

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.