同桌的素材本

阿哲坐我右边，初二开学第一堂作文课，他借我的开头抄。他的开头和我的开头一样，我的开头是我妈给我买的作文选上的。那段时间我们俩的作文像双胞胎，分数也双胞胎，都卡在四十二分上下。语文老师念过一句评语，我们俩共用：内容似曾相识。

十月，阿哲生日，他爸送他一台旧平板。他开始在午休看片子，二十分钟一部的那种短片，也有长的，他攒到周末看。奇怪的是他看完不聊剧情，他掏出一个绿皮本子写两行。我以为他在抄台词，凑过去看过一次，他写的不是台词，是画面：雨夜里车灯扫过水洼，水洼里的路灯碎了一下又圆回来。后面还有一行：像我把妈的搪瓷缸碰掉桌那回，她先捡缸，先没看我。

我问他写这个干什么。他说存着。他说他爸开货车，常年不在，他以前最怕写家人，别人写妈妈织毛衣，他连这个都没得写。后来他看了一部讲司机的片子，片子里司机把女儿学校的门牌号写在方向盘边上。他说那天他把他爸方向盘边上的门牌号记进了本子，记完他坐在那儿半天没说话。从那以后他的本子越写越厚，电影那一栏和他自家那一栏并排，像两列小火车。

十一月那次大作文，题目是《背影》。交上去，第二天语文课老师把阿哲的作文当堂念了。念到他爸卸货，把篷布一角掖进绳缝，掖了三回，第三回用手掌拍了拍篷布，像拍一个睡着的人。全班安静。老师念完说，这一拍，没在课本里，也没在作文选里。阿哲耳朵红了，趴在桌上假装找橡皮。我瞥见他绿皮本摊开在桌肚里，那一页旁边写着新的一条：老师念我作文的时候，我右边这位在偷看我。

十二月月考，他的作文分我瞄到了卷首，五十一。他拿本子换我的物理笔记，换的时候说，其实电影没教我什么，它只是让我知道，原来一个拍篷布的动作值得记。记熟了，考场上自己会走出来。我想了想，也买了个本子，绿的没有，买了个蓝的。第一页我写了我看过的一部片子，讲邮差的，邮差把信塞进门缝，门缝里伸出一只手按住了信。我在那行后面加了自己的：像我把成绩单递给我爸，他按住没说话的那三秒。

现在我和阿哲的素材本都攒了小半本。我们有个约定，互相不许看，考场上见。上回交换物理笔记，他在我本子扉页写了一行：你的电影存货快赶上我了。我回了一行：你的方向盘门牌号，我到现在还记得。作文这件事，我们俩都不再抄了。四十二分的双胞胎，各自走散了。

The Material Notebook Beside Me

Azhe sits to my right. In the first composition class of Junior Two he borrowed my opening to copy. His opening was mine, and mine came from the anthology my mother bought. For a while our compositions were twins, and so were our scores, both stuck around forty-two. Our Chinese teacher once read one comment that we shared: the content looks vaguely familiar.

In October, on the birthday of Azhe, his father gave him an old tablet. He started watching films at lunch break, the twenty-minute shorts, and saving the long ones for weekends. Strangely, he never discussed the plot afterward. He took out a

green-covered notebook and wrote two lines. I thought he was copying dialogue. I leaned over once and saw he was writing images: headlights sweeping a puddle on a rainy night, the streetlamp in the puddle shattering once and rounding back whole. Below it another line: like the time I knocked the enamel mug of my mother off the table, and she picked up the mug first, and did not look at me first.

I asked him what he wrote it for. He said, saving. His father drives a long-haul truck and is gone for months, and he used to dread writing about family. Others wrote about mothers knitting sweaters; he did not even have that. Then he watched a film about a truck driver who wrote the school number of his daughter on the edge of his steering wheel. He said that day he copied the number of his own father on the steering wheel into the notebook, and after writing it sat there a long time without a word. His notebook grew thicker, the film column and the home column side by side like two lines of little trains.

For the big November exam composition, the topic was The Back View. It was handed in, and the next Chinese class the teacher read the essay of Azhe aloud. He wrote how his father unloaded cargo and tucked a corner of the tarp into the rope groove, tucked it three times, and on the third time patted the tarp with his palm, like patting someone asleep. The class went silent. The teacher finished and said: that pat is not in any textbook or anthology. The ears of Azhe went red; he bent over pretending to hunt for an eraser. I glimpsed his green notebook open in the desk cubby, and on that page a new line: while the teacher read my essay, the one on my right was stealing looks at me.

December monthly exam, I caught his composition score at the top of the paper: fifty-one. He traded his notebook for my physics notes, saying, films never really taught me anything. They only showed me that a single pat on a tarp is worth writing down. Write enough of them, and on exam day they walk out by themselves. I thought about it and bought a notebook too. They were out of green, so I bought blue. On the first page I wrote a film about a postman who slides a letter under a door and a hand reaches out from the crack to hold the letter down. After that line I added my own: like the three seconds my father held my report card without speaking.

Now Azhe and I each have nearly full material notebooks. We have a pact: no peeking at each other, meet on the exam paper. Last time we swapped physics notes, he wrote a line on my title page: your film stock is catching up with mine. I wrote back: your number on the steering wheel, I still remember it to this day. Neither of us copies compositions anymore. The twins of forty-two points have each walked off in their own direction.