苦难是礼物？我一开始不信

老师在黑板上写下苦难是礼物这五个字的时候，我在笔记本旁边画了一个问号。苦难怎么会是礼物呢？我读完曹文轩的《草房子》，这个问题想了很久。

杜小康曾经是油麻地最体面的孩子。他家的红门杂货铺开在村口，门漆得亮堂堂的。后来红门贴上了白纸，他爹沉了船，一家人的日子一下子塌了。他被迫退学，跟着爹去芦苇荡放鸭。鸭子受惊跑散，他一个人在暴风雨里追，追到分不清脸上是雨水还是泪水。读到他在学校门口摆小摊，我等着他哭，他没有。他只是把白手套抻了抻，把价钱一样一样喊清楚。

桑桑脖子上长了包，医生把烧红的火针按下去，整间屋子都听见他的叫声，可他没去推医生的手。那以后每一碗苦药他都一口闷下去，脸皱成一团，手端得稳稳的。他还背着妹妹上城墙根看风景，好像生病的人不是他。

我想起自己。上学期数学竞赛选拔，我输在最后一轮，把自己关在屋里两天，连错题本都不想看。跟杜小康的红门、桑桑的火针比，我这点挫折好像很小。可疼就是疼，摔倒的时候，别人的尺子量不到自己身上。

后来我还是把错题本翻开了，一道一道把错处过了一遍。不是忽然想通了什么，只是不甘心输得不明不白。也就是从那天起我才慢慢明白：苦难本身从来不是礼物。让它变成礼物的，是苦难过后重新站起来、肯回头清点自己的人。

杜小康支起了摊，桑桑喝完了药，我坐回了自己的书桌前。礼物的包装纸不一定好看，有时是红门上贴的白纸，有时是药碗里冒出的苦味。可你肯耐心拆开，里面多半藏着一点东西，让你比从前更敢往前走一步。

Hardship Is a Gift? I Did Not Believe It at First

When the teacher wrote the words hardship is a gift on the blackboard, I drew a question mark beside them in my notebook. How could hardship be a gift? I finished reading Cao Wenxuan's Grass House, and the question stayed with me for a long time.

Du Xiaokang was once the most respected boy in Youmadi. His family's general store stood at the village entrance behind a red door, its paint bright and clean. Then white paper was pasted over that red door. His father lost a boatload of goods, and the family's life collapsed overnight. He had to leave school and follow his father into the reed marsh to herd ducks. Frightened by the storm, the ducks scattered in every direction, and he chased them alone until he could not tell rain from tears on his face. When he set up a small stall by the school gate, I kept waiting for him to cry. He did not. He just straightened his white gloves and called out his prices, one by one, clearly.

Sang Sang grew a lump on his neck, and the doctor pressed a red-hot needle into it. The whole room heard him cry out, yet he never pushed the doctor's hand away. After that, he drank every bowl of bitter medicine in one gulp, his face scrunched up but his hands perfectly steady. He even carried his little sister on his back to the foot of the city wall to watch the scenery, as if the sick one were not him.

I thought of myself. Last term I lost the final round of the math contest selection, and I shut myself in my room for two days, unwilling to even look at my notebook of mistakes. Compared with Du Xiaokang's red door and Sang Sang's fire needle, my setback seemed small. But pain is pain. When you fall, nobody else's ruler can measure what lands on you.

In the end I opened the mistake notebook and went through every error one by one. It was not that I suddenly understood something. I simply refused to lose without knowing why. That was also the day I began to see: hardship itself is never a gift. What turns it into one is the person who gets back up afterward and has the courage to take stock of themselves.

Du Xiaokang set up his stall, Sang Sang finished his medicine, and I sat back down at my desk. The wrapping paper of a gift is not always pretty. Sometimes it is the white paper pasted on a red door; sometimes it is the bitter smell rising from a medicine bowl. But if you are patient enough to open it, you will usually find something inside that makes you dare to take one more step forward than before.

