

艾地里的秦大奶奶

油麻地的村边有一片艾地，常年绿得发暗。《草房子》里我第一次读到它，就记住了地的主人，秦大奶奶。那片地不是生来就叫艾地的。早年它是一片荒地，她和丈夫一锄一锄把它开出来，种上艾。艾草能驱虫，也能换几个钱。丈夫死得早，剩下她一个人，守着锄头，守着地，从青年守到白头。

后来学校占了那片地，草房子一间一间立起来。她不肯走，抱着锄头坐在地头，谁劝都不听。孩子们怕她，也烦她，远远喊她老怪物。她骂学校，骂种在艾地上的草房子，骂了十几年。读到这里时我不太喜欢她。一个老太太，挡在孩子们上学的地方，怎么想都不可爱。曹文轩没有替她辩解，只是把她的固执原样摆在那里，像那块地本身，硬，冷，翻不动。

转机是一点一点来的。学校菜地里的鸡鸭来糟蹋青菜，她拄着竹竿去赶，一边赶一边喊，这是学校的地，你们不能糟蹋。她护的是学校的菜，不是自家的艾。孩子们不知什么时候开始改口，喊她秦大奶奶。放学时有人跟在她身后，她兜里揣着枣子、花生，摸出来塞给孩子，嘴上还凶，叫他们别跟着。

再后来，乔乔落水。她离河最远，跳下去最快。乔乔被推上河岸，哇地吐出一口水，她却沒有上来。读到这一段，我合上书坐了很久。前半生她拼了命要留住那片地，后半生她把命留在了学校的河里。她心里那点善良，原来一直有，只是被几十年的委屈压着，要等到菜地里的鸡、河里的孩子，才一层一层露出来。

学校给她开了追悼会，桑桑和纸月跪在灵前守了一夜。坟就葬在艾地旁边。第二年，艾长得格外好，风一过，整片地都朝一个方向斜。孩子们路过，会放慢脚步。风从草房子的屋顶吹到艾地上，艾草弯一弯，又直起来。

Grandma Qin in the Wormwood Field

At the edge of Youma Di village there was a field of wormwood, dark green all year round. When I first read about it in Grass House, I remembered its owner, Grandma Qin. The field was not born a wormwood field. Years ago it was wasteland. She and her husband broke it open hoe by hoe and planted wormwood, which could drive away insects and bring in a few coins. Her husband died early, leaving her alone with the hoe and the field, guarding it from youth until her hair turned white.

Later the school took the field, and one grass house after another rose on it. She refused to leave. She sat at the edge of the field hugging her hoe, listening to no one. The children feared her and were annoyed by her, shouting old monster at her from far away. She cursed the school, cursed the grass houses planted on her wormwood, and cursed for more than ten years. Reading this part, I did not like her much. An old woman standing in the way of children going to school, however you look at it, is not lovable. Cao Wenxuan did not argue on her behalf. He simply laid her stubbornness out as it was, like the field itself, hard, cold, impossible to turn

over.

The change came little by little. When chickens and ducks got into the school vegetable garden and ruined the greens, she went after them with a bamboo pole, driving them off while shouting, this is the school land, you must not ruin it. She was protecting the school vegetables, not her own wormwood. At some point the children started calling her Grandma Qin. After school some followed behind her. She kept jujubes and peanuts in her pocket, took them out and pressed them into small hands, while scolding them not to follow.

Then Qiaoqiao fell into the river. She lived farthest from the water, yet jumped in fastest. Qiaoqiao was pushed onto the bank and spat out a mouthful of water, but she never came up. I closed the book and sat for a long time. In the first half of her life she fought to keep that field; in the second half she left her life in the school river. The kindness in her heart had always been there, pressed down by decades of grievance, waiting for the chickens in the garden and the child in the river to bring it out layer by layer.

The school held a memorial for her. Sangsang and Zhiyue knelt before the bier and kept vigil all night. Her grave lies beside the wormwood field. The next year the wormwood grew taller than ever, and when the wind passed, the whole field leaned in one direction. Children slow their steps when they pass. The wind blows from the roofs of the grass houses to the field; the wormwood bends, then straightens again.