站在田埂上

上初中以后，我跟着爸妈住在镇上，回村的次数一只手数得过来。九月底的一个周六，爸说回去看看老屋，我就又站在了村东头那条田埂上。埂还是那条埂，被几代人的脚板磨得窄窄的，两边是齐膝的稻子，熟透了。

最先撞进眼睛的是远山。夏天的山是厚厚一团绿，糊在天边。秋天的山瘦下来了，颜色一层一层分开：山脚是淡黄的草坡，山腰是深绿的杉，山顶浮着灰蓝，像谁把洗笔的水泼在了天上。山脊的线条清清楚楚，我第一次发现，原来山是有棱角的。

风从西边来。我眼看着一道波纹从远处的田头升起，稻子齐齐弯腰，露出底下深一层的黄，那道黄推着、涌着，一层压一层朝我脚边滚过来，哗啦啦的声音晚了一步才到。整片田像被一只大手抚过。波纹过去，稻子又直起身，穗子互相磕碰，沙沙，像很多人同时低声说话。

我忽然想起小时候，爷爷每年这时候都牵着我走这条埂，去赶偷吃新谷的鸟。他走三步停一步，手里挥着一根扎了布条的竹竿，嘴里咻咻地喊。我负责在后面捡他惊落的稻穗，抱在怀里，够不着的地方他替我够。

正想着，稻浪里噗噜噜炸开一片，几十只麻雀腾地飞起来，贴着稻穗尖上飞，翅膀扑棱棱地响，绕了个圈，又纷纷落回远处。埂边一只灰喜鹊叫了两声，哑哑的，像在报信。天上更高处还有一行雁，排成松松的一字，往南去，叫得又细又远。

爷爷走三年了。他种的那几亩田，爸接着种，稻子照样一年一熟，照样在秋天弯下腰。站在埂上我忽然明白，田不认人，可田记得人走过的每一条埂。

太阳往山后落，山尖先红，红完了慢慢暗下去。村口传来妈的喊声，喊我回家。我应了一声，没动，又站了一会儿。风再起时，稻浪重新涌起来，飞鸟的影子贴着浪尖跑。

下埂的时候，我把脚边一穗低垂的稻子轻轻扶了一下。它在我手里沉了沉，又弹回原处。我把手上的稻芒吹掉，跟着妈往村里走，影子在身后的田里拖得很长。

Standing on the Field Ridge

After I entered middle school I lived in town with my parents, and I could count on one hand the times I went back to the village. On a Saturday at the end of September, Dad said let us go see the old house, and there I was again on the field ridge at the east end of the village. It was still the same ridge, worn narrow by generations of feet, knee-high rice on both sides, fully ripe.

What struck my eyes first was the distant mountains. Summer mountains were one thick mass of green, smeared against the sky. In autumn the mountains had grown lean, their colors separated into layers: pale yellow grass at the foot, deep green firs on the slopes, gray-blue floating on the peaks, as if someone had thrown brushwater into

the sky. The ridgelines stood out sharp and clear, and for the first time I noticed that mountains have edges.

The wind came from the west. I watched a ripple rise from the far field head; the rice bent all at once, revealing a deeper yellow beneath, and that yellow pushed and surged, layer upon layer, rolling to my feet, its rustling arriving a step late. The whole field looked stroked by one huge hand. When the ripple passed, the rice straightened up, ears knocking against each other, sha-sha, like many people talking in low voices at the same time.

Suddenly I remembered being small, when Grandpa took me along this ridge every year to chase the birds that stole the new grain. He walked three steps and paused one, waving a bamboo pole with a cloth strip tied to it, hissing shoo-shoo. My job was to gather the ears the birds knocked down, hugging them, and where I could not reach, he reached for me.

Even as I thought of it, the rice waves burst with a rustle: dozens of sparrows sprang up, flying low along the ear tips, wings whirring, circling once, then settling back in the distance. A gray magpie by the ridge called twice, hoarse, like a signal. Higher in the sky a loose line of geese moved south, their cries thin and far.

It has been three years since Grandpa died. The few mu of field he farmed, Dad took over; the rice still ripens once a year as always, still bends down in autumn. Standing on the ridge I suddenly understood: a field knows no people, yet a field remembers every ridge a person ever walked.

The sun sank behind the mountains; the peaks turned red first, then the red slowly darkened. From the village entrance came mother’s voice calling me home. I answered and did not move, standing a while longer. When the wind rose again the waves surged anew, and the shadows of birds ran along the crests of the waves.

