

## 坟头旁边的艾草

《草房子》读到末尾，油麻地小学东边的艾地旁多了一座坟。学校给她立碑，桑桑和纸月在灵前跪了一整夜。我先把这一页折了个角，又从头往回翻。倒着读秦大奶奶，比顺着读更疼。

往回翻到那条河。乔乔踩空落水，离河最远的老太太第一个跳下去。人救上来了，在岸上吐水，哭。她没回来。一个平时被孩子躲着走的人，最后是被一条河记住的。岸上的人后来回忆，说她下水前鞋都没来得及脱，竹竿还立在自家门口，斜斜地靠着门框，谁也没去动它。再往前翻，是菜地。学校种的青菜叫鸡鸭糟蹋，她拄着竹竿满场跑，喊这是学校的地。桑乔校长向她道谢，她嘴硬，说我是看不得糟蹋东西。可从那以后，孩子们开始往她那边跑，她兜里的枣子就没空过。

再往前，是她抱着锄头坐在艾地头的年月。那片艾是她和丈夫一锄一锄开出来的，丈夫死后她守着地，像守着他。学校占了地，草房子盖起来，她骂，闹，往新栽的树苗边上吐痰。全校都烦她。油麻地的人提起她，先皱眉，再叹气。那时候没有人看见她夜里一个人坐在艾草中间，也不明白一个人把一辈子押在地上的时候，你很难要求她讲道理。

合上书，我还是先想那座坟。艾地还在，艾草比往年高，坟在地的边上，她到底挨着自己开出来的地。油麻地的孩子放学从那儿过，不再喊老怪物了，风大的时候，有人会把围巾解下来系紧，像替她掖被角。我说不清这算不算原谅。我只知道，一个人心里善良长出来的时候，比她固执的时候慢，也比她固执的时候结实。

艾草秋天会枯，根不死，第二年照旧青。书合上了，那片地在我心里一直青着。

## The Wormwood Beside the Grave

Near the end of Grass House, a grave appears beside the wormwood field east of Youma Di Primary School. The school sets up a stone for her. Sangsang and Zhiyue kneel before the bier through the whole night. I fold the corner of that page first, then flip backward from there. Reading Grandma Qin backward hurts more than reading her forward.

Flipping back reaches the river. Qiaoqiao steps into empty air and falls in. The old woman who lives farthest from the water jumps in first. The child is pulled out, spitting water on the bank, crying. She does not come back. A person children used to walk around in the end is remembered by a river. People on the bank recalled later that she had no time to take off her shoes before entering the water; her bamboo pole was still standing at her own door, leaning crooked against the frame, and no one ever moved it. Further back is the vegetable garden. When chickens and ducks ruin the school greens, she runs across the field with a bamboo pole, shouting that this is the school land. Headmaster Sang Qiao thanks her. She puts on a tough mouth and says she simply cannot bear to see things wasted. But after that the children start running to her side, and the jujubes in her pocket are never empty.

Further back are the years she sat at the edge of the wormwood field hugging her hoe. She and her husband opened that field hoe by hoe, and after he died she guarded it as if guarding him. The school took the land, grass houses went up, and she cursed, made scenes, spat beside newly planted saplings. The whole school was fed up with her. People in Youma Di would frown first, then sigh, when her name came up. No one saw her at night sitting alone among the wormwood, and no one understood that when a person stakes an entire life on a piece of ground, it is hard to demand that she be reasonable.

Closing the book, I still think of the grave first. The wormwood field is still there, the plants taller than before, the grave at the edge of the field, and in the end she lies next to the land she opened herself. Children leaving school pass that spot and no longer shout old monster. On windy days someone loosens a scarf and ties it tight again, as if tucking in a blanket for her. I cannot say whether that counts as forgiveness. I only know that when kindness grows in a person, it grows slower than her stubbornness, and it holds firmer than her stubbornness too.

Wormwood withers in autumn, but the roots do not die, and the field turns green again the next year. The book is closed, yet that field stays green inside me.