

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.