

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.

掰橡皮的那个人

考试考到一半，我听见旁边的动静。同桌把文具盒翻过来抖，铅笔、卷笔刀都掉出来，他就是找不着橡皮。我看见他把手伸到桌缝那边又收回来，嘴唇动了动，没出声。他昨天放学还跟我显摆，说他妈给他文具盒补了四块新橡皮，白的一摞。

我昨天刚拆封一块，最软的那种，擦字不伤卷子。我把它按在桌缝上，两手一掰。新橡皮脆，咔哒就开了，碎屑蹦出来。我把大半推过去，小声跟他说，快擦，别愣着。他擦错题的时候手还有点抖，擦完用铅笔尖把黑屑一点点扫到桌角，扫成一撮小丘。

收卷后他把那半块橡皮还我，放在我笔袋上，边角已经用秃了一点，他擦得太用力。我说你留着用，他说不行，借了就得还。我们俩为这半块橡皮僵了几秒钟，后来还是他先想出办法，说那你不收橡皮，收一个约定。他一条一条说：缺文具不许干着急，旁边的人先递；递出去的文具不许要回来；全程不许说谢谢，说了罚扫地。我听完笑了，说你这约定倒像班规。他伸出小拇指，我钩上去，钩得挺用力，像盖章。钩完他补了一句，说这约定不许告诉老师，告诉老师的也罚扫地。我说好，反正班规是老师定的，这条是我们俩定的，归我们俩管。

那块橡皮现在在他文具盒里，我的那半在我这儿，两块橡皮一边一半，凑不成一块了。上个星期我忘带卷笔刀，第二天我的桌上就多了一个卷笔刀，不知道谁放的，我也没问，问了就得说谢谢。前桌的圆规断过腿，后桌的荧光笔没水过，每次都是有人先递过去，谁也不吭声。我们这

一排桌子，橡皮从桌缝里走过去好几回，走的时候谁也没说谢谢，可我心里都记着，那种暖不是烫一下，是冬天手心里攥着一块化了一半的糖。

The One Who Broke the Eraser

Halfway through the exam I heard the fuss beside me. My deskmate turned his pencil case upside down and shook it; pens and a pencil sharpener fell out, but no eraser. I saw his hand reach toward the crack between the desks and pull back, his lips moving without a sound. Yesterday after school he had shown off to me, saying his mom had restocked his case with four new erasers, a white stack of them.

I had unwrapped one of mine just the day before, the softest kind, the kind that erases without tearing the paper. I pressed it into the crack between our desks and snapped it with both hands. New erasers are brittle; it broke with a click and crumbs jumped out. I pushed the bigger half over and whispered, hurry and erase, don't just sit there. His hand still trembled a little while he erased, and afterward he swept the dark crumbs to the corner of the desk with his pencil tip, building them into a tiny hill.

After the papers were collected he returned the half eraser, setting it on my pencil case. Its corner was already worn blunt from how hard he had rubbed. I told him to keep it. He said no, borrowed things get returned. We stalled over that half eraser for a few seconds, and in the end he thought of a way first: he would not take the eraser back, he would take a pact instead. He laid it out clause by clause: when someone is missing a supply, nobody just panics, the person nearby passes it first; a supply that has been passed over may never be asked back; and nobody says thank you during the whole process, and whoever does has to sweep the floor. I laughed and said his pact sounded like class rules. He held out his little finger, I hooked mine onto it, and we hooked hard, like stamping a seal.

After the hook he added one line: the pact must not be told to the teacher, and whoever tells the teacher also sweeps. I agreed. Class rules were the teacher's; this one was ours, and we would keep it ourselves.

His half of that eraser lives in his case now, and my half lives in mine; the two halves can never make one eraser again. Last week I forgot my pencil sharpener, and the next day a sharpener appeared on my desk. I never asked who left it, because asking would lead to thank you. The desk in front once had a compass with a broken leg, and the desk behind once had a highlighter that ran dry, and each time somebody passed a supply over first without a word. In our row of desks, erasers have crossed the cracks many times. Nobody said thank you when they crossed, but I remember every

one. That kind of warmth is not a burn; it is holding a half-melted candy in your palm on a winter day.

