一张纸托起了十二个砝码

十月二十一日 星期二 晴

今天的科学课一开始就不一样。上课铃刚响，王老师抱着一只大纸箱走进来，说每人先别动，材料按小组发。我们四人组依次领到：一张A4纸、四个一样的纸杯、一小盒砝码。王老师在黑板上写下任务：只用这张纸和四个杯子搭一座桥，桥面不能碰桌子，看谁的桥托得住最多的砝码。全班嗡的一声，有人说一张纸能托什么呀，纸那么软。

我们组先吵了一小架。李想说要直接把纸架在杯子上，我觉得那样一放就塌。组长周舟说别争了，一人试一种。李想先试，纸平铺在两个杯子上，第一个砝码放上去，桥就弯了，第二个放上去，纸滑下杯子，掉在桌上。我们笑了一下，不是笑他，是那个掉下来的声音太干脆了。

轮到我。我把纸对折了一次再架上去，撑到第三个砝码，纸从折痕那里对折塌下去。周舟拿出他的办法，把纸折成波浪形，一道一道像手风琴的风箱，架上去以后，第五个砝码没塌，第六个也没塌。我们四个脑袋全凑过去，屏着气。第七个，桥身抖了一下，坐在最边上的陈晨伸手想扶，被周舟一把拉住：别碰！陈晨的手停在半空，半天没放下来。

第八、第九、第十个，桥还在。我们组的声音开始压不住，旁边组回头看我们。第十一个放上去，纸的边缘已经陷下去了，我盯着那道波浪，心里数数。第十二个，我手抖着放上去，桥晃了两下，稳住了。十二个！我们四个先后跳起来，在桌子中间击了一串掌，手都拍红了也不觉得疼。

最后全班测下来，我们组的十二个排第二，第一名那组把纸折成了空心管子，托了十五个。王老师让我们两组上台讲为什么，周舟讲波浪，那组讲管子。我忽然明白纸还是那张纸，软不软是形状说了算。

放学路上我一直在想那半秒钟：陈晨的手停在半空，谁都没碰桥，桥却撑住了十二个砝码。一个人做的时候我早就去扶了，是四个人一起，才忍住了那只手。

One Sheet of Paper Held Twelve Weights

Tuesday, October 21. Sunny.

Today's science class felt different from the first minute. Right after the bell, Mr. Wang walked in carrying a big cardboard box and told us nobody move yet, materials would be handed out by group. Our group of four received, one by one: one sheet of A4 paper, four identical paper cups, and a small box of weights. He wrote the task on the blackboard: build a bridge using only this paper and these cups, the bridge deck may not touch the desk, and see whose bridge can hold the most weights. The whole class buzzed. Someone said, what can one sheet of paper hold? Paper is so soft.

Our group argued a little first. Li Xiang said just lay the paper flat across the

cups. I said that would collapse the moment we placed anything. Our group leader Zhou Zhou said stop arguing, each of us tries one way. Li Xiang went first: paper flat on two cups, the first weight bent the bridge, the second made the paper slide off the cups and fall on the desk with a crisp sound. We laughed, not at him, but because that falling sound was so final.

Then it was my turn. I folded the paper once and laid it up; it held three weights before it collapsed along the crease. Zhou Zhou brought out his idea: he folded the paper into waves, pleat after pleat like the bellows of an accordion. Once it was on the cups, the fifth weight did not break it, nor the sixth. All four of our heads leaned in, holding our breath. At the seventh, the bridge trembled, and Chen Chen, sitting at the edge, reached out to steady it. Zhou Zhou grabbed his arm: Do not touch! Chen Chen's hand hung in midair and did not come down for a long moment.

Eighth, ninth, tenth, and the bridge still stood. Our voices started bubbling over, and neighboring groups turned to look. With the eleventh weight, the paper's edges were already sinking, and I stared at the wave line, counting in my head. The twelfth I placed with shaking fingers. The bridge swayed twice, then settled. Twelve! The four of us jumped up one after another and clapped a chain of high-fives across the table. Our palms were red and it did not even hurt.

In the end, our twelve weights ranked second in the class. The winning group had folded their paper into a hollow tube and held fifteen. Mr. Wang asked both groups to come up and explain why. Zhou Zhou explained waves; they explained tubes. It hit me then: the paper was still that same paper. Whether it is soft or strong is decided by its shape.

On the way home I kept returning to that half second: Chen Chen's hand frozen in midair, nobody touching the bridge, and the bridge holding twelve weights anyway. If I had been alone, I would have steadied it. It took four people together to hold that hand back.