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.