红门、药罐，和那张没及格的卷子

我的书桌角上摆着三样东西：一本《草房子》，一只旧茶杯，还有一张订在笔记最后的物理测验卷。妈妈问我为什么留着那张打了大红叉的卷子。当时我答不上来，现在想想，答得上来了。

《草房子》里，我最放不下的是那扇红门。杜家的杂货铺一直开在红门后面，他们是油麻地最富的人家。船沉了以后，红门贴上白纸，杜小康从大家仰着看的同学，变成了大家垂着怜的同学。他不肯要那份怜。他跟着爹进芦苇荡，鸭子跑散了，他一个人追，追到天黑，抱住找回来的头鸭坐在泥里。

同样忘不了的，还有桑桑药寮里的味道。那间小屋常年飘着药气，桑桑把最苦的药一口一口灌下去，火针按在脖子上，他疼得攥紧床单，也没喊第二声。病拿走了他的力气，没把他变成胆小的人。他后来还把自己的棉袄脱给了比他更冷的人。

我那张物理测验卷，分数难看得不能给人看。我在楼梯间哭了一场，回家宣布再也不学物理，整整一周没翻开课本。后来物理老师把我叫过去，一道一道错处讲下来，我发现不是自己笨，是太多地方装懂，把窟窿留到了考场上。

现在把三样东西摆在一起看，我懂了：红门是杜小康要扛的，药罐是桑桑要扛的，那张卷子是我要扛的。人得学会扛自己那一份，扔不掉，也装看不见不行。

我不再想撕那张卷子。我把它翻过来，在背面把错题重做了一遍，红叉还在，可它不再扎眼。杜小康支摊那天，桑桑喝完药那天，我重新拿起物理课本那天，都是普通的一天，也都是人这辈子少不了的一天。苦难没敲门的时候，谁也躲不过；它进了门，能陪它坐下来的，只有自己。

The Red Door, the Medicine Pot, and My Failed Test Paper

Three things sit on the corner of my desk: a copy of Grass House, an old tea cup, and a physics test paper stapled at the back of my notebook. My mother once asked me why I kept that paper with its big red cross. I had no answer then. Now, thinking it over, I do.

In Grass House, what I cannot let go of is the red door. The Du family store had always stood behind it, and they were the wealthiest household in Youmadi. After the boat sank, white paper was pasted over the red door, and Du Xiaokang changed in everyone's eyes from a classmate they looked up to one they looked down on with pity. He refused the pity. He followed his father into the reed marsh. When the ducks scattered, he chased them alone until dark, then sat in the mud holding the first duck he caught back.

Just as hard to forget is the smell inside Sang Sang's medicine room. That little room always hung with the steam of herbs. Sang Sang forced the bitterest medicine down mouthful by mouthful. When the fire needle pressed into his neck, he gripped the bedsheet hard and never cried out a second time. The illness took his strength but did not turn him into a coward. Later he even took off his own padded coat and gave it to someone colder than himself.

My physics test paper carried a score too ugly to show anyone. I cried once in the stairwell, came home and announced I would never study physics again, and did not open the textbook for a whole week. Then my physics teacher called me over and went through the mistakes one by one. I found it was not that I was slow. It was that I had pretended to understand too many things, leaving holes for the exam to find.

Looking at the three things side by side now, I understand: the red door is what Du Xiaokang must carry, the medicine pot is what Sang Sang must carry, and that test paper is what I must carry. Everyone has to learn to carry their own share. You cannot throw it away, and you cannot pretend you do not see it.

I no longer want to tear up the paper. I turned it over and redid every wrong problem on the back. The red cross is still there, but it no longer stabs my eyes.

The day Du Xiaokang set up his stall, the day Sang Sang finished his medicine, the day I picked up the physics textbook again, were all ordinary days, and all days no life can do without. When hardship has not yet knocked, nobody escapes; once it walks in, the only one who can sit down with it is yourself.

