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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