

草房子里的光

油麻地的房子是草顶的。太阳一斜，整片草房子就泛出金黄，像谁把一炉火慢慢封在了屋顶上。我读《草房子》，最先记住的不是哪个人，是这层颜色。苦是苦的日子，可书里处处有光，光从草缝里漏出来，落在每一个孩子身上。清晨那层光是淡黄的，中午是金黄，到了傍晚便烧成暗红，一天里换三色，却始终没有断过。

光最先落在奔跑的桑桑身上。书里那些秋天，他举着根竹竿满村子跑，风把他的衣角掀起来，鸽子在他头顶盘旋，他的笑声一路撒在河堤上。后来他病了，跑不动了，坐在轮椅上让人推着走，可他的眼睛还是亮的，亮得像藏着那根竹竿、那群鸽子。病好了以后他又跑起来，人瘦了，步子却比从前稳。我读到 he 重新跑起来那一段，忽然明白：光不是没有灭过，是灭了以后，他自己又把它点着了。

光也落在杜小康的摊子上。他家败了，红门板抵了债，他去芦苇荡放过鸭，回来时在油麻地小学门口摆起一个小摊，卖铅笔、卖橡皮、卖糖果。书里写他站在摊子后头，衣服洗得发白，腰板却是直的。孩子们围过去，他一样一样地拿给人看，不躲，也不诉苦。曾经全村最神气的孩子，把最难堪的日子过成了井然有序的营生。那摊子摆在放学的路口，夕阳照着几支铅笔、几块橡皮，照得那么安静。我觉得那是我读过的书里最体面的一张桌子。

而草房子本身，就是油麻地攒下来的光。麻哥纸糊的墙，草铺的顶，洪水来了它塌过，孩子们一块砖一块砖又把它垒回去。教室里读书声一起，芦苇就朝这边倒过来听。房子是穷的，书声是富的。

合上书，窗外是城市的夜，霓虹把天映得发红。可我闭上眼，还是那片草顶上的金黄。我想，好书的用处大概就在这里：它把别人童年里的光取一小束来，放进你这里，不亮得晃眼，就是留着，等你哪天走夜路，它在你心里亮一下。油麻地的光，我收下了。

The Light Inside the Grass Houses

The houses of Youmadi have thatched roofs. When the sun slants, the whole row of grass houses turns golden, as if someone had slowly sealed a furnace of fire into the rooftops. Reading Grass House, the first thing I remember is not any person but this color. The days are hard, yet light is everywhere in the book, leaking through the gaps in the straw, falling on every child.

The light first falls on Sangsang as he runs. In those autumns of the book he runs across the village holding a bamboo pole, the wind flipping his hem, doves wheeling above his head, his laughter scattered all along the river bank. Then he fell ill and could not run, sitting in a wheelchair pushed by others, yet his eyes stayed bright, bright as if that bamboo pole and that flock of doves were still hidden inside them. After he recovered he ran again, thinner, but with steadier steps than before. Reading the part where he runs again, I suddenly understood: the light is not something that never went out. It went out, and he lit it again himself.

The light also falls on Du Xiaokang's stall. His family ruin came, the red door panels went to pay the debt, he herded ducks in the reed marsh, and when he returned he set up a small stall at the gate of Youmadi Primary School, selling pencils, erasers, and candies. The book says he stood behind the stall in a washed-out pale shirt, but his back was straight. The children gathered around, and he took things out one by one for them to see, neither hiding nor complaining. The proudest boy in the village turned the most humiliating days into an orderly living. The stall stood at the crossroads where school let out, the setting sun shining on a few pencils and a few erasers, shining so quietly. I think it is the most dignified table in any book I have ever read.

And the grass houses themselves are the gathered light of Youmadi. Walls papered with hemp-bark paper, roofs of straw. When the flood came they collapsed, and the children piled the bricks back one by one. When reading voices rise in the classroom, the reeds bend this way to listen. The houses are poor; the sound of reading is rich.

I close the book. Outside the window is the city at night, neon reddening the sky. But when I shut my eyes, it is still that gold on the thatched roofs. A good book, I think, is useful exactly here: it takes a small bundle of light from someone else's childhood and puts it in you—not bright enough to dazzle, just kept, so that on some night when you walk in the dark, it lights up once inside your heart. The light of Youmadi, I have received it.