文具盒里传了一周的橡皮

那块4B橡皮是班级里最软的一块，先是在周明的文具盒里，那是他姐用剩的，边角已经圆了。星期一数学小测，周明前一晚把橡皮落在作业本上，卷子写错了一大片，他手伸到桌缝又缩回来。同桌赵一苇没等他开口，从自己盒里摸出橡皮递过去。周明用完还回去，赵一苇摆手，说下回你忘带东西，你也别张嘴，旁边的人先递。这是橡皮的第一条规矩。

星期二，橡皮到了前桌陈朵的盒里。陈朵的橡皮昨天借给走廊对面班同学，没还回来，她正对着英语卷子上的错词发愁。周明把那块圆角橡皮放到她桌上，放完就跑，像传递暗号。陈朵擦完错词，把橡皮放进自己文具盒最上层，说行，规矩我接着。这是第二条：递东西不许让人当面道谢，谢的人替全班擦一次黑板。

星期三轮到值日生马跃。他擦黑板时发现粉笔槽里卡着一截写反的粉笔，改不了，回座位就翻盒找橡皮。陈朵把橡皮从桌缝推过去，推得有点用力，橡皮滚到马跃笔袋底下。马跃捡起来，在橡皮侧面用铅笔刻了个小箭头，箭头指着陈朵的方向，说橡皮认路，谁递的就朝谁躺着。星期四，橡皮又滚回周明桌上，箭头朝外，谁也没说过谢谢，箭头替他们说了。

星期五班会，班主任发现讲台上多了一张纸条，是马跃写的：我们班这周借出去过一块橡皮、两把尺子、三支笔，没人说谢谢，也没人吵架。橡皮星期一在周明盒里，星期五在陈朵盒里，中间路过四个文具盒，每一站都添了一条规矩，规矩加起来就一句话：缺东西别慌，总有人先递。班会下课，那块橡皮躺在陈朵文具盒最上层，侧面的小箭头磨得快看不见了，可它指的方向，我们这一排每个人都认得。

The Eraser That Traveled for a Week

The 4B eraser was the softest in the class, and it started the week in Zhou Ming's pencil case, a leftover from his older sister, its corners already round. During Monday's math quiz, Zhou Ming had left the eraser on his homework notebook the night before, and a whole stretch of his paper went wrong. His hand reached toward the desk crack and shrank back. His deskmate Zhao Yiwei waited for no request; he fished an eraser out of his own case and passed it over. When Zhou Ming tried to return it, Zhao waved him off and said, next time you forget something, don't open your mouth either, the person beside you passes it first. That was the eraser's first rule.

On Tuesday the eraser reached the case of Chen Duo, the girl at the desk in front. Hers had been lent to a class across the hall yesterday and never came back, and she was staring at the wrong words on her English paper in despair. Zhou Ming set the round-cornered eraser on her desk and ran off, like passing along a secret code. After erasing, Chen Duo put the eraser on the top layer of her own case and said, fine, I'll carry the rule on. That was the second rule: whoever passes something over must not be thanked to their face, and whoever says thank you wipes the blackboard for the whole class once.

Wednesday it was the duty student Ma Yue's turn. While wiping the board he found a piece of chalk stuck in the tray writing backwards, unfixable, so he got back to his seat and rummaged for an eraser. Chen Duo pushed it through the desk crack, a little too hard, and it rolled under Ma Yue's pencil case. He picked it up and scratched a small arrow on its side with a pencil, pointing toward Chen Duo, saying the eraser knows the road and lies facing whoever passed it last. On Thursday the eraser rolled back to Zhou Ming's desk, arrow pointing out. Nobody had said thank you, and the arrow said it for them.

At Friday's class meeting, the teacher found a note on the podium, written by Ma Yue: this week our class lent out one eraser, two rulers, and three pens; nobody said thank you, and nobody quarreled. The eraser was in Zhou Ming's case on Monday and in Chen Duo's case on Friday, having passed through four pencil cases on the way, and each stop added one rule, which together came to a single sentence: when you are missing something, don't panic, someone will always pass it first. When the meeting ended, the eraser lay on the top layer of Chen Duo's case, the little arrow on its side worn nearly invisible, but everyone in our row still recognized the direction it pointed.