

油麻地少了一种声音

读完《草房子》，油麻地的画面我都还记得，但最先回到我耳朵里的，是声音。

头一种是秦大奶奶的骂声。天不亮，她的屋子前就传来鸡鸭扑翅膀的声音，接着是她的竹竿抽在篱笆上的脆响，再然后就是她中气十足的骂。她骂偷食的鸡鸭，骂抄近道的孩子，骂油麻地小学占了她的地。那声音又粗又硬，像一块老树皮擦过瓦片。书里的孩子烦她，我也烦：怎么会有这样一个整天吵闹的老太太？我甚至想起我们楼道里挨家拍门催物业费的邻居阿姨，我也嫌她嗓门大。

第二种声音，是河里的扑腾声。乔乔落水那天，岸上的惊叫乱成一片，紧接着扑通一声，有人跳了下去——是秦大奶奶。她在浑水里扑腾，喉咙里咕噜咕噜灌着水，手却高高把乔乔往水面托。那声音一点也不好听，呛、急、吓人，可我读得鼻子发酸：原来那副骂人的嗓子底下，藏着这样一个不肯见死不救的心。

第三种声音，是南瓜事件之后的安静。秦大奶奶为捞学校那只滚到水边的南瓜，滑进了河里，再没上来。油麻地忽然没了她的骂声。竹竿不抽了，鸡鸭没人撵了，校园角落那间破屋的门开着，里面静得让人心慌。人们这才发现：原来那些年被她骂声罩着的日子，早就习惯了，也早就被护着了。一直不知道。桑桑他们把她的坟迁到校园边，从此她的坟头天天有读书声陪着。我读到这里，忽然替从前的油麻地害臊：她吵的时候没人领她的情，她安静了，所有人开始对她好。

书里的孩子们终于不再以貌取人，可他们明白得太晚了。我合上书想：我能不能早一点明白？楼道里那位嗓门大的阿姨，每天挨家拍门，是怕谁家忘锁门招贼；她催物业费，是怕楼道的灯坏了没人出钱修。她跟秦大奶奶一样，把守护做成了吵闹的样子，只等一个南瓜、一次落水，才让人看见她的心。

油麻地后来再没有那种骂声。我耳朵里却一直留着它。它提醒我：下次再被谁的声音吵到，先别捂耳朵。吵闹底下，可能正有人在替你看着鸡鸭、护着庄稼。

Youmadi Lost One Kind of Sound

After finishing *The Straw House*, I still remember the scenes of Youmadi, but the first things that return to my ears are its sounds.

The first is Grandma Qin's scolding. Before dawn, the sound of chickens and ducks flapping their wings comes from in front of her hut, then the crisp crack of her bamboo pole on the fence, and then her full-throated scolding. She scolds the chickens and ducks that steal food, the children who cut across her path, and the Youmadi Primary School that took her land. Her voice is coarse and hard, like old tree bark scraped across roof tiles. The children in the book are annoyed by her, and so am I: how can there be an old woman who quarrels all day long? I even thought of the neighbor auntie in our stairwell who knocks on every door to press people for the property fee—I, too, found her voice too loud.

The second sound is the thrashing in the river. The day Qiaoqiao fell in, the screams on the bank melted into chaos, and then came a splash—someone jumped in. It was Grandma Qin. She thrashed in the muddy water, her throat gulping it down, yet her hands pushed Qiaoqiao high toward the surface. That sound was far from pleasant: choking, urgent, frightening. But I read it with a stinging nose: beneath that scolding voice hid a heart that refused to watch a child die.

The third sound is the silence after the pumpkin. Grandma Qin slipped into the river while trying to rescue the school's pumpkin that had rolled to the water's edge, and never came back. Suddenly Youmadi had no scolding left. The bamboo pole stopped cracking, nobody chased the chickens and ducks anymore, and the door of the shabby hut in the schoolyard corner stood open, silent enough to make people uneasy. Only then did people realize: those years covered by her scolding had long been part of their lives, and they had long been guarded without knowing it. Sangsang and the others moved her grave to the edge of the schoolyard, and from then on the sound of children reading aloud kept her company every day. Reading this, I suddenly felt ashamed for the old Youmadi: while she was noisy, nobody appreciated her; once she fell silent, everyone began treating her kindly.

The children in the book finally stopped judging people by appearances, but they understood too late. I closed the book and asked myself: can I understand sooner? The loud auntie in our stairwell knocks on every door because she worries some family forgot to lock up; she presses for the property fee because she fears the stairwell light will burn out with nobody to pay for repairs. Like Grandma Qin, she shaped her guardianship into noise, waiting for a pumpkin, a fall into water, before letting people see her heart.

Youmadi never heard that scolding again. But it stays in my ears. It reminds me: next time someone's voice annoys me, do not cover my ears first. Beneath the noise, someone may be watching over your chickens and ducks, guarding your crops.