草房子

那排房子是草做的。屋顶铺着金黄的茅草，墙是茅草，门是茅草，连走廊都散发着太阳晒过的味道。风来的时候，整排房子低头，又直起。读初中以后我才懂：草做的房子，为什么比砖瓦的更经得住风。

草房子住过最快乐的孩子。桑桑把白鸽赶上天，蚊帐改成渔网，铃铛响过整条河。纸月的字写在作业本上，轻得像怕吵醒谁。秃鹤的光头，在游行队伍里终于抬起来走路。那时候我以为，快乐是这本书的全部。

后来芦苇荡教我另一件事。芦苇荡很深，风一过，千万枝芦苇弯腰，像谁在哭，又不肯出声。杜小康跟着父亲摇船进去，芦荡的暴风雨抽打他的脸，鸭子飞散了，他追，摔倒，再追。芦苇荡不说话，它只是把孩子往里收，再放出来。放出来的时候，孩子已经换了一副骨头。

药寮教我第三件事。桑桑的病，把油麻地最欢的孩子疼成一只弯着腰的小虾。药寮里光线很暗，草药的苦味蹲在墙角。父亲背他去看病，一路走，一路背，背过田野，背过镇子，背过所有说没救了的目光。药寮的苦味里有一点甜，那是父亲脊背上的温度。

苦难和温暖，原来住在同一排草房子里。苦难是茅草上的霜，温暖是霜底下的草。霜让草弯下去，草在霜底下，一直绿着。杜雍和的船沉了，杜小康在油麻地小学门口摆起小摊，课本从他手里递出来，比从前任何一本都干净。

如今我坐在教室里，窗外没有芦苇荡，也没有河。可是翻开书，它们就在。草房子亮着，芦苇荡弯着腰，药寮的苦味隔着纸漫出来。我不再问快乐和苦难哪个是真的。我都收着。

草做的房子，住过最硬的日子，也住过最软的心。合上书，我对自己说：做草房子，不做砖瓦房。风来的时候低头，风走了，直起身，还绿着。

The Grass House

That row of houses is made of grass. The roof is layered with golden thatch, the walls are thatch, the doors are thatch, even the corridor gives off the smell of sun-dried straw. When the wind comes, the whole row bends down, then straightens up. Only after middle school did I understand: why a house made of grass can stand up to the wind better than one of brick and tile.

The grass house housed the happiest children. Sangsang chased his white doves into the sky, turned a mosquito net into a fishing net, let his bell ring along the whole river. Paper Moon's handwriting sat on her exercise book, light as if afraid to wake someone. Bald Crane's shining head, at last held high, walked in the parade. Back then I thought happiness was the whole of this book.

Later the reed marsh taught me another thing. The reed marsh is deep; when the wind passes, ten thousand reeds bend, like someone crying who refuses to make a

sound. Du Xiaokang followed his father rowing a boat into it. The storm in the marsh whipped his face, the ducks scattered, he chased, fell, chased again. The reed marsh says nothing. It only takes the child inward, then lets him out. And when he is let out, the child has a new set of bones.

The medicine hut taught me a third thing. Sangsang's illness bent the merriest child of Youmadi into a little shrimp doubled over by pain. Inside the medicine hut the light is dim, the bitterness of herbs squats in the corner. His father carried him on his back to see doctors, walking and carrying, across fields, across towns, across every gaze that said beyond cure. In the bitter smell of the medicine hut there is a little sweetness, and that is the warmth on his father's back.

Suffering and warmth, it turns out, live in the same row of grass houses. Suffering is the frost on the thatch; warmth is the grass beneath the frost. The frost bends the grass down, and the grass, under the frost, stays green the whole time. Du Yonghe's boat sank, and Du Xiaokang set up a little stall at the gate of Youmadi Primary School, handing out textbooks from his hands, cleaner than any book before.

Now I sit in my classroom, and outside the window there is no reed marsh, no river. But open the book, and they are there. The grass house glows, the reed marsh bends, the bitter smell of the medicine hut spreads out through the paper. I no longer ask which is real, happiness or suffering. I keep them both.

A house made of grass housed the hardest days and the softest hearts. Closing the book, I say to myself: be a grass house, not a brick house. Bend down when the wind comes; when the wind leaves, straighten up, and still be green.