我们仨上了一堂叫苦难的课

昨晚睡前，我想象出一间教室。黑板上写着两个字：苦难。教室里只有三个学生，杜小康、桑桑，还有我。老师没来，我们决定轮流讲自己的事。

杜小康先讲。他没提从前家里的红门有多气派，只讲芦苇荡。他说荡里的风能把芦苇压成片，鸭子在雷声里炸了群，他追了一夜，抱住找回来的鸭子坐在泥水里，泥浸透了裤腿也不挪窝。他说：没有路可走的时候，就多走一步。

桑桑卷起袖子，给我们看脖子上火针留下的疤。他说针按下去的那一下，他想着城墙根的风、想着妹妹的羊角辫，疼就轻了一点。他说：病挑不了，药可以选着一口喝还是十口喝。

轮到我，我沉默了一会儿，讲起那辆自行车。爸攒了半年钱给我买的，午休的工夫停在校门口就没了。我蹲在传达室边上哭，回家一路走得腿发沉。我说：那之后一个月我都不想上学。后来爸说咱再攒，晚上爷俩趴在桌上数钱，数着数着，我心里那块石头松了一点。

讲完，教室里静了一会儿，窗外的梧桐影子在黑板上晃。我们仨来的地方不一样，受过的伤大小也不一样，可走出来的样子却像：都学会了不盯着那个窟窿看，都学会了不等疼自己过去，先动起来。

我问他们：苦难到底是不是礼物？杜小康想了想说，不是礼物，是一笔债，你得把日子过好才算还上。桑桑说，不是礼物，是一碗药，苦，但治虚病。

铃响了，放学。我们仨走出教室，太阳压得很低，影子被拉得很长。我知道那间教室不存在，可我也知道，在油麻地，在我自己的日子里，这堂课一直没下课。黑板上的两个字，我打算抄在错题本的扉页上，往后每翻一次，就当又进教室坐了一回。

The Three of Us Took a Lesson Called Hardship

Last night before sleep, I pictured a classroom. Two words were written on the blackboard: hardship. There were only three students in it: Du Xiaokang, Sang Sang, and me. The teacher never came, so we decided to take turns telling our own stories.

Du Xiaokang went first. He did not mention how grand his family's red door used to be. He spoke only of the reed marsh. He said the wind there could bend the reeds

flat in whole sheets, that the ducks burst into panic at the thunder, and he chased them all night. When he caught one, he sat in the mud holding it, water soaking through his trousers, unwilling to move. He said: when there is no road left, take one more step.

Sang Sang rolled up his sleeve and showed us the scar the fire needle left on his neck. He said that in the moment the needle pressed down, he thought of the wind by the old city wall and his little sister's pigtails, and the pain eased a little. He said: you cannot choose your illness, but you can choose whether to drink the medicine in one gulp or in ten.

When it was my turn, I was quiet for a while, then told them about the bicycle. My father had saved for half a year to buy it, and it vanished from the school gate during a single lunch break. I cried beside the guard room, and walked home with legs like lead. I said: for a month after that I did not want to go to school. Then my father said, we will save again. At night the two of us bent over the table counting coins, and somewhere in the counting, the stone in my chest loosened a little.

When we finished, the classroom was silent for a while, and the shadow of a plane tree outside the window swayed across the blackboard. The three of us came from different places, and the wounds we carried were of different sizes, yet we looked alike in how we walked out: all of us had learned not to stare at the hole, and not to wait for the pain to pass by itself, but to move first.

I asked them: is hardship a gift after all? Du Xiaokang thought a moment and said, it is not a gift, it is a debt, and you repay it by living well. Sang Sang said, it is not a gift, it is a bowl of medicine, bitter, but it cures the sickness of being frail.

The bell rang. School was over. The three of us walked out of the classroom with the sun pressed low and our shadows stretched long. I know that classroom does not exist. But I also know that in Youmadi, and in my own days, this lesson never ends. I plan to copy those two words from the blackboard onto the first page of my mistake notebook, so that every time I open it, it is like sitting in that classroom once more.

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