校门口的那张旧课桌

《草房子》里，油麻地的草房子一排一排，风一吹就晃，可里面的人一个比一个站得直。这些人里，我最佩服杜小康。他家的红船沉了，杂货铺抵了债，前一天还是班里唯一穿皮裤的少爷，第二天就成了校门口摆摊的孩子。

曹文轩写杜小康，最狠的不是写他穷，是写他不躲。别的穷孩子也许会绕开学校走，他偏不。他把小摊支在校门口，每天听里面上课铃响，听下课铃响，看同学们从他摊前买一分钱的东西。书里写他的眼神，不卑不屈，像一口井。我第一次读到这里，心里咯噔一下：一个人跌进泥里不难，难的是坐在泥里，还把背挺直。

杜小康让我想起巷口的哑叔。哑叔以前开小卖部，后来一场火烧光了铺面，他在巷口支了个修车摊。我放学天天路过他。他从不在摊前叹气，工具摆得整整齐齐，补好一个胎，就朝人竖一下大拇指。有一回我车链子掉了，他摆摆手不收钱，从摊底下摸出一块饼干塞给我。那块饼干有汽油味，我却吃得特别香。后来我才知道，哑叔每天最早出摊，最晚收摊，冬天手冻裂了，缠着胶布继续拧螺丝。他和杜小康是同一种人：命运把他们的屋顶掀了，他们就蹲下来，把日子一块一块重新码好。

我家也搬过一次家。父亲厂子效益不好，我们从三居室搬到临街的平房里。搬家那晚，新屋空得能听见回声，我坐在纸箱上不敢哭。父亲把一盏新台灯插上电，说，灯亮了，家就亮了。后来那盏台灯陪我写了三年作业，灯下父亲的账本从赤字慢慢写回平衡。我这才懂《草房子》里那句话：苦难不是终点，它只是把人的成色照出来。

合上书，我总想起杜小康蹲在摊边的背影，想起哑叔缠胶布的手，想起平房里那盏台灯。他们都没说过一句硬气话，可他们的背，比任何硬气话都直。我这辈子若遇上自己的破产那天，希望也能这样：不躲，不跪，把摊子支起来，把灯点亮。

The Old School Desk at the Gate

In The Straw House, the thatched houses of Oil Grain Village stand row after row, swaying whenever the wind blows, yet the people inside stand straighter one by one. Among them, the one I admire most is Du Xiaokang. His family's red boat sank, their shop was seized for debts; the day before he was the only young master in class wearing leather trousers, and the next day he became the child keeping a stall at the school gate.

What Cao Wenxuan writes most cruelly about Du Xiaokang is not his poverty but his refusal to hide. Other poor children might detour around the school; he does not. He sets his small stall right at the school gate, listening every day to the class bell and the break bell, watching classmates buy things from his stall for a cent apiece. The book describes his eyes: neither servile nor defiant, like a well. The first time I read this, my heart gave a lurch: falling into the mud is not the hard part; the hard part is sitting in the mud and still holding your back straight.

Du Xiaokang reminds me of mute Uncle at the mouth of our lane. He used to run a small shop, then a fire burned it all down, and he set up a bicycle repair stand at the lane entrance. I passed him every day after school. He never sighed at his stand; his tools lay in perfect order, and after patching a tire he would give you a thumbs-up. Once my chain fell off, he waved away my money and fished a biscuit out from under the stand to press into my hand. That biscuit tasted of gasoline, yet I ate it as if it were the sweetest thing. Only later did I learn that mute Uncle opened his stand earliest and closed it latest each day; in winter his hands cracked open, and he wrapped them in tape and kept turning screws. He and Du Xiaokang are the same kind of person: when fate tears off their roof, they squat down and stack their days back up, piece by piece.

My own family moved once too. My father's factory fell on hard times, and we moved from a three-room apartment to a single-story house facing the street. That night the new house was so empty it echoed, and I sat on a cardboard box afraid to cry. My father plugged in a new desk lamp and said: when the lamp is lit, the home is lit. That lamp stayed with me through three years of homework, and under it my father's ledger slowly climbed from red numbers back to balance. Only then did I understand what The Straw House says: hardship is not the destination; it merely reveals the metal a person is made of.

When I close the book, I keep seeing Du Xiaokang squatting beside his stall, mute Uncle's taped hands, that lamp in the small house. None of them ever said a single defiant word, yet their backs were straighter than any defiant word. If the day of my own bankruptcy ever comes, I hope I will be the same: no hiding, no kneeling — set up the stall, and light the lamp.

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