

沉进水里的那只南瓜

《草房子》里有一只南瓜，它没有名字，却让我记了很久。就是这只南瓜，把秦大奶奶永远带走了。

要懂这只南瓜，得先懂秦大奶奶这个人。在油麻地小学的孩子眼里，她是个讨人嫌的老太婆：住在校园角落的破屋里，成天跟学校作对。鸡鸭进了草地，她挥着竹竿满院子撵，骂声能传出二里地；孩子从她屋前抄近道，她会扬手吓唬。谁见了她都绕着走，背地里叫她怪老太婆。说实话，我读到这里也讨厌她，心想世界上怎么有这样不讲理的老人。

可后来发生的事，一拳一拳打在我心上。乔乔失足落水，岸上的大人孩子都慌了神，是秦大奶奶第一个跳进河里。她不会水，喝了一肚子浑水，硬是把乔乔顶出了水面。还有一次，学校地里的瓜果蔬了，她半夜起来一根根扶正，像护自家的娃。我越读越奇怪：这个嘴上恨学校恨了一辈子的老太太，怎么手脚比谁都护着学校？

直到那只南瓜滚到水边。一个熟透的南瓜，从篱笆边滚到河边，眼看要漂走。秦大奶奶去捞它，脚下一滑，掉进了水里。人们捞上来南瓜，却没有捞回她。我读到这里停了很久：她这一辈子，跟学校抢了一辈子地，到头来却为学校的收成丢了命。她抢地，是因为那是她男人用命换来的；她护瓜，是因为她终于把这块地当成了自己的家。她不是不讲理，她只是把理都藏在粗话底下，不会好好说出来。

油麻地的人终于懂了。他们把秦大奶奶葬在校园边上，让她天天听着孩子们的读书声。从前绕着她屋子走的孩子，如今路过她的坟，都会安安静静地把脚步放轻。

那只南瓜后来被人捧回了厨房。你看，它照见了秦大奶奶的心：凶了一辈子的人，心是软的；骂得最响的人，爱得最深。我也想起小区里那个总瞪孩子的门卫爷爷，后来才知道他每天最早到岗，雨天背低年级的孩子过马路。从秦大奶奶起，我不再用一张脸去断定一颗心。要懂一个人，得等他跳进河里的那一刻。

The Pumpkin That Sank Into the Water

There is a pumpkin in The Straw House. It has no name, yet I have remembered it for a long time. It was this pumpkin that took Grandma Qin away forever.

To understand the pumpkin, you must first understand Grandma Qin. In the eyes of the children of Youmadi Primary School, she was a disliked old woman: living in a shabby hut in the corner of the schoolyard, opposing the school day after day. When chickens and ducks strayed onto the grass, she chased them across the yard with a bamboo pole, her scolding carrying two li through the air; if children cut across in front of her hut, she raised her hand to frighten them. Everyone gave her a wide berth and called her the strange old woman behind her back. To be honest, I disliked her too as I read this, wondering how the world could hold such an irrational old person.

But what happened afterward punched me in the heart, blow after blow. When Qiaoqiao fell into the water, the grown-ups and children on the bank panicked, and Grandma Qin was the first to jump into the river. She could not swim; she swallowed bellyfuls of muddy water, yet she pushed Qiaoqiao up above the surface. Another time, the vegetables in the school field wilted, and she got up at midnight to straighten them one by one, guarding them like her own babies. The more I read, the more puzzled I became: this old woman who claimed to hate the school her whole life—why were her hands and feet guarding the school more than anyone's?

Then the pumpkin rolled to the water's edge. A fully ripe pumpkin rolled from beside the fence to the riverbank, about to float away. Grandma Qin went to fish it out, her foot slipped, and she fell into the water. People fished up the pumpkin, but they did not fish her back up. I paused for a long time there: she had fought the school over that land her whole life, and in the end she gave her life for the school's harvest. She fought for the land because her husband had traded his life for it; she guarded its crops because at last she had come to treat this land as her home. She was not irrational—she only hid all her reason beneath rough words, unable to say it gently.

The people of Youmadi understood at last. They buried Grandma Qin at the edge of the schoolyard, so she could listen to the children reading aloud every day. The children who once detoured around her hut now pass her grave in silence, softening their footsteps.

The pumpkin was later carried back to the kitchen. You see, it reflected Grandma Qin's heart: the person who was fierce all her life had a soft heart; the person who scolded the loudest loved the deepest. I thought of the gatekeeper grandpa in our neighborhood who always glared at children; only later did I learn he arrived at work earliest every day and carried younger children across the street on rainy days. Ever since Grandma Qin, I no longer use a face to judge a heart. To understand a person, you must wait for the moment they jump into the river.