校门口的那个小摊

《草房子》里杜小康这一段，我是一口气读完的。读完我在沙发上坐了很久，我妈喊我三遍吃饭我都没听见。她以为我睡着了，其实我在想杜小康，也在想我家客厅里那台落了灰的钢琴。

杜小康家以前是油麻地最阔的一户，院门漆着一扇红门，门一开，吱呀一声又深又长。他爸把最好的东西都往他手里塞，最好的学校、最好的皮袄，全校的孩子都眼巴巴地看着他。他走路下巴抬得高高的，那是红门少爷的派头。

后来他家的货船翻了，红门里的家底一夜之间空了。他爸带着他去芦苇荡放鸭，去看望那片没有人的地方。风一来，芦苇浪一层压一层，鸭子受惊飞进荡里，他一个人追，脚在泥里裂了口子，夜里睡在芦席搭的窝棚里。书里写他后来回到村里，谁也不认识他了，他站在操场边上，看油麻地的孩子们上学放学。

最让我鼻子发酸的是结尾：杜小康在校门口摆了一个小摊，卖些零碎东西。他失学了，可他还想认字、还想念书。他把货摆得整整齐齐，以前的同学来买东西，他笑着多抓一小把。全校人背地里指点他，他头不低，手不停。

我想起我自己。三年级我吵着要学钢琴，爸妈咬咬牙买了琴。学了半年，曲子一难起来，我每天练琴都哭，后来干脆耍赖不练。爸妈没逼我，琴盖从此没再打开过。现在琴就立在我房间角落，盖子上落了一层灰，像一扇关上的红门。

杜小康是什么都没有了，才去放鸭、去摆摊，一样一样把日子撑起来；我不过是练琴难一点，就半路跑了。他让我明白，坚强不是不疼，是疼着还接着干。我缺的不是天赋，是那股疼着还接着干的劲。

这个学期我把琴盖打开了，每周练一首以前不敢碰的曲子，弹错就重来。弹不下去的时候，我就想芦苇荡里那个追鸭子的杜小康，想校门口那个把货摆得整整齐齐的杜小康。书合上了，可那个小摊好像支到了我的琴盖上，天天提醒我：别跑。

The Little Stall Before the School Gate

I read the chapters about Du Xiaokang in Grass House in one sitting. Afterward I sat on the sofa a long time, and my mother called me to dinner three times without an answer. She thought I had fallen asleep. Actually I was thinking of Du Xiaokang, and also of the dusty piano standing in our living room.

The family of Du Xiaokang used to be the wealthiest in Youma Village, with a red-painted gate in their yard. When the gate opened, its creak was deep and long. His father pushed the best of everything into his hands: the best school, the best fur coat, while the children of the whole school watched with envious eyes. He walked with his chin held high, the bearing of the young master behind the red gate.

Then the cargo boat of his family capsized, and the fortune behind the red gate emptied overnight. His father took him to the reed marsh to herd ducks, to watch over that place without people. When the wind came, wave after wave of reeds bent down upon each other, the startled ducks flew into the marsh, and he chased them alone, his feet cracked and bleeding in the mud, sleeping at night in a hut of reed mats. The book writes that when he later returned to the village, nobody recognized him, and he stood at the edge of the playground watching the children of Youma Village go to school and home.

What stung my nose most was the ending: Du Xiaokang set up a little stall before the school gate, selling odds and ends. He had lost his schooling, yet he still wanted to know characters, still wanted to study. He arranged his goods in neat rows, and when former classmates came to buy, he smiled and slipped them an extra handful. The whole school whispered about him behind his back; his head did not lower, his hands did not stop.

I thought of myself. In Grade Three I clamored to learn piano, and my parents, tightening their belts, bought one. After half a year, as the pieces grew harder, I cried every day at practice, and finally threw a tantrum and refused. My parents did not force me, and the piano lid never opened again. The instrument still stands in the corner of my room, a layer of dust on the lid, like a red gate closed for good.

Du Xiaokang had lost everything before he herded ducks and kept a stall, propping up his day by day; I only found practice a little hard and ran off halfway. He taught me that strength is not feeling no pain, but going on working through the pain. What I lacked was not talent but that stubborn force that keeps working through pain.

This term I opened the piano lid and practice one piece a week that I used to be afraid of, starting over whenever I slip. When I want to quit, I picture Du Xiaokang chasing ducks in the reed marsh, and Du Xiaokang arranging his goods in neat rows before the school gate. The book is closed, yet that little stall seems set upon my piano lid, reminding me every day: do not run.

