桑桑的火针

《草房子》是我们班读书月的时候读完的。说实话，刚拿到书我不太想读，封面上就是几间草房子，土土的。老师说要读完整本书写感受，我就一天十几页地赶。可是读到桑桑生病那章，我忽然不赶了，一页一页慢下来。

桑桑的脖子上长了一个包，医生说是很吓人的病，治的办法是火针，一根烧热的针，往那个包里扎。我读这一段的时候手心出汗。我妈在旁边削苹果，问我怎么了。我说，火针听起来太疼了。我妈说，那你也接着往下看呀。

接着往下看，我才发现桑桑真了不起。他坐在治疗床上，两只手把床沿攥得指节发白，可他没有哭喊。扎完了，他还问医生，下一次什么时候来。我举着书愣在那儿，脸有点热，因为我想起去年打针的事。

去年冬天我发烧，去社区医院打针。护士拿着针走过来，我一边哭一边扭，我妈两只手按住我的胳膊，按出红印子。护士说就疼一下，我哭的时间比打针的时间长多了。打完出来，我胳膊上还有我妈指甲掐的印。

桑桑面对的火针，比打针疼一百倍，他都知道疼，还是自己坐上去。那天晚上我把书翻回去，又读了一遍那一段。我想，勇敢的人原来不是不害怕的人，是害怕了还肯坐稳、不跑的人。

今年初夏我得了一次扁桃体炎，要打三天针。第一天我躺在治疗床上，学桑桑那样攥着床沿。护士说，今天没哭呀。我没说话，心里正想着桑桑坐在治疗床上的样子，想着他攥白的指节。

书的最后，桑桑的病好了，头发重新长了出来，黑黑的。我读到那一页笑出了声。同桌问我笑什么，我说，桑桑病好了。其实我不光是替桑桑高兴，也是替我自己高兴，替那个学会坐稳的我。

The Fire Needle of Sangsang

I finished Grass House during our class reading month. To be honest, when I first got the book I did not much want to read it. The cover showed nothing but a few thatched houses, plain and earthy. The teacher said we had to read the whole book and write our feelings, so I raced through a dozen pages a day. But when I reached the chapter where Sangsang falls ill, I stopped racing and slowed down page by page.

A lump grew on the neck of Sangsang, and the doctor said it was a frightening illness. The cure was a fire needle, a red-hot needle pushed into the lump. My palms sweated while I read that part. My mother was peeling an apple beside me and asked what was wrong. I said the fire needle sounded far too painful. She said, then keep reading and see.

Keeping on, I found Sangsang truly remarkable. He sat on the treatment bed, both

hands gripping its edge until his knuckles went white, yet he never cried out. When it was over, he even asked the doctor when the next session would come. I held the book up, stunned, my face warm, because I remembered my own injection last winter.

Last winter I had a fever and went to the community clinic for a shot. When the nurse walked over with the needle, I cried and twisted while my mother pinned my arms down with both hands, leaving red marks. The nurse said it would hurt only for a moment, but I cried far longer than the shot took. When we walked out, my arms still bore the marks of the fingernails of my mother.

The fire needle facing Sangsang was a hundred times more painful than a shot, and he knew it hurt, yet he climbed onto the bed himself. That night I turned back and read the passage again. I thought: brave people are not people who feel no fear; they are people who feel fear and still agree to sit steady and not run.

In the early summer of this year I got tonsillitis and needed injections for three days. On the first day I lay on the treatment bed and gripped its edge the way Sangsang did. The nurse said, no tears today. I said nothing. Inside I was picturing Sangsang on his treatment bed, his knuckles gone white.

At the end of the book, Sangsang gets well, and his hair grows back black. I laughed out loud on that page. My deskmate asked what was funny. I said, Sangsang is better. Actually I was not only happy for Sangsang. I was also happy for myself, for the me who learned to sit steady.

