

合上书的那晚，黑暗里浮起三张脸

星期六，阴。今晚，我把《草房子》读完了最后一页。

合上书，我没有马上开台灯。黑暗里浮起三张脸。第一张是桑桑。他骑着父亲的自行车穿过油麻地的街道，把鸽子卖掉换零钱，生病时忍着火针扎进皮肉的疼，一声没哭，还反过来安慰父亲。读到他的头发因为药一撮一撮往下掉，我用手捂住那一页，不忍看，可也没有把书合上。我想知道他后来怎么样了。他好了。他又坐到了学校台阶上，人瘦了一圈，眼睛还是那么亮。

第二张脸是陆鹤，大家都叫他秃鹤。整整一个冬天他都戴着那顶棉帽，春天文艺汇演的日子，他亲手把自己的头剃得精光，演那个光头士兵，演到台下全站起来鼓掌。可在那之前，孩子们学他的光头，追着他一直撵到河堤上。我想起我们班有个同学，因为眉毛浓总被人起外号，座位换了三回。我没笑过他，可也从没替他说说过一句话。我欠他一句对不起，就像油麻地的孩子们欠秃鹤一句。

第三张是细马。他听不懂本地的话，留在异乡照顾养父母，撑船去学校搬砖，话不多，做每一件事都扎扎实实。洪水冲垮了房子，他出门卖羊，回来又把新屋的屋脊垒得比原来还高。他把养父埋在了屋后的坡上，从那天起，这个家就他一个人撑着。我上初二，还在拿妈妈的钱买零食，还嫌学校食堂的饭难吃，摔一跤先看看有没有人看见，才决定哭不哭。

油麻地的孩子们都早熟。苦日子推着他们往前走，他们没时间磨蹭。我的童年是平的，没有洪水，没有大病，可我也没有他们那种把腰一挺、把事扛起来的姿势。我把这些写进日记。合上书以后我明白了一件事：长大不是等天晴，是学会自己在雨里走。

Three Faces in the Dark After I Closed the Book

Saturday, cloudy. Tonight I read the last page of the novel Grass House.

After closing the book, I did not turn on the desk lamp. Three faces rose in the dark. The first was Sangsang. He rode his father's bicycle through the streets of Youmadi, sold his doves for pocket money, and when illness came he bore the fire needle pressed into his skin without a cry, then comforted his father instead. When I read the part where his hair fell out in clumps because of the medicine, I covered the page with my hand, too pained to look, yet I did not close the book. I wanted to know how he turned out. He got well. He sat on the school steps again, a ring thinner, his eyes as bright as ever.

The second face was Lu He, the boy everyone called Bald Crane. He wore a cotton cap through the whole winter, and on the day of the school play he shaved his own head bright and played the bald soldier, so that the whole audience stood and applauded. Before that, the children had copied his bald head and chased him all the way to the river bank. I thought of a classmate of mine, teased for his thick

eyebrows, who changed seats three times. I never laughed at him, but I never stood up for him either. I owe him an apology, just like the children of Youmadi owe Bald Crane one.

The third was Xima. He could not understand the local words, stayed behind in a strange place to care for his adoptive parents, and ferried bricks on a boat for the new school. He spoke little, and everything he did was solid. When the flood took the house down, he went away to sell the sheep, then came back and raised the ridge of the new house higher than before. He buried his adoptive father on the slope behind the house, and from that day on he was the only one holding the family up. I am in my second year of middle school, and I still spend my mother's money on snacks and complain that the canteen food tastes bad; when I fall, I first check whether anyone is watching before deciding whether to cry.

The children of Youmadi all grew up too early. Hard days pushed them forward, and they had no time to dawdle. My childhood is flat, with no flood and no great illness, yet I never learned their way of straightening my back and shouldering things. I wrote these lines in my diary. After closing the book I understood one thing. Growing up is not waiting for the weather to clear; it is learning to walk in the rain yourself.

