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.

www.vv99.net