我看见杜小康的摊子摆到了我们巷口

班级读书会轮到我说《草房子》。老师要求讲一个最打动自己的段落，我选了杜小康。我讲他家那扇红门，讲他从前穿皮袄、戴白手套，讲油麻地的孩子怎样围着他转。讲到货船翻了，教室里安静下来。

我讲芦苇荡。放鸭的爷俩住在芦席窝棚里，芦苇浪一层压一层地响，鸭子受惊飞了，杜小康一个人追进荡深处，脚划破了，鞋陷在泥里。我背这一段的时候，眼前总浮现书里那句：他忽然

觉得自己长大了。可我不知道怎么把下一段讲下去，就是校门口摆摊那一段，我卡住了。

我卡住，是因为我一想到那个摊子，就先想起我爸。我爸在巷口开修车铺，去年铺子租期到了，房东涨了一半的租。我爸连着半个月夜里不睡，坐在铺子里抽烟。我妈劝他关了吧，他把烟摁灭，说再撑撑。那阵子我放学绕开巷口走，怕看见我爸蹲在车轮后头的背影。

书里的杜小康，从红门少爷变成看摊的人，全校人背后笑他，他把头抬着，把货摆齐。我爸不是少爷，可他一样是在把日子往起撑的人。我绕开巷口那一个多月，跟我从前嫌练琴难、嫌跑步累，是同一种跑。杜小康连学都失掉了还在摆摊，我爸不过是多撑一把，我凭什么躲。

我把卡住的那一段接着讲完。我讲杜小康的摊子上有橡皮、有尺子，讲他给来买东西的同学多抓一把瓜子，讲他一边看摊一边借同学的课本认字。讲完我问全班：如果摊子摆到你家门口，你会不会绕路走。没人说话。后排有个男生小声说，可能会。老师说，会绕路不丢人，绕完还肯走回来，才要紧。

那天放学我没绕路。我爸正给一辆自行车上链条，手上有油。我书包都没放，蹲过去帮他扶轮子。他愣了一下，说今天怎么没绕远。我说，我看了本书，书里有个看摊的人，看摊不丢人。我爸没接话，可我看见他嘴角动了一下。

后来我爸的铺子没关，房东看我们一家天天早早开门，最后让了两百块。这事书里没写，书里只写杜小康的摊子一直摆着。我现在路过摊子都会进去站一会儿，不买什么，就陪我爸坐两分钟。杜小康教会我的事，我在我爸的修车铺里又学了一遍：撑住，日子是自己扶起来的。

I Saw the Stall of Du Xiaokang Move Into Our Alley

It was my turn to talk about Grass House at the class reading circle. The teacher asked each of us to present the passage that moved us most, and I chose Du Xiaokang. I talked about the red gate of his family, about the fur coat and white gloves he used to wear, about how the children of Youma Village once orbited around him. When I reached the capsized cargo boat, the classroom fell quiet.

I talked about the reed marsh. The father and son herding ducks lived in a hut of reed mats; wave upon wave of reeds bent down with a roaring sound; the startled ducks flew off, and Du Xiaokang chased them alone deep into the marsh, his feet cut, his shoes swallowed by the mud. Reciting that passage, the line from the book kept rising before my eyes: he suddenly felt he had grown up. But I could not find a way into the next part, the one about the stall before the school gate. I stalled.

I stalled because the moment I thought of that stall, I thought first of my father. My father runs a bicycle repair shop at the mouth of our alley, and last year the lease ran out with the rent raised by half. For half a month he sat up late in the shop smoking, unable to sleep. My mother urged him to close it; he stubbed out his cigarette and said, hold on a little longer. During those weeks I walked home by

a detour around the alley, afraid to see the back of my father crouching behind a wheel.

The Du Xiaokang in the book turns from the young master of the red gate into a man minding a stall; the whole school giggles behind his back, and he keeps his head up and his goods in rows. My father is no young master, yet he too is a man propping his days back up. My detour around the alley for over a month was the same running as my old excuses that piano practice was hard and running was tiring. Du Xiaokang keeps his stall even after losing school; my father only has to hold on one more push, and what right have I to hide.

I finished the passage that had stuck me. I talked about the erasers and rulers on the stall of Du Xiaokang, about the extra handful of seeds he slips to classmates who come to buy, about how he minds the stall while borrowing textbooks to learn characters. When I finished I asked the class: if the stall stood at your door, would you take a detour. Nobody spoke. A boy in the back row whispered, probably. The teacher said, taking a detour is no shame; what matters is walking back afterward.

That afternoon I did not detour. My father was putting a chain back on a bicycle, his hands greasy. I dropped nothing, just crouched over to hold the wheel steady for him. He froze for a second and asked why I had not taken the long way today. I said, I read a book, and there is a man minding a stall in it, and minding a stall is no shame. My father did not answer, but I saw the corner of his mouth move.

In the end the shop did not close. Seeing our family open the door early day after day, the landlord finally took two hundred yuan off the rent. The book does not tell this part; the book only says that the stall of Du Xiaokang stayed set up all along. Now whenever I pass the shop I go in and stand a while, buying nothing, just keeping my father company for two minutes. What Du Xiaokang taught me, I learned once more inside the repair shop of my father: hold on, and your days get stood back up by your own hands.