桑桑喝下的苦药

《草房子》读完已经两个星期了。别的同学总说桑桑拿碗柜做鸽子笼、拿妈妈的被子做渔网那些事好玩，可我最记得的，是桑桑生病以后喝药。

书里写桑桑病了，每天都要喝一碗苦药。他端着碗，仰头一口灌下去，苦得整张脸皱成一团。他爸说，不喝就不会好。桑桑就喝，一天接一天，谁劝都没用，他自己端着碗去灶上倒。

喝苦药的滋味我太知道了。去年夏天我肚子疼，奶奶熬了一锅中药，还没走进厨房我的鼻子就先皱起来。药端过来，我捏着鼻子抿一小口，苦味从舌根一直爬到耳朵。我把碗往外推，说啥也不喝。奶奶哄我，加了一勺糖。加了糖还是苦。我半天才喝下半碗，碗边还洒了一圈，碗底剩的黑渣像一小片泥。

桑桑喝药不知道喝了多少天，没有糖哄他，他也没洒。我趴在桌上想：不是桑桑不怕苦。他嘴里的苦比我的苦重多了，可他扛得住，因为他心里有个想要好的念头，想要病好了去疯玩，想要拉着纸月一起走上学的路。心里有了想要，嘴里的苦就赢不了。

这么一想，我好像也懂了一点后面的事。桑桑怕火针，他也是靠心里那个想要好的念头撑着的。他不是铁打的，他只是比我先想明白了一件事：苦的东西喝下去，病就会退一步。

今年春天我嘴里长了疮，又要喝苦药。药端上来，我想起桑桑端碗仰头的样子，我也学着端稳，仰头一口灌下去。苦还在，从舌根爬到耳朵，可我一口都没洒，也没要糖。我妈在旁边瞪大了眼，问我今天怎么了。我说，桑桑也没加糖。

书的最后，桑桑的病好了，跑起来比以前还快。合上书我想，那本书里的苦药好像一路从油麻地走到了我的桌上。生了病都得喝它，分别只在一口灌下去，还是哄两个小时。现在的我，一口灌下去。

The Bitter Medicine Sangsang Drank

It has been two weeks since I finished Grass House. Other classmates always talk about the fun parts, how Sangsang turned the cupboard into a dovecote or made a fishing net out of the quilt of his mother. What stays in my mind most, though, is him drinking medicine after he fell ill.

In the book, the sick Sangsang drinks a bowl of bitter medicine every day. He lifts the bowl, throws his head back, and gulps it down in one go, his whole face scrunching from the bitterness. His father says, without it you will not get well. So Sangsang drinks, one day after another. Nobody has to urge him; he goes to the stove and fills the bowl himself.

I know the taste of bitter medicine too well. Last summer my stomach hurt, and my grandmother boiled a pot of herbal medicine. Before I even reached the kitchen my nose was already wrinkled. When the bowl came, I pinched my nose and took one small sip, and the bitterness crawled from the root of my tongue up to my ears. I pushed the bowl away and swore I would not drink. My grandmother coaxed me and added a spoonful of sugar. With sugar it was still bitter. It took me half a day to finish half the bowl, spilling a ring around the rim, the black dregs at the bottom like a patch of mud.

No one knows how many days Sangsang kept drinking, with no sugar to coax him and nothing spilled. I lay on my desk and thought: it is not that Sangsang fears no bitterness. The bitterness in his mouth was far heavier than mine, yet he could stand it, because his heart held a wish to get well, a wish to run wild again, a wish to walk to school beside Zhiyue. Once the heart has a wish, the bitterness in the mouth cannot win.

Thinking this way, I seem to understand the later chapters a little better. Sangsang feared the fire needle too, and he got through it on that same wish to be

well. He is not made of iron; he simply figured out one thing before I did: swallow the bitter thing, and the illness steps back.

This spring sores grew in my mouth, and the bitter medicine came back. When the bowl arrived, I remembered Sangsang lifting it and throwing his head back. I steadied the bowl and gulped it in one go. The bitterness was still there, crawling from tongue-root to ears, but I spilled not a drop and asked for no sugar. My mother stared at me with wide eyes and asked what came over me. I said, Sangsang asked for no sugar either.

At the end of the book, Sangsang gets well and runs faster than before. Closing the cover, I thought that the bitter medicine in that book has traveled all the way from Youma Village to my desk. Everyone who falls ill has to drink it; the only difference is one gulp or two hours of coaxing. The me of today takes it in one gulp.

