

重读草房子的那几晚

儿子十二岁生日过后，我把三十年前那本《草房子》从书架上抽了出来，书脊都裂了，用透明胶粘着。我说，咱俩一人一本，一块儿读。他瞥了一眼，说，老古董。话虽这么说，晚饭后他还是坐到了桌灯底下。

我们读得慢，一晚上十来页，读完各说各记下的东西。读到杜小康在校门口摆摊，儿子说，要是我，我没脸摆。我说，我小时候赶过集，卖过冰棍，那时候也怕碰见同学。他抬起头看我，像第一次认识我。那晚我们聊了很久，聊到我家也穷过几年，聊到骨气不是不干活，是干活的时候腰是直的。儿子最后说，爸，你比我写的作文里厉害一点。当爹的没日没夜挣来的话，都在这儿了。

秃鹤那几章，是散步时聊的。我说我小学也笑话过班里一个黄毛的同学，笑了好几年，到现在同学聚会也没跟他说过一句抱歉。儿子问，那你现在为什么不说不。我说，不好意思，都三十年了。儿子说，秃鹤等到毕业都没等到一句对不起。那晚回家，我翻出老同学群，打了几个字又删掉。有些账，大人比孩子记仇，也比孩子怯。

读完那晚，儿子合上书，说他最想变勇敢。我问他什么叫勇敢。他说，就是像桑桑那样，知道疼还站着；像杜小康那样，没脸的事也堂堂正正做。他顿了顿又说，爸，你也勇敢一点，去把那个对不起说了。十二岁的孩子给父亲布置作业。我应了。第二天一早，我真在那位老同学的微信名下留了言，就一句，当年笑你黄毛，对不起。他隔了两天回我，记得，早不记了。那几晚的桌灯底下，我以为我在领他进门，其实他一直在把我往屋里带。一本旧书，裂了书脊，倒把我们爷俩缝到了一起。

Those Evenings Rereading Grass House

Just after my son turned twelve, I pulled my own copy of Grass House off the shelf, the one I bought thirty years ago. Its spine had split and was holding on with clear tape. I said, one copy each, let us read it together. He glanced at it and called it an antique. Talk like that aside, after dinner he still sat down under the desk lamp.

We read slowly, ten-odd pages a night, then each said what we had noted down. At the chapter where Du Xiaokang sets up his stall by the school gate, my son said, if it were me, I would not have the face to. I said, when I was small I went to market fairs and sold popsicles, and I was afraid of running into classmates too. He looked up at me as if meeting me for the first time. That night we talked a long time: about how our family too had been poor for a few years, about how backbone is not refusing to work but working with your back straight. My son ended with, Dad, you are a little more impressive than the one in my compositions. Every word a father earns without rest lands right here.

The Bald Crane chapters came up on a walk. I told him I had mocked a fair-haired

classmate in primary school, laughed at him for years, and never once said sorry even at reunions decades later. My son asked, why not now. I said, embarrassed. It has been thirty years. My son said, Bald Crane graduated without ever getting one sorry. That night at home I opened the old classmates group chat, typed a few words, deleted them. Grown-ups hold grudges longer than children, and flinch harder than children too.

The night he finished, my son closed the book and said the thing he wanted most was to be brave. I asked what brave means to him. He said, like Sangsang, standing even when you know it hurts; like Du Xiaokang, doing the faceless thing with your head up. Then he paused and added, Dad, you be a little braver too. Go say that sorry. A twelve-year-old assigning homework to his father. I said yes. Early the next morning I did leave a message under that old classmate's name in WeChat, one line only: sorry for laughing at your fair hair back then. He answered two days later: I remember, and I stopped holding it long ago. Under those desk lamps I had thought I was showing him through the door. All along he had been leading me deeper into the house. One old book with a split spine, and it stitched the two of us together instead.