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.