妹妹学着桑桑的样子

《草房子》在我们家，最先读完的其实不是我，是上二年级的妹妹。她们老师布置了这本书，她三天就啃完了，晚上抱着书爬上我的床，说要读给我听。读到火针那一章，她停下来问，姐姐，火针是什么呀。我说，是一根烧热的针。她的脸一下子皱起来，又接着往下读。

妹妹有哮喘，每年犯得重的时候都要打针。去年冬天她犯病，才四岁，护士拿着针过来，她哭着往被子底下钻，是我妈连人带被子把她抱住，才打完那一针。她哭到打嗝，我妈的眼圈也红了。

今年夏天妹妹又犯病了，她已经上二年级。去卫生所的路上她一直很安静，安静得我心里发紧。护士取出针，妹妹自己把手臂伸过去，说，可以打了。护士夸她勇敢。我看见了，她的嘴唇其实在抖。

晚上我问她，今天怎么不怕了。她说，因为桑桑没有哭呀。桑桑那么怕，都没有哭。我都上二年级了，也可以坐稳的。她说桑桑的时候，语气就像说一个转学来的同学。

我没接话，想起的是书结尾那一幕：桑桑的病好了，爸爸背着他去看病回来，桑桑的头发重新长了出来，黑黑的，有点支棱。妹妹读到那一页跟我说过，她又想笑又想哭。我说我懂，我也想这样。

我妈买菜回来，听说这事，说她小时候打针才是哭得最凶的那个，现在带妹妹打针，她自己倒不敢闭眼。妹妹爬上凳子宣布，她也要教妈妈学桑桑。我们笑成一团，笑完我妈的眼角有点湿。

那天夜里，我从书架上又取下《草房子》，书角已经被妹妹翻得卷了边。草房子的顶就是普通的茅草，可住在里面的孩子一个个都长大了。桑桑教会了妹妹，妹妹教会了妈妈。我学到的那条是：家里有人害怕的时候，抱住她，别让她往被子底下钻。

My Little Sister Learned From Sangsang

In our family, the first one to finish Grass House was actually not me but my little sister, who is in Grade Two. Her teacher assigned the book, and she chewed through it in three days. At night she climbed onto my bed hugging the book and said she would read it to me. When she reached the chapter of the fire needle, she stopped and asked, big sister, what is a fire needle. I said it is a red-hot needle. Her face scrunched up at once, and then she kept reading.

My sister has asthma, and in the bad years she needs injections. Last winter when it flared up, she was only four. When the nurse came with the needle, she cried and tried to burrow under the quilt, and our mother had to hug her together with the quilt to get the shot done. She cried until she hiccupped, and the eyes of our mother went red too.

This summer it flared up again, and my sister is already in Grade Two. On the way to the clinic she was quiet all the way, so quiet my heart tightened. When the nurse took out the needle, my sister held out her arm herself and said, you may give it now. The nurse called her brave. I could see that her lips were trembling.

At night I asked her why she was not afraid today. She said, because Sangsang did not cry. Sangsang was so scared and still did not cry. I am in Grade Two now, so I can sit steady too. When she said the name Sangsang, she said it the way one talks about a classmate who just transferred in.

I did not answer right away. What came back to me was the closing scene: Sangsang gets well, and his father carries him on his back home from the doctor, and the hair of Sangsang has grown back black and standing up a little. My sister once told me that on that page she wanted to laugh and cry at the same time. I said I understood. I would want that too.

Our mother came back from the market and, hearing this, said she had been the loudest crier at injections when she was little, and now she cannot even close her eyes when my sister gets her shot. My sister climbed onto a stool and announced that she would teach our mother to be like Sangsang. We all laughed in a heap, and afterward the corners of the eyes of our mother looked a little wet.

That night I took Grass House off the shelf again. Its corners were already curled from the reading of my sister. The roof of the grass house is ordinary thatch, yet one by one the children who live inside it grow up. Sangsang taught my sister, and my sister taught our mother. The lesson I took away is this: when someone at home is afraid, hold her, and do not let her burrow under the quilt.