

药寮里的无词歌

《草房子》里有一间屋子，终年飘着苦味，叫药寮。屋主人温幼菊老师自己也病着，瘦，说话轻，走路也轻，像一阵风就能把她吹走。桑桑病了，天天来喝药。药是黑的，稠，苦得舌头发麻。桑桑端着碗，先不动，看着碗里那一团黑。

温老师不催他。她坐在灶边，看着火，忽然开口唱歌。没有词，只有一个调子，起起伏伏，像水波，又像风穿过草顶。她唱得很小声，好像不是唱给桑桑的，是唱给自己，唱给那碗药，唱给这间屋子。桑桑后来就端着碗喝起来了，喝一口，停一停，听她唱一段，再喝一口。碗底见了底，苦还在嘴里，可桑桑说，那是他喝过的最不难喝的药。温老师也不夸他，只把空碗接过去，在罐沿上磕一磕，说，明天来。第二天桑桑真的去了，进门先坐下，等那支调子起来。

我读这一段读了三遍。第一遍看见药苦，第二遍看见歌轻，第三遍才看见唱歌的人。温幼菊自己也在喝药。她的歌里没有词，我猜她是不想把苦说出来。有词的歌要说清一件事，无词的歌只要把气吐出来，跟着火苗一起一伏。她教给桑桑的，其实不是勇敢，是挨着苦坐下来的办法：不必讲它，哼着它，一口一口，它就见了底。

桑桑后来好了，离开了油麻地。药寮还在，灶上的罐子还咕嘟咕嘟响。我合上书，耳朵里留着那个调子。它没有名字，没有词，可我知道它从哪儿来。它从一个瘦瘦的女人的嗓子里来，从一个满是苦味的屋子里来，从火苗和药罐的响声里来。它告诉我，有些安慰不讲话。它只是坐在你旁边，把苦的日子哼成一段调子，等你把碗喝空，它才停。

The Wordless Song in the Medicine Hut

There is a room in Grass House that smells of bitterness all year round. It is called the medicine hut. Its keeper, Teacher Wen Youju, is ill herself, thin, soft-spoken, soft-footed, as if a gust of wind could carry her off. Sangsang falls ill and comes every day to drink his medicine. The medicine is black, thick, so bitter his tongue goes numb. He holds the bowl and does not move at first, staring at the dark mass inside.

Teacher Wen does not hurry him. She sits by the stove, watches the fire, and suddenly begins to sing. There are no words, only a melody, rising and falling like ripples, like wind moving across a thatched roof. She sings very quietly, as if not to Sangsang but to herself, to the bowl of medicine, to the room itself. After a while Sangsang lifts the bowl and drinks. One sip, a pause, one stretch of her song, then another sip. When the bottom of the bowl shows, the bitterness is still in his mouth, yet Sangsang says it was the least terrible medicine he ever drank. Teacher Wen praises him either. She takes the empty bowl, taps it twice on the rim of the pot, and says, come tomorrow. And Sangsang really goes the next day, sits down first, and waits for that melody to rise.

I read this passage three times. The first time I saw the bitter medicine. The

second time I saw the light song. The third time I finally saw the woman singing. Wen Youju is drinking medicine too. Her song has no words, and I think it is because she does not want to say the bitterness out loud. A song with words has to state one thing clearly; a wordless song only asks you to breathe out, rising and falling with the flame. What she taught Sangsang was not courage, really. It was a way of sitting down beside suffering: do not talk about it, hum along with it, sip by sip, and it will show its bottom.

Sangsang gets well later and leaves Youma Di. The medicine hut is still there, the pot on the stove still bubbling. I close the book with that melody in my ears. It has no name and no words, yet I know where it comes from. It comes from the throat of a thin woman, from a room full of bitterness, from the sound of flame and medicine pot. It tells me that some comfort does not speak. It only sits beside you and hums the bitter days into a tune, and it stops only after you have drained the bowl.