

# 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.

## 灯下，我把草房子读给孩子听

晚饭后，女儿抱着《草房子》钻进被窝，非要我读。她翻到油麻地那一页，指着插图上的草顶房子问：这房子会漏雨吗。我说会。她又问：那为什么还叫它家。我没答上来，只好低头往下读。书里的草房子确实漏雨，雨点落在麻纸糊的墙上，鼓起一个个小包，孩子们仰头看，谁也不恼。教室漏雨，先生就领他们大声读书，说读书声能把雨声压下去。女儿听到这里把被子往上拉了拉，像怕雨淋着书里的人。

读到桑桑举着竹竿满村跑，女儿忽然攥紧了被角。她紧张的样子像在看一场要输的比赛。后来桑桑生病跑不动了，她小声问：他还能跑吗。我说你往下听。病好了，桑桑重新跑起来，风又掀起他的衣角，女儿在被窝里轻轻跳了一下，像那一跑是跑给她看的。孩子的眼睛是一架最老实的秤，书里那点好，她全接得住。读到这一句我自己倒先停了，低头把那一行又看一遍，嗓子有点紧。

最难讲的是杜小康。他家的红门板被债主卸走那晚，女儿把书扣在胸口，半天不翻开。缓过

来以后她问：他后来吃什么。我接着往下念：他在小学门口摆了个摊，卖铅笔和糖果，腰板直直的。女儿想了很久，问：他能赚很多钱吗。我说不知道，可他没伸手要过谁的。女儿点点头，第二天一早，把她攒的硬币数出一半放进存钱罐，说这是给杜小康进货的。我知道她不是给书里的人，她是把这份体面收进了自己心里。

我原以为是我在给孩子读书，读着读着才明白，是孩子替我把书里的光一处一处指出来。草房子漏雨，她说那是房子在喝水；桑桑跑，她攥拳；杜小康摆摊，她存硬币。大人读书看命运，孩子读书看人心，而人心那一层，本来就该先讲给她听。

灯熄了，她的呼吸慢慢匀了。书摊在枕边，草房子在灯影里立着。我替她掖好被角，心里想：这一夜读进去的东西，够我们俩受用很久。

## Under the Lamp, I Read the Grass House to My Child

After dinner my daughter crawled into bed hugging Grass House and insisted that I read to her. She turned to the page about Youmadi, pointed at the thatched house in the picture and asked: does this house leak when it rains. I said yes. She asked again: then why is it still called home. I had no answer, so I bent my head and kept reading. The grass houses in the book do leak. Raindrops beat on the hemp-paper walls, swelling little bubbles, and the children look up at them, nobody angry. When the classroom leaks, the teacher leads them to read aloud, saying the sound of reading can press the sound of rain down. Hearing this, my daughter pulled the quilt up a little, as if afraid the rain would soak the people inside the book.

When I read the part where Sangsang runs across the village holding a bamboo pole, my daughter suddenly gripped the corner of the quilt. Her tension looked like watching a game about to be lost. Later Sangsang fell ill and could not run, and she whispered: can he still run. I said, listen on. After he recovered, Sangsang ran again, the wind flipping his hem once more, and my daughter gave a little jump under the quilt, as if that run were performed for her alone. A child's eyes are the most honest of scales; every bit of goodness in a book, she can hold.

The hardest part to read was Du Xiaokang. On the night the creditor carried off his family's red door panels, my daughter pressed the book shut against her chest and would not open it for a long while. When she calmed down she asked: what did he eat afterward. I read on: he set up a stall at the school gate, selling pencils and candies, his back straight. She thought for a long time, then asked: can he earn much money. I said I did not know, but he never once reached out his hand to anyone. She nodded, and early the next morning she counted out half of her saved coins into the piggy bank, saying this is capital for Du Xiaokang's goods. I knew she was not giving to a person in a book; she was folding that dignity into her own heart.

I thought I was reading the book to my child. Reading on, I understood: it was she pointing out to me, one by one, the lights inside the book. The grass house leaks, and she says the house is drinking water; Sangsang runs, and she clenches her fists; Du Xiaokang sets up his stall, and she saves coins. Grown-ups read for fate, children read for the human heart, and the layer of the human heart was always the one to tell her first.

The lamp went out; her breathing evened out slowly. The book lay open at her pillow, the grass houses standing in the afterglow. I tucked the quilt around her and thought: what we read into ourselves tonight will serve us both for a long time.