我在纸上给油麻地的孩子排座次

11月8日 星期日 小雨。今天哪儿也没去，把《草房子》从头到尾读完了。晚饭后我拿出一张纸，把书里孩子的名字一个一个写下来，像给我们班排座位那样，在每个人后面写一行印象。

第一个名字是桑桑。我在他后面写：胆子最大，也最疼人。他敢穿着棉鞋蹚夏天的水，敢把父亲的奖杯当鸽子笼，也在纸月被人欺负时冲上去挨了打。他生病以后，我怕得整晚睡不踏实，他倒自己先稳住了，还安慰来看他的同学别哭。我在这个名字下面画了道横线——油麻地的孩子里，他是领头的。

第二个名字是陆鹤，就是秃鹤。我原本想写爱出风头，笔停了停，改成了：想被当成普通人。他戴帽子，是因为怕人看他的光头；他在汇演上亲手剃光头，是想让人看一眼真正的他，那一演，台下全站起来了。我们班的张一鸣也是这样，个子矮，非要在元旦晚会上报魔术，有人笑他，他报得更大声。我以前不懂他，现在我懂了。

第三个名字是细马。我写：话最少，肩膀最硬。他放羊，种山药，给瘫在床上的养母端水送饭，养父走后一个人把新房子盖起来，屋脊垒得比旧屋还高。他刚来油麻地时谁都不拿他当回事，最后油麻地最靠得住的偏偏是他。

写完这三个名字，我把我们班的名单也摸出来看了看。我们班四十七个人，没有洪水，没有

饥荒，可每个人也都有自己的难处：有人家里父母常年吵架，有人转学来一直没交到朋友，有人像我一样，一考试就手心出汗。我以前只觉得他们怪，现在我知道，每个人心里都下着自己那场雨。

我把这张纸夹进书里，当书签。合上书我想：油麻地的孩子和我们的差别，不是苦不苦，是他们摔倒了就地爬起来，我们摔倒了先看看有没有人扶。这大概就是我该从这本书里带走的东西。明天，我想去跟张一鸣说一句：你那个魔术，其实挺有意思。

I Seated the Children of Youmadi on a Sheet of Paper

November 8, Sunday, light rain. Today I stayed home and read Grass House from beginning to end. After dinner I took out a sheet of paper and wrote down the names of the children in the book one by one, the way our teacher arranges the class roster, and behind each name I wrote one line of impression.

The first name was Sangsang. Behind it I wrote: the boldest, and the kindest. He dared to wade through summer water in cotton shoes, dared to turn his father's trophy cup into a dove cage, and rushed in to take a beating when Paper Moon was bullied. After he fell ill, I tossed awake all night with worry, yet he was the one who kept steady first, even comforting the classmates who came to visit him. I drew a line under this name. Among the children of Youmadi, he is the one who leads.

The second name was Lu He, the boy called Bald Crane. I first wanted to write show-off, then paused and changed it to: wants to be treated as an ordinary boy. He wore the cap because he feared people staring at his bald head; he shaved it bright himself for the school play because he wanted people to see the real him, and that night the whole audience rose to their feet. Zhang Yiming in our class is like that too. Short in stature, he insisted on performing magic at the New Year party; some laughed, and he performed all the louder. I never understood him before. Now I do.

The third name was Xima. I wrote: fewest words, strongest shoulders. He herded sheep, planted yams, carried water and meals to his adoptive mother paralyzed in bed, and after his adoptive father was gone he built the new house alone, its ridge higher than the old one. When he first came to Youmadi nobody took him seriously; in the end he was the one Youmadi could lean on most.

After writing these three names, I took out our class roster and looked it over. Forty-seven students in our class. No flood, no famine, yet each one carries a private hardship: some have parents quarreling for years, some transferred in and still made no friends, some, like me, get sweaty palms at every exam. Before, I only thought they were strange. Now I know that inside everyone it is raining its own rain.

I slipped the sheet into the book as a bookmark. Closing the book I thought: the difference between the children of Youmadi and us is not whether life is hard. It is that when they fall they get up on the spot, and when we fall we first look around to see if anyone will help. That, I think, is what I should take away from this book. Tomorrow, I want to say to Zhang Yiming: that magic trick of yours is actually pretty interesting.

