苦药要一口一口喝

《草房子》里让我读得最慢的一段，是桑桑喝药。那药又苦又腥，他端起来，一口一口往下咽，咽得喉咙一耸一耸，咽完还冲他爸笑，说这药甜。我读到这里停了一下，因为我想起我妈给我冲的感冒冲剂，甜得发腻，我还嫌苦，每次含在嘴里半天，等它自己在舌头上化开，我妈说吞下去，我脖子一缩，药汁溅一桌子。

桑桑的病比我重一万倍。他脖子上的肿块疼起来，他弯着腰，扶着墙，一步一步走。他怕他爸背他累，自己走。他夜里疼醒了不吭声，怕他妈听见了哭。他那么疼，药还是一碗一碗喝，从没倒掉过一碗。我连一口甜药都要含半天，我脸上热。

我更不敢想的是打针。上次学校组织体检抽血，酒精棉刚擦上去我就哭了，针还没扎。护士让我握拳，我攥着我同桌的袖子。做完之后我同桌一句话没说，把棉签帮我按了五分钟。我当时觉得丢人，又觉得没办法，谁让我怕疼呢。

可是书里桑桑也怕疼啊，他疼得在地上滚，他也偷偷哭过。他跟我不一样的地方，不是他不知道疼，是他不把疼喊大。他把苦药一口一口喝，把疼一天一天过。喊，不会让针变细；不喊，也不会让针变粗。可是不喊的那个我，站得直一点。

所以我做了一个很小的决定：从下次喝药开始，一口吞，不喊苦；这个月去做理疗，针扎进来，我数自己的呼吸，一下，两下，不动。这个决定没人知道，不用告诉谁，它是我跟桑桑之间的一个约定。

上个月理疗，我真的从头到尾没扭。做完我坐在椅子上，出了一身汗，可是我心里特别亮，像有人把教室的灯全打开了。回家我把《草房子》放回书架，跟它说：你等着，我长大一点了。它没说话。书都不说话。可我知道它听见了。

Bitter Medicine Must Be Drunk Mouthful by Mouthful

The passage in The Straw House I read most slowly is Sangsang drinking his medicine. The medicine is bitter and fishy; he lifts it and swallows mouthful by mouthful, his throat bobbing as he swallows, and when he finishes he smiles at his father and says this medicine is sweet. I paused here, because I remembered the cold-drink mix my mother makes for me, sweet enough to cloy, and still I complain it is bitter. Every time I hold it in my mouth for ages, waiting for it to dissolve on its own on my tongue. My mother says swallow it, I shrink my neck, and the medicine splashes all over the table.

Sangsang's illness is ten thousand times worse than mine. When the lump on his neck hurts, he bends over, holds the wall, walks step by step. He is afraid his father will wear himself out carrying him, so he walks himself. He wakes at night in pain without a sound, afraid his mother will hear and cry. In such pain, still he drinks bowl after bowl of medicine, never poured one away. And I hold even a mouthful

of sweet medicine for ages. My face is hot.

What I dare not even think about is injections. At the school physical last term, the alcohol swab had barely touched me and I was crying, the needle not yet in. The nurse told me to clench my fist; I gripped my deskmate's sleeve instead. Afterward my deskmate said nothing and pressed the cotton ball for me for five minutes. I felt ashamed then, and also helpless — what can you do when you are afraid of pain.

But Sangsang in the book is afraid of pain too. He rolls on the ground, he has cried in secret. Where he differs from me is not that he does not know pain; it is that he does not shout the pain bigger. He drinks the bitter medicine mouthful by mouthful, he lives the pain day by day. Shouting will not make the needle thinner; not shouting will not make it thicker either. But the me that does not shout stands a little straighter.

So I made a very small decision: starting next time, I drink my medicine in one go and do not complain it is bitter; at this month's physiotherapy, when the needle goes in, I count my breaths, one, two, and do not move. Nobody knows this decision, I need not tell anyone. It is a pact between Sangsang and me.

Last month at the physiotherapy, I truly did not twist once from start to finish. Afterward I sat in the chair soaked in sweat, but inside I felt very bright, as if someone had switched on every light in the classroom. Going home I put The Straw House back on the shelf and said to it: you wait for me, I have grown a little. It did not answer. Books never answer. But I know it heard.

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