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.

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.

那颗光头，和我的大板牙

班级读书分享会，轮到我上台，我开口第一句是：我读《草房子》，读进去的不是故事，是我自己。台下有人小声笑，我攥紧了书角，接着往下讲。

书里的秃鹤，从一年级起就得不到安静。他生下来头发就掉光，一颗头在太阳底下亮得晃眼。孩子们给他起外号，大人背后叹气，他自己试过所有办法：生发药抹了半瓶，帽子戴了一夏天，头发剃了留、留了剃。他故意在会操里乱动，想让人哪怕恨他，也别当他不存在。读到这里时我喉咙发紧，因为五年级之前，我就是另一个秃鹤。

我门牙突出，外号叫大板牙，一喊全班回头。我学会了捂嘴笑，发言时侧过脸，合影永远站边边。那种日子过久了，人会真的相信自己低人一头。书里写秃鹤夜里一个人对着水缸照自己的头，我夜里也对着镜子掰开嘴唇看过我的牙。我们都在问同一句话：凭什么是我。

可《草房子》最了不起的地方，是它没让秃鹤的头发长出来，也没让他的嘲笑消失。它让汇操那天来了。全校会操，秃鹤演一个光头伪军，他跳得比谁都用力，每一个动作都砸在地上。全场忽然静了，静得能听见风。那阵安静不是施舍，是他一寸一寸挣来的敬意。我在台下读这一段，忽然坐直了：原来对付嘲笑，最好的办法不是求它停，是把自己做成一件让人没法笑的事。

六年级上学期，学校合唱比赛缺报幕的，我举了手。排练时我一开口，台下还是有人憋笑。我没停，把词一句一句砸清楚，比排练任何一遍都用力。正式演出那晚，我报完最后一个节目，礼堂安静了两秒，然后掌声起来。那两秒的安静，和秃鹤挣来的那阵安静，是同一个东西。下台时我腿在抖，可我的背是直的。

分享会最后，我把《草房子》举起来给大家看封面：这本书告诉我，有些东西生下来就改不掉，光头改不掉，门牙也改不掉。但怎么带着它活，是自己定的。油麻地的秃鹤把那颗头抬起来了，我的牙还突出，可我再没在合影时站去过边边。

That Bald Head, and My Big Front Teeth

At our class reading-sharing session, when it was my turn to go up, my first sentence was: reading The Straw House, what I read into myself was not a story but myself. Someone below whispered a laugh, and I gripped the corner of the book and kept going.

Touhe in the book has never had a moment of peace since first grade. He was born without hair, his head shining dazzlingly in the sun. The children gave him nicknames, the grown-ups sighed behind his back, and he tried every remedy himself: half a bottle of hair tonic rubbed on, a hat worn all summer, his head shaved and regrown and shaved again. He deliberately messed up during the drill formations, wanting people to at least hate him rather than pretend he did not exist. My throat tightened reading this, because before fifth grade I was another Touhe.

My front teeth protruded, my nickname was Big Board Teeth, and one shout of it turned the whole class around. I learned to laugh behind my hand, to turn my face sideways when speaking, to stand at the very edge in every group photo. Live like that long enough and a person truly believes he is a head shorter than others. The book writes Touhe alone at night, bending over a water jar to study his own head; at night I too pried my lips apart in the mirror to look at my teeth. We were both asking the same question: why me.

But the greatest thing about The Straw House is that it never lets Touhe's hair grow back, and never lets the mockery disappear. It lets the gymnastics show come instead. At the whole-school drill, Touhe plays a bald puppet soldier, and he dances harder than anyone, every movement hammered into the ground. The whole field went suddenly silent, silent enough to hear the wind. That silence was not charity; it was respect he earned inch by inch. Reading this in my seat, I straightened up all at once: so the best answer to mockery is not to beg it to stop, but to make yourself into something no one can laugh at.

In the first term of sixth grade, our school choir contest lacked an announcer, and I raised my hand. During rehearsal, the moment I opened my mouth, someone below still choked back a laugh. I did not stop. I hammered each line out clearly, harder than in any rehearsal. On the night of the real performance, after I announced the last program, the hall was quiet for two seconds, and then the applause rose. Those two seconds of silence and the silence Touhe earned are the same thing. My legs were shaking when I stepped down, but my back was straight.

At the end of the sharing session, I held The Straw House up to show everyone its cover: this book tells me that some things cannot be changed from the day you are born — a bald head cannot be changed, and neither can buck teeth. But how you live

carrying it is your own decision. Touhe of Oil Grain Village lifted his head up high; my teeth still protrude, yet I have never once stood at the edge of a group photo since.