里。

The Quick March of Half an Eraser

During the midterm math exam, I got an entire section of problem three wrong. One sweep of the pencil turned my paper into a dark smudge. I reached into my pencil case for the eraser and found nothing, and only then remembered it sitting on my desk at home. The zipper had closed too fast and it had not squeezed in.

The proctor walked down from the platform and paced up and down the aisle. I spun the pencil tip on my finger, my palm all sweat. The desk in front, the pencil case behind, all too far away. At a moment like that, even a whisper of borrowing would carry across the whole classroom.

My deskmate Lin Xiaoman noticed. He said nothing, took out the new eraser he had unwrapped only yesterday, still white with the crease marks of its wrapper. He pressed it against the crack between our desks and snapped it in two with both hands. The bigger half slid to the edge of my paper; he kept the smaller one. Eraser crumbs landed on his cuff and he blew them off.

I finished erasing the whole wrong section just as the bell rang. After papers were collected, I put the half eraser on his desk and said, here you go back. He shook his head and said it was broken in half for you to use; if you want to return

something, return something else. We leaned on the desk and thought it up: a pact that from now on, if either of us is missing a supply, the other one passes it over first without being asked, the one who passes it may never ask for it back, and the one who receives may not say thank you, and whoever says thank you has to sweep the classroom once. He held out his little finger, I held out mine, and our two fingers hooked together over the stack of exam papers.

Afterward he wrote a date on his paper, saying whoever broke the pact first would be settled by that date. I scratched a line on the back of my half eraser with my pencil, so that if the two halves ever ended up in one case, we could still tell whose was whose.

The half eraser has been sitting at the back of my pencil case ever since, its corners worn round, and neither of us has used it again. Last term Lin Xiaoman forgot his ruler, and mine appeared on his desk without a word, and nobody said thank you. The eraser made one journey between two pencil cases and never came back, but I think it went nowhere at all. It just stays right there, in the crack between our two desks.