稻穗弯腰的时候

天刚亮，爸爸就喊我起床。今天要跟爷爷去田里收稻子。我趴在窗边一看，好家伙，田里的稻子全黄了，一大片一大片，像谁把太阳碾碎了撒在地上。

走到田边，稻穗一个一个弯着腰，脑袋垂得低低的，离脚尖只差一点点。我伸手摸了摸，谷粒硬硬的，扎手。风一吹，整片田哗啦哗啦响，黄浪从这头滚到那头，几只蜻蜓被惊起来，又落在穗尖上。我捏住一个稻穗想把它扶直，手一松，它又弹回原来的样子。爷爷说，穗子越饱满，腰弯得越低，空壳的才昂着头。我低头看看自己，今天可得向稻穗学学。

中午，收割机突突突开进田里，声音大得我捂住耳朵。它前面吞进去稻子，后面吐出碎稻草，一会儿就吃掉一大片。机器惊起一群麻雀，落在远处的电线上，歪着头看。爷爷跟在机器后头，弯着腰捡掉下来的稻穗，一捧一捧塞进蛇皮袋。他说漏掉的也要拾回家，一粒都不能浪费。

我在田埂上跑。田埂窄窄的，两边都是稻子，我张开胳膊保持平衡，像走一根金色的独木桥。稻叶划过手背，痒痒的。稻茬戳脚底板，硌人。我跑到田埂这头，回头再看，爷爷的田少了一角，割过的地方平平整整，没割的地方稻穗还在弯腰。

爷爷从田埂头的水壶里倒了一缸子水递给我，水是凉白开，我咕咚咕咚灌了半缸子，剩下的浇在头上，凉得打了个哆嗦。爷爷把装满的蛇皮袋口拧成麻花，往肩上一甩，让我帮忙拎另一小袋。那小袋有二十来斤，我两只手抱着走，走三步换一次手，稻粒在袋底磨得沙沙响。爷爷走在前头，步子又大又稳，扁担在他肩上一起一落。

我扯着嗓子喊：爷爷，明天还来！风把稻香送过来。那香味是甜的，混着太阳晒过的味道。爷爷直起腰，冲我笑，脸上的皱纹一条条全挤在一起，像田埂一样多。

When the Rice Ears Bow

Day had barely broken when Dad called me up. Today I would go with Grandpa to harvest the rice. I pressed my face to the window and saw that all the rice in the fields had turned gold, patch after patch, as if someone had crushed the sun and scattered it over the ground.

At the edge of the field, the rice ears all bowed, their heads hanging low, just a finger’s width from my shoes. I reached out and touched one. The grains were hard and pricked my hand. When wind swept through, the whole field roared like water, yellow waves rolling from one end to the other. A few dragonflies started up and landed again on the tips of the ears. I pinched one ear and tried to straighten it, but the moment I let go it sprang back to its bow. Grandpa said the fuller an ear is, the lower it bends; only the empty-husked ones hold their heads up. I looked down at myself and decided I should learn from the rice ears today.

At noon, the combine harvester rumbled into the field, so loud I covered my ears. It swallowed rice at the front and spat out chopped straw at the back, eating up a

wide strip in no time. The machine startled a flock of sparrows that settled on the distant wires, tilting their heads to watch. Grandpa followed behind the machine, bending to pick up the fallen ears and stuffing handful after handful into a woven bag. Whatever the machine drops must be carried home, he said, not a single grain wasted.

I ran along the field ridge. The ridge was narrow, rice on both sides, and I stretched out my arms to keep balance, like walking a golden tightrope. Rice leaves brushed the backs of my hands, ticklish. The stubble poked through my shoe soles. I reached the far end of the ridge and looked back. A corner of Grandpa's field was gone; the cut part lay flat and neat, while in the uncut part the ears were still bowing.

Grandpa poured a ladle of water from the kettle at the head of the ridge and handed it to me. It was cooled boiled water; I gulped down half of it and poured the rest over my head, shivering with the chill. Grandpa twisted the mouth of the full woven bag into a rope, swung it onto his shoulder, and let me carry the smaller one. That small bag weighed twenty-odd jin; I hugged it with both hands, switching sides every three steps, the grains rustling against the bottom of the bag. Grandpa walked ahead, his strides long and steady, the carrying pole rising and falling on his shoulder.

I shouted at the top of my voice: Grandpa, we are coming back tomorrow! The wind carried the scent of rice to me. It smelled sweet, mixed with the smell of sun-baked straw. Grandpa straightened his back and smiled at me, the wrinkles on his face squeezing together line by line, as many as the field ridges.