那本借来的草房子

小学四年级，我借到一本《草房子》，是同桌的。他只肯借三天，我三个晚上没睡够，书翻得快散了架。还回去时封面掉了，他用透明胶带粘上，摆摆手说没事。我妈知道后赔了钱，为这事家里安静了好几天。那本书我记了二十年，记的不是故事，是同桌那句没事。

前些年搬家，我在旧书摊上又碰见它，八成新，标价五块。买回来搁在床头，一直没翻开。真正重读是去年秋天，父亲生病住院，我夜里守累了，随手抽开它。

少年时读，我最爱桑桑：他敢把棉衣拆了卖，敢在夏天戴棉帽，敢带着纸月过河。杜小康那段我跳着看的，觉得一个败落人家的孩子没什么好看。这次重读，我恰恰在杜小康随父亲去放鸭那几页坐了一夜。芦荡像一堵绿色的墙围住他，他问父亲我们迷路了吗，父亲不答。他回家以后摆小摊，从前最阔的孩子在风里数毛票。

当年我不懂这些。如今父亲躺在病床上，我白天跑医院晚上跑单位，我才懂杜小康：苦难不是故事里那种壮丽的东西，它是你得低着头继续过的每一天。书里写他后来夜里偷偷去学校，把鸭子放在教室门口，第二天又赶在人来之前走掉。我读到这里停了很久——一个人最难的时候，还想给从前留一点体面。

合上书我想起同桌。前年同学聚会我提起那本书，他说早忘了。我说你说过没事。他想了想笑了，说那是件小事。我说不是，后来我懂了，那本书里最亮的一句话，就是你那句没事。

成年后再读《草房子》，我读懂了杜小康的苦，也读懂了当年那个不肯多收一分钱的同学。一本旧书，隔了三十年还给你，这样的书谁舍得不再读第二遍。

The Borrowed Copy of Grass House

In the fourth grade of primary school I borrowed a copy of Grass House from my deskmate. He would lend it only for three days, and I barely slept across those three nights, flipping it fast enough to shake it apart. When I returned it the cover had come off; he fixed it with clear tape and waved it off, saying it was nothing. My mother found out and paid for it, and the house stayed tense for days over that. I remembered that book for twenty years - not the story, but my deskmate's words: it's nothing.

Years later, during a move, I ran into it again at a secondhand book stall, nearly new, priced at five yuan. I bought it and put it on the bedside table without opening it. The real rereading came last autumn. My father was hospitalized, and one night, exhausted from watching over him, I picked the book up at random.

As a boy I loved Sang Sang most: he dared to unpick his padded coat and sell it, dared to wear a cotton hat in summer, dared to ferry Zhi Yue across the river. I skipped the Du Xiaokang parts, thinking a boy from a ruined family had nothing worth reading. This time I sat the whole night on the pages where Du Xiaokang follows his

father to herd ducks. The reed marsh closed around him like a green wall; he asked his father whether they were lost, and his father did not answer. After coming home he kept a street stall - once the grandest child in school, counting small bills in the wind.

I did not understand any of that back then. Now my father lies in a hospital bed while I run to the hospital by day and to work by night, and only now do I understand Du Xiaokang: hardship is not the grand thing stories make of it; it is every day you must live on with your head lowered. The book writes that he later crept to the school at night and left his ducks by the classroom door, slipping away before anyone came. I paused long at that line - even in a person's hardest hour, he still wants to keep a little dignity for his former self.

Closing the book, I thought of my deskmate. At a class reunion the year before last I brought up the book, and he said he had long forgotten it. I said you told me it was nothing. He thought a moment and laughed, saying it was a small thing. I said no - I understand now. The brightest line in that whole book was your line: it's nothing.

Rereading Grass House as an adult, I understood Du Xiaokang's hardship, and I also understood the classmate who once refused to take one extra cent. When an old book comes back to you across thirty years like this, who could bear not to read it a second time.