

文具盒里的深夜争吵

夜深了，我睡不着，把耳朵贴在书桌上的文具盒边，听见里面闹哄哄地在争吵。我没开灯，假装睡着，竖起耳朵听。

是铅笔的声音，又响又得意：「这个家里数我最重要。你们看作业本，老师画了多少个红钩，封面还贴了一朵大红花，那全是我一笔一笔写出来的。没有我，本子就跟空房间一样，一个字也没有。」

橡皮一听就不服了，腾地跳起来：「你别吹牛了！昨天那道应用题，你把加号看成了减号，错了一整行，是谁扑上去把它擦干净的？是我！你看看我的脸都瘦了一圈，还让铅笔灰蹭得漆黑。功劳全归你，脏活儿全归我？」

铅笔嗓门更高：「没有我写，要你这个只会擦的干什么？」橡皮气得滚到了文具盒底下，撞到了尺子。尺子打了个哈欠，刚想说句什么，谁也没理她。

两个越吵越响，文具盒忍不住了，清了清嗓子开口：「行了行了，都别吵。没有铅笔，本子确实写不出字；没有橡皮，写错的字就永远留在纸上。可是没有尺子，明天数学课画线段的垂线，你们谁来画直？」文具盒的声音不大，大家一下子都不吭声了。

过了一会儿，尺子小声补了一句：「其实铅笔靠我画线的时候，自己也会画歪，是我替他扶稳的。」铅笔低头想了想，没有顶嘴。

第二天数学课学画长方形，我拿出铅笔和尺子。尺子平平地趴在纸上，铅笔挨着他的边慢慢滑，两条线画得又平又直；不小心多画了一笔，橡皮立刻扑上去擦得干干净净，纸面一点也没弄脏。老师走过来，夸我图画得工整。

晚上回到家，我打开文具盒，觉得这里面的每一位都站得更直了。橡皮的脸还是黑的，铅笔的头削得尖尖的，尺子的边还是直直的。打那以后，我再也没听见他们吵过——谁都有自己的本事，用不着争谁最要紧。

The Late-Night Quarrel in the Pencil Case

Late at night, I could not sleep. I pressed my ear against the pencil case on my desk and heard a noisy quarrel inside. I did not turn on the light. I pretended to be asleep and listened.

It was the pencil, loud and smug: "I am the most important one in this house. Look at the homework notebook. The teacher drew so many red check marks, and there is a big red flower on the cover. Every line of it came from my hand. Without me, the notebook would be as empty as an empty room."

The eraser jumped up at once, not agreeing at all: "Stop bragging! Yesterday in

that word problem, you read a plus sign as a minus sign and got a whole line wrong. Who jumped in and cleaned it up? Me! Look, my face has grown a whole ring thinner, and pencil dust has made it black as soot. You keep all the credit, and I get all the dirty work?"

The pencil raised his voice higher: "If I do not write, what is a mere eraser good for?" The eraser, furious, rolled to the bottom of the case and bumped into the ruler. The ruler yawned and started to say something, but nobody paid attention to her.

The two grew louder and louder, until the pencil case could not stand it anymore. He cleared his throat: "Enough, both of you. Without the pencil, the notebook stays blank. Without the eraser, wrong characters stay on the paper forever. But without the ruler, who will draw a straight perpendicular line in tomorrow's math class?" His voice was not loud, and suddenly everyone went quiet.

After a while the ruler added softly: "Actually, when the pencil leans on me to draw lines, he still wobbles. I am the one who holds him steady." The pencil hung his head and did not talk back.

Next day in math class we learned to draw rectangles. I took out the pencil and the ruler. The ruler lay flat on the paper, the pencil slid slowly along his edge, and the two lines came out even and straight. When I drew one stroke too many, the eraser jumped in and cleaned it off without smudging the page. The teacher walked by and praised my drawing for being neat.

That evening I opened the pencil case at home, and it seemed to me that every one inside was standing straighter than before. The eraser's face was still black, the pencil's tip was sharpened to a point, and the ruler's edge was still perfectly straight. From then on I never heard them quarrel again. Each of them has his own talent, and there is no need to argue about who matters most.

