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.