杜小康的白手套

读《草房子》的时候，我在书页边上写了一行小字：注意杜小康的手。这是我爸教我的读法，他说看一个人，看手最准。于是杜小康这一个人，我是从手读起的。

第一双手，是红门少爷的手。杜小康小时候戴白手套，白得晃眼，他爸的杂货铺里什么稀罕物都有，他捏着糖在油麻地的街上走，手白白净净，碰过的东西都有人抢着摸。书里写他的手递出去，半条街的孩子都围上来。

第二双手，是芦苇荡里的。家道败了，他去放鸭，风大天冷，手背上裂开口子，血珠子渗出来，他用芦叶擦一擦接着干活。鸭子飞进荡里，他趟水去追，手扒开芦苇，苇叶像小刀，划一道不算什么。书里这一段没有写他哭，我也没替他哭，我就是把手伸出来看了看我自己的。

我的手干干净净，握笔不疼，洗碗嫌水凉，解不出数学题第一反应是喊妈。有一回手工课做纸桥，我的桥塌了两次，第三次材料一碰我就把胶水推到同桌那边，说我不做了。同桌的桥也没多结实，可他粘了五遍。杜小康在芦苇荡里的手，和我在手工课上的手，差的不是一层皮。

第三双手，是校门口摊子上的。杜小康数一毛两毛的零钱，手指头冻得通红，给同学找钱的时候稳得很。以前的同学笑他，他手不停，账不错。书里写他一边看摊一边看书，那双手一边挣钱一边认字，两头都没耽误。

我把书页边上那行小字又添了一句：手会变，人也要会变。杜小康的手从白手套到裂口子到数零钱，每一双手都比上一双手有用。我现在的毛病不是手笨，是手一难就缩。书读到最后一页，我在手工课的旧纸桥照片前站了一会儿，那张照片还是同桌帮我拍的。

这个星期数学难题我不喊妈了，草稿纸用满三张再举手问老师。手背上冬天也起了两个小裂口，不碍事，我给它抹点油继续写。我妈说我最近像换了个人。我说不是换人，是读了本书，看见一个人的手，从白手套一路走到了生活里。我想，我迟早也要走到那一步，早一点，不怕。

The White Gloves of Du Xiaokang

While reading Grass House, I wrote a small line in the margin of the page: watch the hands of Du Xiaokang. This reading method came from my father, who says you can judge a person most truly by their hands. So for this one character, I began reading from his hands.

The first pair of hands: the hands of the young master behind the red gate. As a child Du Xiaokang wore white gloves, dazzling white. The grocery shop of his father held every rarity, and he walked the streets of Youma Village holding candy, his hands clean and fair, whatever he touched fought over by others. The book writes that when his hand reached out, children from half the street gathered around.

The second pair: the hands in the reed marsh. With the family ruined, he herded ducks; in wind and cold the backs of his hands cracked, beads of blood seeping out, and he wiped them with a reed leaf and kept working. When the ducks flew into the marsh he waded after them, parting the reeds, whose leaves cut like small knives, a scratch being nothing. This part of the book never says he cried, and I did not cry for him either. I simply held out my own hands and looked at them.

My hands are clean and fair; holding a pen does not hurt them, dishwater is too cold, and the moment a math problem resists me my first reaction is to call for mother. Once in handcraft class we built paper bridges, and mine collapsed twice; the

third time, one touch of the materials and I pushed the glue toward my deskmate, saying I quit. The bridge of my deskmate was not much sturdier either, but he glued it five times. The hands of Du Xiaokang in the reed marsh and my hands in handcraft class differ by more than a layer of skin.

The third pair: the hands at the stall before the school gate. Du Xiaokang counts coins of one and two mao, fingers red with cold, yet perfectly steady when making change for classmates. Former classmates laugh at him; his hands do not stop, and his accounts do not slip. The book writes that he minds the stall while reading borrowed books, those hands earning money on one side and learning characters on the other, losing neither.

I added another phrase to the little line in my margin: hands change, and people must change too. The hands of Du Xiaokang go from white gloves to cracked knuckles to counting coins, and each pair is more useful than the last. My fault now is not clumsy hands but hands that shrink the moment they are tested. At the last page I stood a while before the old photo of my paper bridge from handcraft class, a photo my deskmate helped me take.

This week I no longer call for mother at hard math problems; I fill three sheets of scratch paper before raising my hand to the teacher. Two small cracks appeared on the back of my hand in the winter cold, nothing serious, a little cream and I keep writing. My mother says I seem like a different person lately. I say it is not a new person; it is that I read a book and watched the hands of one man walk from white gloves all the way into real life. I will have to walk that road too, sooner or later, and sooner is not frightening.