我读三遍，每次怕的人不一样

《草房子》这本书，我读过三遍。五年级一遍，六年级一遍，七年级一遍。奇怪的是，每一遍我记住的人都不一样。后来我想明白了：不是书变了，是我在变。

五年级那一遍，我整天活在秃鹤里。那学期我刚从乡下转来，普通话里带着调子，一开口后排就笑。我学着把话吞回去，课间也装作不听见别人聊天。书里秃鹤留过长发又剃成光头，站在操场上让所有人看，我当时不懂他为什么自讨苦吃。现在懂了：他是不肯让自己一辈子躲着那颗头。而我那一年，确实在躲着自己的口音。

六年级那一遍，满书都是杜小康。就在那年夏天，我最好的朋友阿远家做买卖赔光了，他半夜转学走了，走前把心爱的集邮册塞给我，说帮我保管。第二天他的座位空着，我盯着那道空看了整整一周。书里杜小康蹲在校门口摆摊，听见上课铃不能进教室。我在学校门口见过阿远，他穿着旧外套帮家里卸货，看见我，笑了一下，喊了我名字。那一下比任何哭都重。我第一次知道，失去可以不打招呼，接住它的人得自己站稳。

七年级这一遍，我读到了桑桑。上学期我做了个小手术，住院五天，夜里疼得睡不着，母亲趴在床边睡，手还攥着我的手腕。书里桑桑的父亲背着他在镇上找医生，一夜白头发。我从前觉得大人不会老，那一夜我看见我父亲在走廊里来回走，背也有点弯。病这个东西，把一家人的胆子都照出来了，也把爱照出来了。

三遍读完，我在扉页写下一句话：苦难没有相同的形状，它落到秃鹤头上是嘲笑，落到杜小康家是空货架，落到桑桑脖子上是一个肿块。但它每次都不是白落的。秃鹤赢得了安静，杜小康把摊子撑成了脊梁，桑桑从病床上自己坐起来。

我合上书想，我这一代人也会有自己的肿块、自己的空货架、自己的嘲笑，早晚的事。只希望到时候，我能想起油麻地这三个人的背影，然后像他们一样，不躲，不跪，不装没事。

I Read It Three Times, and Each Time I Feared a Different Boy

I have read The Straw House three times: once in fifth grade, once in sixth, once in seventh. Strangely, the person I remember differs each time. Later I figured out why: the book did not change. I did.

During my fifth-grade reading, I lived inside Touhe's skin all day. That term I had just transferred in from the countryside, my Mandarin carrying the accent of the fields, and the back rows laughed whenever I opened my mouth. I learned to swallow my words and pretended not to hear the chatter at break. In the book, Touhe grows his hair long and then shaves it bald, standing on the playground for everyone to see. Back then I could not understand why he courted such pain. Now I do: he refused to spend his life hiding his own head. And in that year, I truly was hiding my own accent.

During the sixth-grade reading, the whole book was Du Xiaokang. That very summer, my best friend Ayuan's family lost everything in their trade, and he transferred schools in the middle of the night. Before leaving he pressed his beloved stamp album into my hands and asked me to keep it safe for him. The next day his seat stood empty, and I stared at that emptiness for a full week. In the book, Du Xiaokang squats at the school gate with his stall and hears the class bell he can no longer enter. I once saw Ayuan at the school gate, wearing an old coat, helping his family unload goods. He saw me, smiled, and called my name. That smile weighed more than any crying. For the first time I understood that loss need not knock first, and the one who catches it must stand steady alone.

During this seventh-grade reading, I reached Sangsang. Last term I had a small surgery and stayed in the hospital five nights, unable to sleep from pain, my mother asleep face-down at the bedside with her hand still gripping my wrist. In the book, Sangsang's father carries him through the town hunting for a doctor, his hair turning white in a single night. I used to think adults never grow old. That night I watched my father pacing up and down the corridor, his back slightly bent too. Illness exposes a family's courage, and it exposes their love.

After three readings I wrote one line on the title page: suffering never takes the same shape. It lands on Touhe's head as mockery, on Du Xiaokang's home as empty shelves, on Sangsang's neck as a lump. But it never lands for nothing. Touhe won the silence, Du Xiaokang propped his stall into a backbone, and Sangsang sat up from his sickbed by himself.

I closed the book and thought: our generation will have its own lumps, its own empty shelves, its own mockery, sooner or later. I only hope that when the time comes, I can recall the backs of these three boys from Oil Grain Village and, like them, not hide, not kneel, not pretend nothing happened.