油麻地的孩子

你问油麻地有多大。油麻地不大。一条河，一排草房子，一片艾地，就够了。你问油麻地的孩子什么样。我给你请三个出来，一个一个站好。

第一个，叫桑桑。他头顶的白鸽，扑棱棱飞上天。他拆了家里的蚊帐，织成一张渔网，捞起满网的银光。他把碗里的油渍舔得发亮，他骑着父亲的大自行车，铃铛响过整条河。他生病的时候，疼得弯成一只小虾，可他抬起头，还是笑。桑桑是油麻地的火苗，烧起来，噼啪响。

第二个，叫秃鹤。他的脑袋，没有头发，有光。别人笑，他把头埋进衣领。后来他把头抬起来，抬得高高的，一步一步，走成游行队伍里最亮的那一颗。他喊出的口令，比谁的都响。秃鹤是油麻地的月亮，白天躲着，夜里自己发亮。

第三个，叫纸月。她的书包背得直直的，她的字写得轻轻的。她上学要走很远的路，走过芦苇，走过桥，走过想欺负她的目光。她不吵，不闹，她把委屈叠起来，叠成纸船，放进水里。纸月是油麻地的风，你看不见她，她一过，芦苇全弯腰。

火苗，月亮，风。他们住在草房子里，屋顶铺着金黄的茅草，风一吹，草就唱歌。他们也会哭，也会疼，也会被笑话，也会在夜里想家。可第二天太阳一出来，他们又站在河边，影子排成一排。

你问他们后来去哪了。桑桑长大了，带着疼过的身体去看世界。秃鹤长大了，他的名字陆鹤，被人记住了。纸月长大了，她的纸船不知道漂到了哪个港口。他们走出油麻地，油麻地装进他们心里。

你问油麻地还在不在。在。它在一本书里，书页翻一下，草房子就亮一次。它也在你心里，你读一遍，孩子们就长大一遍。来，跟我念：油麻地，一条河，一排草房子。桑桑，秃鹤，纸月。火苗，月亮，风。

The Children of Youmadi

You ask how big Youmadi is. Youmadi is not big. One river, one row of straw houses, one field of mugwort, and that is enough. You ask what the children of Youmadi are like. Let me invite three of them out, standing one by one.

The first is called Sangsang. The white doves on his head flutter up into the sky. He took apart the family mosquito net and wove it into a fishing net, scooping up a netful of silver light. He licked the grease from his bowl till it shone. He rode his father's big bicycle, the bell ringing along the whole river. When he fell ill, pain bent him into a little shrimp, yet he still lifted his head, still smiling. Sangsang is the flame of Youmadi. When it catches, it crackles.

The second is called Bald Crane. His head has no hair. It has light. When people laughed, he buried his head in his collar. Later he raised it, high, step by step,

walking as the brightest head in the parade line. The commands he shouted rang louder than anyone's. Bald Crane is the moon of Youmadi. He hides by day and shines by himself at night.

The third is called Paper Moon. Her schoolbag hangs straight on her back. Her handwriting falls light on the page. She walks far to school, past the reeds, past the bridge, past the eyes that wanted to bully her. She does not quarrel, does not cry out. She folds her grievances into paper boats and sets them on the water. Paper Moon is the wind of Youmadi. You cannot see her, but when she passes, every reed bows.

Flame, moon, wind. They live in the straw houses with golden thatch, and when the wind blows, the grass sings. They cry too, hurt too, get teased too, and lie awake missing home too. But when the sun rises the next day, they stand by the river again, their shadows in a row.

You ask where they went afterward. Sangsang grew up and carried his aching body to see the world. Bald Crane grew up, and his real name, Lu He, was remembered. Paper Moon grew up, and her paper boats drifted to some harbor no one knows. They walked out of Youmadi, and Youmadi went inside them.

You ask whether Youmadi still exists. It does. It lives in a book: turn a page, and the straw houses light up once. It lives in your heart too: read it once, and the children grow up once. Come, say it with me: Youmadi, one river, a row of straw houses. Sangsang, Bald Crane, Paper Moon. Flame, moon, wind.