

笔袋里的三个隔层

儿子把文具盒往桌上一倒，笔、尺子、橡皮、攥扁的面包袋，还有一把不知道什么时候混进去的小钥匙，全堆在台灯底下。我蹲下去捡，先挑能用的：两支还能出水的笔，一把缺了角的直尺，半块橡皮。剩下的归到一边：断芯的自动铅笔，写干的荧光笔，一张揉成一团的纸条。

我问儿子，文具盒天天用，怎么从来不整理。他说乱塞只要三秒钟，找东西才要翻三分钟。上周考试，他就是为找圆规迟到了两分钟。

第二天我买了个带隔层的笔袋，教他把笔放一层，尺子和圆规放一层，橡皮和备用笔芯放进小袋。规则只有一条：每天睡前花一分钟，把跑错层的东西放回去。第一周我在手机上定了晚上九点五十的闹钟，闹钟一响，他就坐到台灯前摆弄那个笔袋。前三天都算认真，第四天作业多，他忘了，笔和尺子又混在一处。第五天没等他起身，他自己先想起来，把笔一根根插回笔槽。第六天没有提醒，他也整理了。第七天我故意不设闹钟，九点五十，他自己坐到台灯前，把笔袋从书包侧袋里抽出来。

我路过他房间，看见他把笔尖朝同一个方向摆好。他抬头跟我说，原来整理不烦，以前不肯整理，是怕一整理就要整理很久，分开来放其实很快。他说这话的时候，手里还捏着那半块橡皮，在桌角轻轻磕掉橡皮屑。那天以后，他书包侧袋里再没出现过攥扁的面包袋，那把混进来的小钥匙也回到了门边的挂钩上。有回他同学来家里写作业，翻他的笔袋找尺子，一拉开拉链，尺子就在第二层明明白白躺着，同学说你这笔袋比我的干净，他在旁边笑，没接话，把笔袋拉上又检查了一遍拉链。

现在那个笔袋还放在台灯旁边，他偶尔也会随手塞，但睡前把东西放回各自隔层，已经成了习惯，像刷牙一样不用人管。我不再检查，只是偶尔站在门口看他整理，笔尖朝同一个方向，这个动作他已经做得很熟了。

Three Compartments in the Pencil Case

My son turned his pencil case upside down on the desk, and pens, a ruler, an eraser, a squashed bread wrapper, and a small key that had slipped in at some point all piled up under the lamp. I squatted down to pick things up and sorted out what still worked: two pens that could still write, a ruler with a chipped corner, half an eraser. The rest went to one side: a mechanical pencil with a broken tip, a dried-out highlighter, a crumpled note.

I asked him how he could use the case every day and never tidy it. He said tossing things in takes three seconds, but hunting for something takes three minutes. Last week he was two minutes late for an exam because he could not find his compass.

The next day I bought a pencil case with compartments and taught him to put pens in one layer, rulers and compasses in another, and erasers and spare refills in the small pocket. The rule was simple: spend one minute before bed putting anything that

had wandered into the wrong layer back where it belonged. For the first week I set a phone alarm at twenty to ten each night, and when it rang he sat down at the lamp and worked on the case. The first three days went well. On the fourth day he had too much homework and forgot, and the pens and rulers ended up mixed together again. On the fifth day, before anyone reminded him, he remembered on his own and put each pen back into its slot. On the sixth day he tidied up without any reminder. On the seventh day I deliberately set no alarm, and at twenty to ten he sat down at the lamp and pulled the case out of the side pocket of his schoolbag.

Passing his room, I saw him lining up the pens with their tips facing the same way. He looked up and told me that tidying was not tedious after all; before, he had been afraid that one tidy-up would take forever, while putting things into separate places was actually quick. As he said this, he was still holding that half eraser, tapping the crumbs off it against the corner of the desk.

After that day, no squashed bread wrapper ever appeared in his schoolbag pocket again, and the small key that had wandered in went back to the hook by the door. Once a classmate came over to do homework and rummaged through his case for a ruler; the zipper opened and the ruler lay plainly in the second layer. The classmate said his case was cleaner than mine, and my son just smiled, did not answer, zipped the case up, and checked the zipper once more.

The case still sits beside his lamp. He sometimes still tosses things in carelessly, but putting everything back into its own compartment before bed has become a habit, as automatic as brushing his teeth. I no longer check. I sometimes stand in the doorway and watch him line the pens in one direction, a motion he has clearly done many times.