割稻比赛

九月底，村里的稻子全熟了，田头一直黄到天边。村长拿树枝在田里画了条线，八户人家各占一头，割稻比赛就算开了张。我爸在里头，我的差事是送水和喊加油。村长一声开始，镰刀在地里亮成一片，唰、唰，稻子一排排倒下，声音像雨落在屋顶上。

我跑到田埂上看我爸割稻。他的镰刀抡圆了，一把稻子齐刷刷倒下，他头都不抬。他旁边是老张叔，瘦瘦矮矮，手脚却快，两个人扯了个平手。田埂上的人喊得嗓子都劈了。我怕踩坏稻茬，踮着脚沿埂跑，攥着衣角喊爸快点，喊到嗓子冒烟。

比赛有规矩：割倒的稻子要码成人字形靠在埂边，乱堆的罚重割。我爸码稻子也整齐，一把一把靠得匀匀的。我数着我们那一行的稻把子，一、二、三，数到二十几就乱了，索性改成喊加油。

日头爬到头顶，比赛歇晌。我从家里拎来大暖壶，两只手各提一只，一路打晃地跑到田头。壶里是绿豆汤，倒进杯底沉着一层豆沙。叔伯们蹲在地边咕咚咕咚灌，喝完抹嘴，说我送的水比去年家的甜。我爸喝得最快，嘴角挂着几滴汤，手背一擦，又下了地。

第二轮开赛，我爸的镰刀像长了翅膀，慢慢压过老张叔半头。老张叔不恼，还喊：慌什么，稻茬留高了，回头你收不完。地里的人都笑。笑声混着镰刀声，田野比赶集还热闹。

日头偏西，比赛收场，我爸赢了半行。村长没有奖品，抱了抱拳，说明年给赢的人备一暖壶绿豆汤。众人又笑，说明年自己送水。

傍晚回家，我们沿田埂走，我爸肩上挑着稻子，我抱着镰刀和空暖壶。夕阳把影子拉得很长，新割的稻茬冒出青草味。村里的炊烟直直地升起来。我爸忽然说，今年谷子饱，冬天新米给你蒸年糕。我抱着暖壶嗯了一声，手上还全是绿豆汤的味道。

The Rice-Cutting Contest

At the end of September, the whole village’s rice was ripe, and the field heads lay golden all the way to the sky. The village head drew a line in the field with a stick, eight households each took one end, and the rice-cutting contest began. My father was in it, and my job was to carry water and cheer. At the village head’s shout of start, sickles flashed in the field, swish, swish, rice stalks fell row after row, the sound like rain on a roof.

I ran along the field ridge to watch my father. His sickle swung in a wide arc, a handful of rice fell at once, and he never raised his head. The man beside him was old Zhang Shu, thin and short but fast, and the two kept even. The people on the ridge shouted themselves hoarse. Afraid of trampling the stubble, I tiptoed along the ridge, clutching my hem, shouting Dad, go faster until my voice went hoarse.

The contest had rules: cut rice had to be propped into a leaning shape against the ridge, and a messy pile meant cutting it over. My father stacked his bundles neatly too, each one leaning evenly. I counted the bundles in our row, one, two, three, lost count past twenty, and gave up and went back to cheering.

When the sun climbed overhead, the contest paused. I lugged the big thermos from home, one in each hand, staggering all the way to the field head. It was full of mung bean soup, and the poured cups had a layer of bean pulp at the bottom. The uncles squatted at the field edge and gulped, then smacked their lips and said my water was sweeter than last year's. My father drank fastest, wiped a few drops from his mouth with the back of his hand, and went back into the field.

The second round began. My father's sickle seemed to grow wings, and he slowly edged ahead of old Zhang Shu. Old Zhang Shu did not get angry; he shouted over: do not rush, you leave the stubble too high. Everyone in the field laughed. The laughter mixed with the sound of sickles, and the field was livelier than the market.

When the sun tilted west, the contest ended, and my father won by half a row. The village head had no prize but clasped his hands and promised a thermos of mung bean soup for next year's winner. Everyone laughed again, saying they would carry their own water next year.

On the dusk road home, we walked along the ridge, father carrying rice on his shoulder, me carrying the sickle and the empty thermos. The setting sun stretched our shadows long, and the fresh stubble gave off a green grassy smell. From the village chimneys, cooking smoke rose straight up. Father said suddenly: this year's grain is plump; when the new rice comes in winter, we will make you rice cakes. I hugged the thermos and said mm, my hands still smelling of mung bean soup.

