

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.