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.

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