一排草房子的自述

我是一排草房子。油麻地小学的一排草房子。我的墙是茅草，我的顶是茅草，我的窗框被几十年的手摸得发亮。我不高，也不硬，风大的年份我弯一弯腰。可我站住了，站了很多年，把一群孩子站成了大人。

我见过最骄傲的孩子。杜小康穿皮夹克进教室，裤脚扎在皮鞋里。他父亲摇着船，船上有整个家。后来那条船翻了，不是在水里翻的，是在日子里翻的。杜小康退学，跟我告别那天，在我门口站了很久。我说：进来躲一躲风。他说不用，他要去芦苇荡。

芦苇荡替我养了他。芦花一片白的时候，暴风雨来了，芦苇全跪下，他不跪。鸭子跑散，他在芦荡里喊，喊哑了。等他再回到油麻地，他在我门口摆一个小摊，一根绳，几本书，几个纸盒。他抬头看我，我认出他了，可他眼睛里多了一样东西，一样我屋顶上从来没有过的东西。后来人们管那叫长大。

我也背过最疼的孩子。桑桑的病是从药寮里传出来的，苦味顺着风爬进我的教室。桑桑的父亲背着他，从我门前走过，一天，又一天。那个孩子的重量压在父亲背上，父亲的汗滴在门槛上。我在心里说：让他轻一点，再轻一点。我做不到。我只能把影子让长一些，给他们遮一小段太阳。

苦难从我屋顶上过，像霜，像雪，像那场压塌半边屋檐的大雨。温暖在我梁上住下，不走。它是秃鹤抬起的头，是纸月放进河里的纸船，是桑桑骑过大自行车的铃铛，是杜小康递出课本时那只冻红的手。

现在你们坐在砖楼里读书，窗玻璃是双层的中空玻璃。你们问我有什么用。我说：我教你们弯而不折。芦苇荡教过的，药寮教过的，我都记得。苦难不是来毁掉谁的，它是来验收的——验收谁能在霜底下，一直绿着。

合上书的时候，替我看一眼那排房子。茅草屋顶，金黄，发亮。风来了，它低头。风走了，它直起身。它还绿着。

A Row of Grass Houses Speaks

I am a row of grass houses. A row of grass houses of Youmadi Primary School. My walls are thatch, my roof is thatch, my window frames are polished bright by decades of hands. I am not tall, and I am not hard. In windy years I bend my waist a little. But I have stood my ground, stood for many years, standing a whole flock of children into grown-ups.

I saw the proudest child. Du Xiaokang walked into the classroom in a leather jacket, trouser cuffs tucked into leather shoes. His father rowed a boat, and on the boat was the whole family. Later that boat capsized — not in water, but in the days of life. Du Xiaokang left school. The day he said goodbye to me, he stood a long time at my door. I said: come in, hide from the wind. He said no, he was going to the reed marsh.

The reed marsh raised him in my place. When the reed flowers turned all white, the storm came. All the reeds knelt; he did not. The ducks scattered, and he shouted in the marsh until his voice went hoarse. When he came back to Youmadi, he set a little stall at my door: one rope, a few books, a few paper boxes. He looked up at me. I recognized him. But his eyes held one more thing, a thing never on my roof. People later called it growing up.

I also carried the child in the most pain. Sangsang's illness spread out from the medicine hut, its bitterness climbing into my classroom on the wind. The boy's father carried him on his back, passing in front of me, one day, then another. The boy's weight pressed on the father's back; the father's sweat dropped on my threshold. In my heart I said: make it lighter, a little lighter. I could not. I could only stretch my shadow longer, to shade them for a small piece of the sun.

Suffering passes over my roof — like frost, like snow, like the great rain that crushed half my eaves. Warmness moves in under my beam and does not leave. It is Bald Crane's lifted head, Paper Moon's paper boats on the river, Sangsang's bicycle bell, Du Xiaokang's red-frozen hand handing out a textbook.

Now you study in brick buildings, your windows double-paned. You ask what use I am. I say: I teach you to bend without breaking. What the reed marsh taught, what the medicine hut taught, I remember all of it. Suffering did not come to destroy anyone. It came to inspect — to inspect who can, beneath the frost, stay green the whole time.

When you close the book, take one look at that row of houses for me. Thatch roofs, golden, shining. When the wind comes, it lowers its head. When the wind leaves, it straightens up. It is still green.

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