田头的绿豆汤

小雁头天夜里就把绿豆泡上了。第二天鸡叫头遍她起来熬汤，熬得豆皮全开了花，晾在两只木桶里。她爹下地参赛，她妈走不开，送水这差事她揽了。她说自己是六年级的大孩子了，拎两桶水不在话下。

赶到田头时，割稻比赛正赛到第二轮。八个人的镰刀在地里排开，唰唰声连成一片，稻子一排排伏下去。田埂上挤着看热闹的孩子和老人，加油声一浪盖过一浪。小雁挤不进去，就站在老槐树底下等，看哪个身影是她爹。她爹割稻有个记号：镰刀使得快，稻茬留得矮，远看那一行最齐。

歇晌的哨子一响，小雁提着桶就过去了。木桶晃得厉害，绿豆汤泼出来几星，洇湿了她的鞋

面。她把桶墩在田埂下，拿瓢挨个舀。叔伯们排着队，有人开玩笑，说小雁这汤熬得稠，瓢都立得住。小雁脸一红，说熬糊了别怪她。众人灌完汤，抹抹嘴又下了地，哨子再响，唰唰声又连起来。

她爹那行跟老陈家的扯了个平。第二轮到后半，她爹的镰刀忽然快起来，一把接一把，稻把子码成人字靠满半条田埂。老陈叔在后头喊：年轻人悠着点，闪了腰没人背你回家。田埂上的人笑成一片，小雁也笑，笑完才想起来喊加油，扯着嗓子喊她爹，声音混在人声里，她自己都听不清。

比赛在日头偏西时收了场。她爹赢了小半行，得了村长一句明年备奖品的许诺，众人又是一阵笑。人们三三两两往村里走，镰刀扛在肩上，稻茬地里的气味一路跟着。

小雁挑着空桶走在最后。桶轻，她偏要让它一晃一晃地响，木柄磕在桶沿上，笃、笃。夕阳把田埂照成金色，她影子在前头跑。走到村口，她妈迎出来接桶，问她汤都喝光了没有。她说一滴不剩。她妈说那就好，回家她爹新米蒸饭，管够。小雁嗯了一声，脚步比来时还快。

Mung Bean Soup at the Field Head

Xiao Yan soaked the mung beans the night before. She got up at the first cockcrow to boil them, boiled until every bean skin burst open, and let the soup cool in two wooden buckets. Her father was in the contest and her mother could not leave home, so she took the job of carrying water herself. She said she was a sixth-grader now, a big kid, and two buckets of water were no trouble.

When she reached the field head, the contest was in its second round. Eight sickles were spread across the field, their swishing running into one sound, rice falling row after row. Children and old people crowded the ridge, and the cheering came in waves. Xiao Yan could not squeeze in, so she waited under the old locust tree, looking for her father’s figure. Her cutting had a mark: fast sickle, low stubble, and from far off his row was the neatest.

At the whistle for the break, she carried her buckets over. The buckets sloshed; a few splashes of soup wet the tops of her shoes. She set them down at the foot of the ridge and ladled out cup by cup. The uncles lined up, and one joked that her soup was so thick a ladle would stand in it. Xiao Yan blushed and said do not blame her if it burned. They gulped, wiped their mouths, went back to work, and at the second whistle the swishing joined up again.

Her father’s row ran even with old Chen’s for a while. In the second half of the round his sickle suddenly sped up, handful after handful, bundles propped in leaning rows along half the ridge. Old Chen shouted from behind: take it easy, young man, no one will carry you home if you throw out your back. The crowd on the ridge

roared, and Xiao Yan roared with them, then remembered to cheer and shouted for her father, her voice lost in the crowd, inaudible even to herself.

The contest ended as the sun tilted west. Her father won by less than half a row and earned the village head’s promise of a prize next year, and the crowd laughed again. People drifted back toward the village in twos and threes, sickles on their shoulders, the smell of fresh stubble following them all the way.

Xiao Yan carried the empty buckets at the rear of the crowd. The buckets were light, but she made them sway and knock anyway, the wooden handles tapping the rims, tok, tok. The setting sun gilded the ridge, and her shadow ran ahead of her. At the village entrance her mother came out to take the buckets and asked if all the soup was gone. She said not a drop. Her mother said good, then: your father will steam dinner from the new rice, enough for everyone. Xiao Yan said mm, and her steps were faster than on the way out.

