

第三排的听写本：红笔用完那天

周三下午，林老师在办公室批改第三排的听写本。第三排是班里最容易写错的一排，因为靠窗，风一吹孩子就分心。这一摞有十一本，改到第九本，红笔在最后一个字上拐了个弯，不出水。

林老师甩了两下笔，在草稿纸上画圈，越画越淡。换一支红笔，写两个字，也断了。拧开笔杆，笔芯是空的，捏扁了扔进笔筒。拉开抽屉翻，一支蓝笔躺在角落。林老师拿起蓝笔接着改，改完两本，笔停住了。学生写的是黑笔，批注是蓝笔，两种蓝黑挤在一页上，错字圈都看不清。林老师把那两本抽出来，压在桌子左边。

放学铃响，林老师锁了办公室，走到校门口的红庙小卖部，问有没有0.5的红笔芯。阿姨从铁盒里摸出一板，五支，两块五。林老师挑了一支捏了捏，又挑了一支，一共买了四支。

回到办公室，天已经黑了。林老师拆了笔芯装上，先把那两本蓝笔批过的翻开，用红笔把错字重新圈了一遍，蓝笔圈的地方不擦，只在上头再描一个红圈。改完十一本，笔尖在纸上沙沙响到七点半。最后林老师做了一件以前没做过的事：在每本听写本的最后一页，全对的画一个红对勾，有错别字的画半个对勾，错三个以上的不画。

周四发本子，第三排的李小满翻到最后一页看见对勾，举起来给同桌看。一上午，全班都知道了翻到最后一页的习惯。有人问林老师那个勾是什么意思，林老师说，就是红笔想说的话。周五开始，交听写本之前，孩子们都会先把最后一页翻出来看一眼，再合上交上去，好像那样本子更整齐。

那支用完的红笔芯扔在笔筒里，被一个值日的孩子看见，问老师怎么不扔。林老师说，留着，提醒我笔会没的。后来很多年，第三排的孩子长大了，听写这个词都不常用了，但有人收拾旧书包翻出过那本听写本，最后一页上那个红对勾还没褪干净。

The Dictation Books of the Third Row: The Day the Red Pen Ran Out

On Wednesday afternoon, Teacher Lin was in the office grading the dictation books of the third row. The third row was the class's most mistake-prone row because it sat by the window, and children drifted whenever the wind blew. The stack had eleven books. On the ninth, the red pen turned a corner on the last character and stopped giving ink.

Teacher Lin shook the pen twice and drew circles on scratch paper, each fainter than the last. He switched to another red pen; two characters in, that one died too. He unscrewed the barrel: the refill was empty, squeezed flat. He tossed it into the pen holder, dug through the drawer, and found a blue pen lying in the corner. He took up the blue pen and kept grading. After two books, the pen stopped. The students wrote in black, the marks were in blue, and the two shades crowded one page until the circles around wrong characters were hard to see. Teacher Lin pulled those two books

out and set them on the left side of the desk.

The dismissal bell rang. Teacher Lin locked the office and walked to the little shop by the school gate, asking whether they had 0.5 red refills. The shop auntie fished a strip of five out of a tin can, two yuan fifty. Teacher Lin squeezed one, picked another, and bought four in all.

Back in the office, it was already dark. He fitted a new refill, reopened the two blue-graded books, and re-circled every wrong character in red — he did not erase the blue circles, only traced a red one over each. The nib hissed on paper until half past seven, and all eleven books were done. Then he did something he had never done before: on the last page of each dictation book, he drew a red check for perfect work, half a check for one or two mistakes, and nothing for three or more.

Books came back on Thursday. Li Xiaoman of the third row turned to the last page, saw the check, and held it up for the deskmate. By noon the whole class knew the habit of turning to the last page. Someone asked Teacher Lin what the check meant. He said it was just what the red pen wanted to say. From Friday on, before handing in a dictation book, the children flipped out the last page, took one look, closed it, and then turned it in, as if that made the book neater.

The empty red refill stayed in the pen holder. A child on duty saw it and asked why the teacher did not throw it away. Teacher Lin said: keeping it, to remind me that pens run out. Years later, the children of the third row had grown up and barely used the word dictation, but someone cleaning out an old schoolbag found that notebook, and the red check on its last page had not quite faded.