今晚，我想转学去油麻地

11月14日 星期六 晴。今晚我把《草房子》读完了。躺在床上一时睡不着，我做了个没出息的梦：我想转学去油麻地小学。

我想象自己插班进桑桑的班。第一节课间，桑桑就凑过来看我的文具盒，看完倒背着手走了，没两天他准会想出个新花样来——比如把碗柜改成鸽子笼那种事。可纸月被高年级欺负那天，冲上去挨打的也是他。我想象自己跟在他后头喊：桑桑，你头上流血了。他抹一把，说没事，疼是过会儿的事，先打完再说。

我想象坐秃鹤后排。夏天他的棉帽换成了草帽，后脑勺在太阳底下白得晃眼。前排的人回头学他，我想象自己把书往桌上一放，说：看什么看，他有名字，叫陆鹤。说完教室里安静下来，他从帽子底下抬起眼睛看我一眼，什么也没说。就这一眼，我觉得够本了，这个朋友我交定了。

我想象放学顺路去帮细马赶羊。他不怎么说话，羊钻了庄稼地，他就把羊抱出来，拍拍土，给被踩倒的苗重新扶直。我想象我跟他坐在河边，一人一根草棍，半天说不出一句话，谁也不觉得尴尬。他养父的坟在屋后坡上，我想象我陪他去，把供果摆好，他看我一眼，还是不怎么说话，但递给我半块饼。

梦做到这儿，我睁了眼，天花板是白的，台灯是暖的，窗外有汽车声。油麻地没有汽车，没有台灯，一场洪水就能把学校搬走。我的童年有空调、有课外班、有扔了不心疼的文具，可我摔了跤会先看看有没有人，他们摔了跤直接爬起来。这就是我和他们的分别。

我在日记本上写：其实用不着转学。桑桑的胆气、陆鹤的挺直腰、细马的闷头扛，书读完了，它们就搬进我心里住了。油麻地不在远方，往后我遇到难处，就是回油麻地。

Tonight I Want to Transfer to Youmadi

November 14, Saturday, clear. Tonight I finished reading Grass House. Lying in bed unable to sleep, I had a foolish little dream: I wanted to transfer into Youmadi Primary School.

I imagined enrolling in Sangsang's class. At the first break he would come over to inspect my pencil case, then walk off with his hands clasped behind his back, and within two days he would surely think up some new stunt—the kind of thing like turning a cupboard into a dove cage. But on the day older boys bullied Paper Moon, the one who charged in and got beaten was him too. I imagined running after him shouting: Sangsang, your head is bleeding. He would wipe it with his hand and say it is nothing—pain is something for later; finish the fight first.

I imagined sitting behind Bald Crane. In summer his cotton cap would give way to a straw hat, the back of his head white and dazzling under the sun. When the boy in front turned around to mimic him, I imagined putting my book down on the desk and saying: what are you looking at, he has a name, it is Lu He. The classroom would go quiet, and he would lift his eyes from under the hat to look at me once, saying nothing. That one look would be enough—I would have made a friend for life.

I imagined stopping to help Xima drive his sheep home after school. He hardly spoke. When the sheep got into the crops, he carried them out, patted off the dirt, and straightened the trampled seedlings. I imagined sitting with him by the river, each of us with a stalk of grass, saying nothing for half an hour, neither of us feeling awkward. His adoptive father's grave was on the slope behind the house; I imagined going there with him, setting out the offering fruit, and him glancing at me, still saying little, but handing me half a flatbread.

The dream ended there, and I opened my eyes. The ceiling was white, the lamp was warm, cars passed outside the window. Youmadi has no cars and no lamps; one flood could carry the school away. My childhood has air conditioning, after-school classes, stationery I throw away without a pang, yet when I fall I first check whether anyone is watching, and they fall and simply get up. That is the difference between us.

I wrote in my diary: actually, there is no need to transfer. Sangsang's courage, Lu He's straight back, Xima's silent endurance—now that the book is finished, they have moved into my heart and taken up residence. Youmadi is not far away. Whenever I meet hardship from now on, I am going back to Youmadi.