替爹下田的那天

傍晚回家，我肩上挑着两捆稻子，扁担压得吱呀响。田埂被夕阳照成金色，稻茬地里冒出青草和泥土混在一起的气味。爹拄着锄头在村口等我，见了我咧嘴笑，说你没给咱家丢人。我把稻子卸在场院里，坐在稻垛边上，胳膊酸得抬不起来，可心里热热的。这一天，像做了一场大汗淋漓的梦。

事情要从早上说起。比赛前夜爹闪了腰，早上直不起来，弯着腰像只大虾。村长来问还上不上，我书包一撂，说上，我是六年级的，镰刀我会使。爹瞪我，娘却替我说话，说让孩子试一回。于是我的名字顶上了爹的名字。

下了地我才知道厉害。老把式们的镰刀唰唰响，一把接一把，我半天割不完一行。稻秆硬，镰刀钝，割到一半还割到手腕。我旁边是老周叔，他看不下去，说孩子，镰刀放平，贴地皮走，别抡高。我照他说的来，唰、唰，慢慢跟上了点。稻把子我码成人字靠埂边，码得歪歪扭扭，被人喊了两次重码。

歇晌时我妹妹拎着暖壶来了，一路小跑，壶盖没盖严，绿豆汤浇了我一鞋。她急得眼圈发红，我说不烫不烫，蹲在田埂边咕咚咕咚把剩下的半壶灌完。妹妹又跑回家灌第二壶，回来时手里还抓着一把粗瓷碗，说是娘让带的。叔伯们喝了汤，冲我竖大拇指，说我割得不赖。其实我手心磨出了两个亮晶晶的水泡。

第二轮我豁出去了。镰刀声跟不上人家，我就追，汗流进眼睛里杀得慌，也用袖子一抹接着割。割到后半，我这一行竟然没被落下，还压过最末一家半头。老周叔在隔壁喊，说这孩子是替谁上的？村长翻了翻树枝划的名单，说，他爹家的。地里地埂上笑成一片，笑声里有佩服，也有打趣。

收场时我赢没赢说不清，反正咱家那一行没垫底。爹在家门口迎我，接过扁担，摸了摸我手心的水泡，没说话，转身进灶屋。晚上娘炒了鸡蛋，爹倒了半杯酒，递给我一筷子说，吃。我咬了一口，忽然觉得，秋天真的到了。

The Day I Filled In for Father

On the dusk road home, I carried two bundles of rice on a shoulder pole, the wood creaking under the load. The field ridge lay golden in the setting sun, and the cut stubble gave off a smell of green grass mixed with earth. Father waited at the village entrance leaning on a hoe, and when he saw me he grinned and said you did not shame our family. I unloaded the rice in the yard and sat by the sheaf pile, my arms too sore to lift, yet my heart was warm. That day felt like a dream drenched in sweat.

It began that morning. The night before the contest, father threw out his back, and at dawn he still could not straighten up, bent like a shrimp. The village head came to ask whether our row would still field someone. I dropped my schoolbag and said I would go, I am in sixth grade, I know how to use a sickle. Father glared at me, but mother spoke for me, saying let the child try once. And so my name took the place of father’s.

Only in the field did I learn how hard it was. The old hands’ sickles swished handful after handful while I could not finish a row. The stalks were tough, my sickle blunt, and halfway through I cut my wrist. Old Zhou Shu beside me could not bear to watch and said: child, keep the blade flat, skim the ground, do not swing high. I did as told, swish, swish, and slowly caught up. My bundles leaned against the ridge crooked, and twice people shouted at me to restack them.

At the break my little sister came running with the thermos, its lid loose, and mung bean soup drenched one of my shoes. Her eyes reddened in panic, and I said it was not hot, squatting at the ridge to gulp down the half jug left in it. She ran home for a second jug and came back clutching a handful of coarse porcelain bowls, saying mother sent them. The uncles drank and gave me thumbs-up, saying my cutting was not bad. In fact my palms had two shiny blisters.

In the second round I gave it everything. My sickle could not keep up with the others, so I chased, sweat stinging my eyes, wiped with my sleeve, and kept cutting. In the second half my row not only held its place but edged past the last household by half a head. Old Zhou Shu shouted from next door: whose child is filling in here? The village head checked the list beside his stick line and said: the old man’s family. The field and the ridge rang with laughter, admiration and teasing mixed in

it.

Whether I won, nobody said plainly; our row did not come last, anyway. Father met me at the gate, took the pole from my shoulder, felt the blisters in my palm, said nothing, and turned into the kitchen. That evening mother fried eggs, father poured half a cup of liquor, and handed me a chopstickful with a word: eat. I bit into it and suddenly felt that autumn had truly come.