## 那束光穿过三十年的草顶

人到中年重读《草房子》，是被一场秋雨引回去的。老家的瓦房漏雨，父亲在电话里说，雨顺着瓦沟淌成一条线，他在下面接了盆水，听了一夜。我放下电话，从书架上抽出那本旧版《草房子》——油麻地的草房子也漏雨，我中学读它时正为赋新词，嫌它土气，如今才看懂，那层草顶是书里最暖的东西。

书里的教室漏雨，桑桑和同学们仰头看水珠，先生领大家把书声放大，说把雨声压下去。我读到这里笑出声，笑完鼻子又酸。我老家的瓦房也这样：每逢大雨，祖母把全家的盆摆成一排，叮叮咚咚，她管这叫听雨。原来穷日子的体面，各地都是相通的——不骂雨，把雨过成一段声响。

年轻时读桑桑，只记得他闹：拆碗柜做鸽子窝，穿棉鞋蹚水。这一遍读他奔跑，读到的是另一样东西。他举着竹竿从秋天里跑过，笑声撒在河堤上，那是还没被生活收走过的小孩才有的跑法。后来他大病一场，重新站起来跑，人瘦了，步子稳了。我在深夜的台灯下读到病愈的桑桑重新跑起来，忽然想起自己生那场大病时，也是扶着墙在楼道里一步一步走。原来书早就写好了答案：人这一生，跑不动不要紧，要紧的是好了以后还肯跑。

最扎心的是杜小康的摊子。少年时读这一段只觉得惨：杂货铺少爷站在校门口卖铅笔。中年再读，才看见书里那些不起眼的字——他把摊子摆得整整齐齐，铅笔按长短排，橡皮按大小码。他不吆喝，也不躲熟人的眼睛。一个人把失去的日子重新码放整齐，这就是一个平民能做到的全部英雄主义。我店周转不开那年，也摆过一阵摊，难怪这一段我当年读不懂，是拿今天的自己才读懂的。

合上书，雨停了。书里那束光，穿过油麻地的草顶，穿过我老家的瓦缝，落在我这个中年人的桌上，不刺眼，但确实在。它让我信一件事：穷和难都不白过，苦日子里存下的体面和勇气，会在往后某场雨里，替你接好。

## A Beam of Light Through Thirty Years of Thatch

Reading Grass House again in middle age, I was led back to it by an autumn rain. The tiled house in my hometown leaks, my father said on the phone: the rain runs down the grooves of the tiles in a single line, and he set a basin under it and listened all night. I put down the phone and pulled the old edition of Grass House from the shelf. The grass houses of Youmadi leak too. When I read it in middle school, writing for sorrow's sake, I thought it rustic and dowdy. Only now do I see that that layer of thatch is the warmest thing in the book.

In the book the classroom leaks in the rain. Sangsang and his classmates tilt their heads to watch the water beads, and the teacher leads everyone to read louder, saying they will press the rain down. I laughed out loud at this, then felt my nose sting as the laugh faded. My hometown's tiled house was the same: at every heavy rain my grandmother lined up every basin in the house, drip drip dong, and she called it listening to the rain. So the dignity of poor days is the same everywhere—do not curse the rain; turn the rain into a piece of music.

Reading Sangsang when I was young, I remembered only his mischief: taking the cupboard apart to build a dove nest, wading through water in cotton shoes. This time, reading him run, I saw something else. He runs through autumn holding a bamboo pole, his laughter scattered along the river bank—the way only a child not yet collected by life can run. Then he fell gravely ill, and when he stood he ran again, thinner, his steps steadier. Under my desk lamp late at night, reading the recovered Sangsang running again, I suddenly remembered the year of my own bad illness, when I too walked the corridor step by step with a hand on the wall. The book had written the answer long ago: it does not matter that you cannot run; what matters is that once you are well you are still willing to.

The sharpest part is Du Xiaokang's stall. As a boy I read it only as misery: the grocer's young master standing at the school gate selling pencils. Read again in middle age, I finally noticed the unremarkable words in the book—he keeps the stall arranged neatly, pencils lined by length, erasers stacked by size. He does not hawk, and he does not dodge the eyes of people he knows. When a person takes the days he lost and stacks them straight again, that is the whole heroism available to an ordinary man. The year my shop could not turn its capital around, I kept a stall for a while myself. No wonder I could not read this passage back then; it took today's me to understand it.

I close the book. The rain has stopped. That beam of light in the book passes through the thatch of Youmadi, through the gaps in the tiles of my hometown, and lands on the desk of a middle-aged man like me—not dazzling, but truly there. It makes me believe one thing: poverty and hardship are never wasted. The dignity and

courage saved up in hard days will, in some future rain, hold the basin for you.