城墙上的桑桑，病床上的我

如果用一句话讲完《草房子》，我会说：它写油麻地一群孩子和大人，怎样在贫穷、嘲笑、破产和死亡面前，一个一个悄悄长大。书里人物很多，秃鹤、纸月、杜小康、白雀、蒋一轮，可我合上书时，脑子里只剩一个画面：桑桑大病之后，父亲背着他登上城墙，去看远处的田野。

桑桑在这本书里一直是闹腾的那个：拆了父亲的蚊帐打鱼，夏天穿棉衣买冰棍，把碗架砸了换鸽子。就是这样一个天不怕地不怕的孩子，脖子上长出一个肿块之后，忽然安静了。全镇的偏方都试过，最后连火针都扎了下去。书里写他疼，写母亲夜里偷偷哭，写父亲一夜之间白了头发。可城墙那一段，父亲背着虚弱的他，指给他看：你看，远处的草多好看，人活着，什么都有可能。我第一次读到这里，把那一页反复读了三遍。原来最重的爱，是病床上方那只粗糙的手。

我为什么读这一段读得这么慢？因为我五年级住过一次院。急性阑尾炎，半夜推进手术室，母亲在门外一直站着。术后那几天我疼得不肯翻身，父亲平时话少，那几天夜里都是他起来给我倒水。有一天他扶我坐起来，说，走，看看窗外去。住院楼七层，窗外是半个城，远处有一小片麦田。父亲说，你看远一点，就不疼了。

当时我没说话，现在想起来，眼泪先到了。曹文轩写桑桑的父亲背他上城墙，我父亲扶我走到窗前，原来天下的父亲都找不到办法，只能把孩子背到、扶到能看见远方的地方，让远方替他们说话。

《草房子》让我记住的不是苦难本身，而是苦难里那些背起孩子的人。桑桑后来从病床上自己坐了起来，我也从那张病床上自己下了地。出院那天我回头看了一眼七楼的窗户，窗台上父亲放着一只苹果，阳光正落在上面。我想，油麻地的草房子在闪光，我家的窗台也在闪光。

Sangsang on the City Wall, I on the Sickbed

If I had to tell The Straw House in one sentence, I would say: it is about a group of children and grown-ups in Oil Grain Village, each quietly growing up in front of poverty, mockery, bankruptcy, and death. The book is full of characters — Touhe, Zhiyue, Du Xiaokang, Baique, Jiang Yilun — yet when I close it, only one picture remains in my head: after his great illness, Sangsang's father carries him up the city wall to look at the distant fields.

In the book Sangsang is always the rascal: he tears his father's mosquito net to make a fishing trap, wears padded cotton clothes in summer to sell popsicles, smashes the dish rack to trade for pigeons. It is exactly this fearless boy who suddenly falls quiet after a lump grows on his neck. Every folk remedy in town is tried, and in the end even the burning needle goes in. The book writes his pain, writes his mother crying secretly at night, writes his father's hair turning white in one night. But in the city-wall passage, the father carries his weak son and points into the distance: look, the grass far away is so beautiful; while a person lives, anything is possible. The first time I reached this page I read it three times over. So the

heaviest love is the rough hand above the sickbed.

Why did I read this passage so slowly? Because I was hospitalized once in fifth grade. Acute appendicitis, wheeled into the operating room at midnight, my mother standing outside the door the whole time. For days after the surgery I refused to turn over from the pain, and my father, usually a man of few words, got up every night those days to pour water for me. One day he helped me sit up and said: come, let us look out the window. The ward building was seven stories up; outside lay half the city, and far away a small field of wheat. Father said, look into the distance, and the pain will ease.

I said nothing then. Thinking of it now, the tears arrive first. Cao Wenxuan writes of Sangsang's father carrying him up the city wall; my father helped me walk to the window. It turns out that fathers everywhere can find no remedy; they can only carry or lead their children to where the distance is visible, and let the distance speak for them.

What The Straw House made me remember is not suffering itself, but the people who pick their children up inside the suffering. Sangsang later sat up from his sickbed by himself, and I also got off my bed by myself. The day I left the hospital I looked back at the seventh-floor window. On the windowsill my father had left a single apple, and the sunlight was falling on it. I thought: the thatched houses of Oil Grain Village are shining, and the windowsill of my home is shining too.