午睡时的三种声音

中午我趴在桌上午睡，迷迷糊糊听见有人喊开会。睁眼一看，文具盒盖大开，里面的文具围成一圈，铅笔站在最中间，像举着手发言一样。

今天居然是尺子先开的口。他平着嗓子说：「开会就说正事。这个家里只有我能画直线，线段、垂线、长方形，哪样离得开我？弯弯曲曲的活儿我不干，直的活儿谁也干不过我。所以最有用的是我。」

铅笔一听就不乐意了，蹦到作业本上，哗啦一页一页翻给大家看：「这一整本，从生字到算

术，全是我写的。作文本上的方格，是我一个字一个字填满的。你尺子写过一个字吗？一个也没有。」

橡皮没有跳，也没有喊。她慢慢挪到灯光底下，把自己亮出来。原来她原先是个方方的白胖子，现在只剩下薄薄的一片，四个角全磨圆了，脸也灰扑扑的。她小声说：「我不争。我就是想说，铅笔写错的那些字，每一个都是我用身子换掉的。我短了这么多，没人看见过。」

文具盒一直坐在最底下当主席，这时拍了拍盒盖：「都别争嘴上的胜负。咱们各干一件事，干完再说。铅笔写一行字，尺子画一个长方形，橡皮把写错的地方擦干净。少一样，这个活儿就完不成。」

铅笔写了一行字，有两个错了；尺子接过笔靠着他画，长方形四个角方方正正；橡皮凑上去，把错字擦得干干净净，连铅笔灰都拢成一条小堆，我一吹就吹掉了。三样东西干完，谁也没提谁最有用。

会议开到这儿就散了。文具一个一个跳回盒里，尺子躺在最底下，铅笔挨着他，橡皮缩在角落。文具盒盖轻轻合上，像打了个哈欠。

我醒了，嘴角还挂着口水印，作业本摊在面前，那行字整整齐齐。我揉了揉眼睛，把文具盒摆正。梦里的事我记着：一个本子上的干净整齐，是三种声音合起来才有的。

Three Voices During the Nap

At noon I put my head down on the desk and dozed off. Through the fog of sleep I heard someone call a meeting. I opened my eyes to find the pencil case wide open, its contents standing in a circle, with the pencil in the middle as if his hand were raised.

Surprisingly it was the ruler who spoke first. In his flat, level voice he said: "Let us get to business. I am the only one in this house who can draw a straight line. Segments, perpendiculars, rectangles - none can do without me. Crooked work is not my job, and at straight work nobody beats me. So the most useful one is me."

The pencil was not pleased at that. He leapt onto the homework notebook and flipped page after page for everyone to see: "This whole book, from new characters to arithmetic, is written by me. Every square in the composition book is filled one character at a time by me. Have you, ruler, ever written a single character? Not one."

The eraser did not jump and did not shout. She slowly moved into the light and showed herself. Once she had been a square, plump, white fellow; now only a thin slice was left, all four corners worn round, her face gray with dust. She said quietly: "I am not fighting for the title. I only want to say that every wrong

character the pencil wrote, I traded my own body to remove. I have grown this much shorter, and nobody ever noticed.”

The pencil case had been sitting at the bottom acting as chairman. Now he tapped the lid: “No more arguing with words. Each of us will do one thing, and then we talk. Pencil, write a line of characters. Ruler, draw a rectangle. Eraser, clean up the mistakes. Leave out any one of us, and the job cannot be finished.”

The pencil wrote a line, and two characters were wrong. The ruler took the pen leaning against him and drew a rectangle with four square corners. The eraser hurried over and wiped the mistakes spotless, gathering even the pencil dust into a little ridge that I could blow away with one breath. When the three finished, nobody mentioned who was the most useful.

The meeting broke up right there. One by one the stationery jumped back into the case: the ruler lay at the bottom, the pencil next to him, the eraser tucked in the corner. The lid closed gently, like a yawn.

