桥塌了以后，我们才学会搭桥

那座桥塌掉的声音，我到现在都记得。不是轰的一声，是很轻的咔一下，像折断一根干树枝。桥面从中间凹下去，两个钩码咕咚掉进下面的纸箱，我们小组四个人围着桌子，谁都没说话。科技节初赛就在隔壁班，我们的桥连门槛都没过。

评委老师把桥递还给我们，说：拿回去看看吧。我们把塌桥摊在教室后墙的桌子上，用胶带把断开的地方虚虚粘住，像给它包扎。组长林一鸣拿铅笔在断口周围画圈：桥面是从这里折的。副组长周蕊把剩下的纸桥残片翻过来看：你们发现没有，我们的桥面就是一张平纸。

那天放学，我们四个没走，留在教室里翻科学书。书里讲拱形和三角形能分散重量。周蕊捡了张纸，两边按在桌上，中间一压就塌；又把同一张纸折出波浪形的褶，再压，中间鼓起来，压不弯了。她喊我们看：折过的纸，力气被分给了每一道褶。林一鸣一拍桌子：我们的桥缺的就是这个。

第二周我们重新搭。桥面换成折了七道褶的纸，桥墩之间加了六个三角形支架，是用硬纸条粘的，粘歪了三次，拆了重粘两次。我负责按住纸条等胶干，手指被胶沾住好几回，撕皮都撕不下来。周五放学前，新桥搭好了，丑得很，到处是胶水和褶子，像一座补丁桥。

我们把它架在两摞书中间，开始放钩码。一个，两个，五个，桥面纹丝不动。放到十二个，桥身开始有一点点下沉，我们屏住呼吸继续放。十九个。桥面凹成一张吊床，但它没塌。教室里爆出一阵乱叫，隔壁组的人跑过来看，问你们怎么做的。我们说了褶子，说了三角形，说得七零八落，因为那里面每一句话都是拿塌掉的那座桥换的。

后来我把那座塌桥的断片夹进了科学笔记本，断口上还有林一鸣画的铅笔圈。每次翻到那一页，我就想起塌掉当天的沉默，也想起留下来的四个傍晚。比赛我们没得名次，奖状一张没有，可我学到的东西全在塌掉以后：先别急着难过，先把塌的地方看清楚，它比赢的那一下诚实得多。

上个月班里布置教室，需要搭个纸架子放作业本。没人指挥，我们四个很自然地分了工：折褶的折褶，粘三角支架的粘支架。架子放满作业本，站得稳稳的。周蕊拍拍手上的胶说：这都得感谢那座塌了的桥。我们都笑了。塌过一次的小组，搭第二次的时候，手是稳的。

After the Bridge Collapsed, We Learned How to Build One

I still remember the sound our bridge made when it collapsed. Not a crash, but a light click, like snapping a dry twig. The deck sagged in the middle, two weights plopped into the cardboard box below, and the four of us in our group stood around the table saying nothing. The science festival preliminaries were in the next classroom over. Our bridge never even crossed the threshold.

The judge handed the bridge back and said: take it home and look at it. We spread the broken bridge on the table at the back of the classroom and loosely taped the snapped places, like bandaging a wound. Our group leader Lin Yiming circled the break with a pencil: the deck folded right here. Zhou Rui, our deputy, flipped the

fragments over: did you notice? Our deck was just one flat sheet of paper.

That day after school, the four of us stayed and paged through the science textbook. It said arches and triangles spread weight. Zhou Rui took a sheet of paper, pressed its ends on the desk, and it collapsed under a push in the middle; then she folded the same sheet into wavy pleats and pushed again. The middle domed up and would not bend. She called us to look: a folded sheet shares the force among all its pleats. Lin Yiming slapped the desk: that is exactly what our bridge was missing.

The next week we rebuilt. The deck became paper folded with seven pleats; between the piers we added six triangular braces cut from stiff card, glued crooked three times, taken apart and reglued twice. My job was holding the strips while the glue dried. My fingers got stuck to the glue again and again; I peeled off skin to free them. Before school ended on Friday, the new bridge was done. It was ugly, covered with glue and pleats, like a patched-up bridge.

We set it across two stacks of books and started adding weights. One, two, five. The deck did not move. At twelve, the body began to sink a little; we held our breath and kept adding. Nineteen. The deck sagged into a hammock, but it did not fall. The classroom erupted with shouting. Kids from the next group ran over and asked how we did it. We talked about pleats and triangles, all jumbled, because every sentence in there was paid for with the bridge that had collapsed.

Later I pressed the broken piece of the first bridge into my science notebook, Lin Yiming's pencil circle still on the break. Every time I turn to that page, I remember the silence on the day it fell, and the four evenings we stayed. We won no prize, not one certificate, yet everything I learned came after the collapse: do not rush to feel bad; first look closely at where it broke. That place is far more honest than the moment of winning.

Last month our class was decorating the room and needed a paper rack for homework books. Nobody gave orders. The four of us split the work naturally: some folded pleats, some glued triangular braces. The rack stood firm under a full stack of books. Zhou Rui clapped the glue off her hands and said: we have that collapsed bridge to thank for this. We all laughed. A group that has collapsed once builds the second time with steady hands.

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