稻茬地里剩下的秋天

稻子收完的第三天，田里只剩一茬一茬的稻桩，整整齐齐，像给大地剃了个平头。我踩着稻茬往田中间走，脚底板一下一下地被顶。走到昨天收割机停过的地方，我看见几株漏掉的稻子还立在那里，稻穗弯着腰，黄里透绿，穗尖上落了一只小虫。

我把那几株稻子扶起来。就在手握住稻秆的一瞬，我想起前天它们还是一大片。前天，整片田都是弯着的腰。我站在田边就能听见穗子互相碰的声音，沙沙的，很轻。风一来，稻浪一层压一层，从水渠那边一直滚到公路那边。我伸手拨开一垄，谷粒挤在我手心里，圆滚滚，硬邦邦，有几颗还带着尖尖的芒，戳得我掌心发痒。

再往前想，是收割机进田的那个上午。突突突，突突突，声音从田头一路碾过来，地都在抖。机器肚子前面张开一张大嘴，稻子整排整排地倒进去，不见了；机器屁股后面喷出碎草，纷纷扬扬落一地。我和爸爸跟在机器后头捡稻穗，它吞一片，我们捡一片。爸爸腰快弯断了也不歇，说机器有漏的，人就得补上。那天中午我们捡了小半袋，谷粒在袋子里哗啦哗啦地响。

机器收工走了，田少了一大半。我沿着田埂疯跑，埂子窄，我张开胳膊，两边金黄的稻穗扫过我的衣服，扫得袖子沙沙响。跑到埂子尽头我摔了一跤，膝盖磕在软泥上，没哭，爬起来接着跑，鞋底粘着泥，一步一个响。

现在，我手里攥着那几株漏收的稻子，往家走。稻茬地在脚下平平地铺开，田埂还是那条田埂，只是两边的稻子没了。晚上，妈妈把白天新碾的米下锅。饭香从厨房漫出来，漫过院子，漫到我鼻尖。我扒了满满一碗，粒粒都是甜的。我含着那口饭想，明年秋天，那片田还会把腰弯下来的。

The Autumn Left in the Stubble Field

Three days after the harvest, the field held nothing but row after row of rice stubble, cut neat and flat, as if the earth had been given a close crop. I stepped over the stubble toward the middle of the field, the cut stalks nudging my soles again and again. Where the harvester had stopped yesterday, I found a few missed hills still standing, their ears bowed, yellow touched with green, a tiny insect resting on the tip of one ear.

I straightened those few hills. The instant my hand closed around the stalks, I remembered that two days earlier they had been a whole sea of them. Two days earlier, every inch of the field was a bowing waist. Standing at the edge, I could hear the ears brushing one another, a soft sifting sound. When the wind came, wave pressed wave, rolling from the irrigation ditch all the way to the road. I parted a row with my hand and the grains crowded into my palm, round and hard, a few still wearing sharp awns that tickled my skin.

Further back still was the morning the harvester entered the field. Rumble,

rumble, the sound crushed toward us from the headland, the ground trembling. The machine opened a great mouth at its front, and rank after rank of rice fell in and vanished; from its back it sprayed chopped straw that fluttered down over the ground. Dad and I followed behind the machine gathering fallen ears. It swallowed a strip; we gathered a strip. Dad kept bending until his back ached but refused to rest, saying the machine misses some and people must make it up. By noon we had collected half a small bag, the grains rattling inside it.

The machine finished and left, and most of the field was gone. I ran wildly along the field ridge, arms spread wide on the narrow path, golden ears on both sides sweeping my sleeves into a rustle. At the end of the ridge I fell, my knee hitting soft mud. I did not cry. I got up and kept running, my soles sucking at the mud, each step a small report.

Now I hold those few missed ears and walk home. The stubble field spreads flat beneath my feet; the ridge is still the same ridge, only the rice on both sides is gone. In the evening, Mother puts the freshly milled rice from the day into the pot. The smell of cooking rice drifts out of the kitchen, across the yard, to my nose. I eat a heaping bowl, every grain sweet. Holding that mouthful of rice, I think: next autumn, that field will bow its waists again.