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，她却没有上来。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.

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.

那片艾地记得

油麻地最清楚秦大奶奶的，不是人，是那片艾地。艾是她和丈夫亲手种下的。荒地翻过来那天，丈夫的锄头磨秃了一把，她把手掌上的茧给他看，两个人笑了。后来丈夫埋进了土，她守着剩下的艾，一年一年，艾高了又枯，枯了又高。地认得她的脚步，从快走，到拄拐，到拖着走。

学校来占地的消息传开那天，她在地头坐了一夜。第二天起，她抱着锄头坐在草房子前，见人来骂，骂完接着坐。艾地里的艾被踩倒了一片，她心疼，更心疼的是地要没了。这一坐就是十几年。人在外头说她犟，艾地不评理。艾地只记得她夜里拔草，把踩倒的艾一株一株扶起来，扶的时候手很轻，跟白天骂人的那个人不像同一个。

鸡鸭进学校菜地那天，最先冲过去的也是她。竹竿挥得歪歪斜斜，鸡扑棱着飞，她喊，糟蹋东西，作孽。她护的不是艾，艾地看明白了，她护的是她终于找到的一个用处。从那以后她的竹竿换了用途，枣子装进了兜里。艾地听见过孩子们围着她，声音比风还密。

乔乔落水那天，艾地离河最近，却拦不住她。她跑过去的时候鞋都跑掉了一只。艾地后来只等到一个消息：孩子活了，她没上来。艾地等了她几十年，从她年轻时等到她白发，最后等到这一句。

坟埋在艾地边上。学校开了追悼会，桑乔校长念她，孩子们哭，桑桑和纸月跪在灵前。埋她的第二天，艾草上落了一层白霜，太阳出来，霜化了，地又绿回去。艾地不说什么。它只是记得：她开过它，守过它，骂过占它的人，最后睡回它旁边。风一年一年从草房子那边吹过来，艾草点头，像是她把该说的话，都留给了这片地。

The Wormwood Field Remembers

The thing in Youma Di that knew Grandma Qin best was not a person. It was the wormwood field. She and her husband planted the wormwood with their own hands. The day they turned the wasteland over, his hoe wore blunt a second time, and she showed him the calluses on her palms, and the two of them laughed. Later her husband went into the earth, and she kept what wormwood remained, year after year, the plants growing tall, withering, growing green again. The field knew her footsteps, from brisk, to leaning on a cane, to dragging along.

She sat in the field all night the day news spread that the school would take the land. From the next day on she sat before the grass houses hugging her hoe, cursing whoever came, then sitting on after cursing. A patch of wormwood was trampled flat, and she ached for the plants, but ached more for losing the land. She sat like that for over a decade. People out there called her obstinate; the field took no sides. The field only remembers her pulling weeds at night, straightening the trampled wormwood one plant at a time, her hands very gentle then, nothing like the woman who cursed in daylight.

She was again the first to rush over the day chickens and ducks got into the school garden. Her bamboo pole swung crooked, the chickens fluttered away, and she shouted, wasting things is a sin. She was not defending the wormwood. The field understood: she was defending the one use she had finally found for herself. After that her bamboo pole changed jobs, and jujubes went into her pocket. The field heard children crowding around her, their voices thicker than wind.

The day Qiaoqiao fell into the river, the wormwood field lay closest to the water, yet could not hold her back. She lost a shoe running. The field waited afterward and received only one piece of news: the child lived, she did not come up. The field had waited for her across decades, from her youth to her white hair, and in the end waited for this sentence.

Her grave was buried at the edge of the field. The school held a memorial; Headmaster Sang Qiao read her name, the children cried, Sangsang and Zhiyue knelt before the bier. The morning after the burial, frost lay white on the wormwood; when the sun came out it melted, and the field turned green again. The field says nothing. It only remembers: she opened it, guarded it, cursed those who took it, and finally slept back beside it. Year after year the wind blows over from the grass houses, and the wormwood nods, as if she left the field everything she meant to say.

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