狐狸的九条尾巴少了一条

电影演到一半，我旁边的周小舟小声问我：那只狐狸为什么总是一个人坐着？我没答上来。银幕上那只狐狸有八条尾巴，别的狐狸都有九条。它到处找自己丢的那一条，翻石头，钻草丛，问路过的鸟。找了一整部电影，一条也没找回来。

最让我心里一动的是那个雨夜。一只小鹿的腿被石头缝卡住了，狐狸本来要赶路去找尾巴，它停了停，把自己的第八条尾巴伸过去，让小鹿咬着借力，把腿拔出来。尾巴上被咬掉一撮毛。狐狸舔了舔伤口，没吭声。后来雪停了，它回到老地方坐着，忽然发现第九条尾巴就在身后，短短的，新长的，像一小束火苗。它愣了很久，把尾巴绕到身前看了看，又放回身后。

看到这里我想起陈小禾。四年级上学期，她借我的橡皮擦错了字，把我那张写了一半的读书卡蹭花了。我生气，把她的借书证从她桌上推到桌下。她捡起来，从此两个星期不跟我说话。我们座位挨着，那十五天里我们没讲过一句话，各自跟别人说话时还故意大声。我表面没事，心里每天数日子，数到第十天我已经在草稿纸上写好了道歉的话，又揉掉了。

第十四天，她感冒请假没来。放学时她妈妈来还我的借书证，说陈小禾在家念叨我。第二天我把一颗橘子糖放在她桌角，没写字。她来了，拿起糖看了看，坐下，剥开吃了。她说：你的读书卡我赔你一张新的。我说：我那张本来也写歪了。

电影里狐狸找了一辈子没找回来的尾巴，是在它把尾巴借出去的那个晚上自己长回来的。我说不清这算不算道理。我只知道那天放学，我跟陈小禾一起走出校门，她的围巾拖在地上，我提醒她，她捡起来，两个人一路都在说话。

散场时周小舟又问我：狐狸为什么不着急？我说：它不是不着急，它是把手松开了。

The Fox With One Tail Less

Halfway through the film, Zhou Xiaozhou next to me whispered: why does that fox always sit alone? I could not answer. The fox on the screen has eight tails, while other foxes all have nine. It searches everywhere for the tail it lost, turning over stones, crawling through grass, asking passing birds. It searches the whole film and gets not one tail back.

What moved me most was the rainy night. A young deer had its leg wedged in a crack of rock. The fox was on its way to look for its tail, but it paused, reached out its eighth tail for the deer to bite and pull itself free, and the leg came out. A tuft of fur was bitten off the tail. The fox licked its wound and made no sound. Later, when the snow stopped, it returned to its old place to sit, and suddenly found the ninth tail behind it, short and newly grown, like a small bundle of flame. It stared for a long time, curled the tail around to look at it, then let it fall back behind.

Watching that, I thought of Chen Xiaohe. In the first term of fourth grade, she

used my eraser to rub out a wrong character and smeared my half-finished reading card. I got angry and pushed her library card off her desk onto the floor. She picked it up, and for two weeks she did not speak to me. Our seats touched, and in those fifteen days we exchanged not one word, speaking loudly to others on purpose. Outside I seemed fine; inside I counted the days. By the tenth day I had written an apology on scratch paper, then crumpled it up.

On the fourteenth day she was absent with a cold. At dismissal her mother came to return my library card, saying Chen Xiaohe kept talking about me at home. The next day I put a tangerine candy on the corner of her desk, with no note. She came, picked up the candy, looked at it, sat down, unwrapped it, and ate it. She said: I will replace your reading card with a new one. I said: mine was crooked anyway.

The tail the fox searched a lifetime and never got back grew back the night it lent a tail away. I cannot say whether that counts as a lesson. I only know that at dismissal that day, Chen Xiaohe and I walked out of the school gate together, her scarf dragging on the ground. I reminded her, she picked it up, and we talked the whole way.

As the hall emptied, Zhou Xiaozhou asked again: why was the fox not anxious? I said: it was not that it was not anxious. It was that it opened its hand.