I woke up with a drool mark at the corner of my mouth, the homework notebook open in front of me, that line of characters neat and tidy. I rubbed my eyes and straightened the pencil case. I remember what happened in the dream: the cleanliness and order on one notebook came from three voices joined together.

只用铅笔的一天

那天晚上写作业，文具盒里忽然传来争吵声。铅笔说他是家里最有用的，橡皮不服气，尺子也不答应，三个你一句我一句，吵得我笔都握不稳。

我气坏了，把文具盒往桌上一放，大声说：「都别吵了！既然你们都说自己最有用的，那我明天写作业只用铅笔，不用橡皮也不用尺子。谁最有本事，一天就见分晓。」文具盒里一下子安静了，我猜铅笔正在里面偷着乐。

第二天放学，我果然只留铅笔在笔袋里。先写生字，一切顺利，铅笔在田字格里站得稳稳的。我心里想，看见了吧，铅笔就是最有用的。

坏事儿在数学课。一道竖式，我把七十看成了十九，算完一整行才发现错了。要往常，橡皮早扑上去了。那天我只能拿铅笔在错的地方狠狠划，划了一道又一道，纸背都划起了毛，那一块黑成一团，像让墨汁泼过。我越划越急，越急越黑，后桌的同学探头看了一眼，说我这题像一窝蚂蚁在打架。

更糟的是画线段。老师要求用尺子，我举着铅笔悬在半空描，线抖得像毛毛虫。连线的题，我把第一行连到了第三行，眼睛盯着线，手却不听话。那天的作业本，是我上学以来最脏的一本。

晚上我把本子摊在文具盒前面，一句话没说。铅笔先开了口，声音低低的：「原来离开橡皮，错字就没办法了。」橡皮说：「离开你，我连可擦的东西都没有。」尺子没说话，只是把身子在桌上贴平，像在示意什么。

我把橡皮和尺子请回笔袋，从此再没做过只用一样文具的试验。文具盒里也再没吵过。有一回妈妈问我，你们文具盒里谁最有用？我想了半天，说：一起写作业的时候，都有用；分开，一个也不顶用。

The Day I Used Only a Pencil

That evening while I was doing homework, a quarrel suddenly rose from inside the pencil case. The pencil said he was the most useful in the house, the eraser refused to agree, and the ruler objected too. They threw sentence after sentence at each other until my hand could not even hold the pen steady.

I got fed up, slammed the case onto the desk and announced loudly: "Stop arguing! Since every one of you claims to be the most useful, tomorrow I will do my homework with the pencil only - no eraser, no ruler. One day will show who really has the talent." The case went silent at once. I guessed the pencil was secretly rejoicing inside.

After school the next day I really kept only the pencil in my pouch. First came the new characters. Everything went smoothly; the pencil stood firm inside the grid squares. I thought to myself: see, the pencil really is the most useful.

The trouble came at math class. In a column calculation I read seventy as nineteen and only noticed after finishing the whole line. Normally the eraser would have pounced at once. That day I could only slash at the mistake with the pencil, one stroke over another, until the back of the paper fuzzed up and the whole patch turned into a black mess, as if ink had been splashed on it. The more flustered I got, the harder I slashed; the harder I slashed, the blacker it grew. The classmate behind me peeked and said my problem looked like a nest of ants fighting.

Drawing segments was worse. The teacher required a ruler. I held the pencil in mid-air and traced, and the line trembled like a caterpillar. In the matching exercise I joined the first row to the third: my eyes watched the line while my hand refused to obey. That day's notebook was the dirtiest one since I started school.

At night I spread the notebook open in front of the pencil case and said nothing. The pencil spoke first, his voice low: "So without the eraser, a wrong character has no remedy." The eraser said: "And without you, I would have nothing to erase at all." The ruler said nothing; she only laid her body flat on the desk, as if pointing at

something.

I invited the eraser and the ruler back into the pouch, and I never ran the one-tool experiment again. The pencil case never quarreled either. Once my mother asked me: in your pencil case, who is the most useful? I thought for a long time and answered: when they do homework together, all of them are useful; taken apart, not one of them is any good.