Stepping off the ridge, I gently propped up one heavy rice ear hanging at my feet. It sagged in my hand, then sprang back. I blew the awns from my fingers and followed mother toward the village, my shadow stretched long across the field behind me.

田埂上的心事

月考成绩出来的那个周六，阿禾一个人走出了外婆家。她没跟谁说去哪儿，脚却熟门熟路地拐上了门前那条田埂。十一月初的稻子已经黄透，田埂上只有她一个人的脚印。

她在埂中间站定。西边是远山，山色淡得像一笔旧墨，山尖上搁着一小片云，云不动，山也不动。阿禾盯着那片山看，看着看着，胸口那团堵了两天的东西松了一点。山不说话，也不问考了多少分，它就在那儿，站得比任何一次考试都稳。

风来了。稻浪从田那头起，一道接一道往这边推。阿禾看着浪头由远及近，稻子弯腰、起身、再弯腰，整片田像一床被慢慢抖开的黄被子。她伸出脚，在稻子边缘轻轻一扫，穗子哗地扫过鞋面，凉丝丝的。她沿着埂往前走，埂两边的稻浪就陪着她走，走多远，响多远。

一群麻雀从稻浪里惊起来，扑棱棱贴着田飞，绕了一圈又落下，落得很有秩序，像下课的学生排队出教室。埂前头的电线上停着几只灰喜鹊，歪着头看她。天上有一行雁，细细的一点一点往南挪。阿禾数那行雁，数到第七只数乱了，索性不数了。她想，鸟飞它们的南，稻熟它们的秋，一次考砸，好像也没把天捅破。

她想起外婆说过，田里的稻子最沉得住气。旱的时候它不喊，涝的时候它不哭，一到秋天，该结的粒一颗不少。外婆种了一辈子田，没考过试，可她评庄稼比谁都准：哪块地今年争气，哪块地偷了懒，她站在埂上一眼就说出个八九不离十。

太阳低下来了，远山的轮廓渐渐化进灰蓝的天里。稻浪还在起，一阵一阵，不紧不慢。阿禾在埂上站得腿有点麻，心里那团东西不知什么时候散了。她弯腰系好鞋带，转身往回走。

外婆在门口择菜，抬头看她一眼，什么都没问，只说饭好了。饭后，阿禾回屋把月考卷子从书包里抽出来，摊在桌上，一道一道看错在哪儿。窗外田里的风声一阵一阵传进来，像有人在很远的地方，慢慢地鼓掌。

Thoughts on the Field Ridge

The Saturday after the monthly exam results came out, A He walked out of Grandma’s house alone. She told no one where she was going, but her feet knew the way and turned onto the field ridge in front of the door. The rice in early November had turned fully golden, and on the ridge there were only her footprints.

She stopped in the middle of the ridge. To the west rose the distant mountains, their color faint as an old brushstroke of ink, a small cloud resting on the peak. The cloud did not move, and neither did the mountain. A He stared at them until, bit by bit, the lump that had sat in her chest for two days loosened. The mountain said nothing, asked nothing about her score; it simply stood there, steadier than any exam.

The wind came. Rice waves rose from the far side of the field, one after another pushing toward her. She watched the crests approach, the rice bending, rising, bending again, the whole field like a yellow quilt being slowly shaken open. She reached her foot out and swept the edge of the crop; the ears brushed her shoe top, cool and faintly damp. She walked on along the ridge, and the waves beside her walked

too, sounding as far as she went.

A flock of sparrows startled up from the waves, flying low over the field in a whirr, circling once, then settling back in good order, like students filing out of a classroom. A few gray magpies perched on the wire ahead, tilting their heads at her. In the sky a thin line of geese inched south. A He counted them, lost count at the seventh, and gave up. She thought: birds fly their south, rice ripens its autumn, and one failed exam had not, it seemed, torn a hole in the sky.

She remembered Grandma saying that rice in the field is the most patient thing on earth. In drought it does not cry out, in flood it does not weep, and when autumn comes, not a single grain it should set goes missing. Grandma had farmed all her life and never taken an exam, yet her judgment of crops was surer than anyone's: which plot did well this year, which had slacked off, she could tell from the ridge with a single look.

The sun sank low, and the mountain's outline melted into the gray-blue sky. The waves still rose, wave after wave, unhurried. A He's legs went numb from standing, and somewhere along the way the lump in her chest had dissolved. She bent to retie her shoelace and turned back.

Grandma was shellin vegetables at the door, glanced up, asked nothing, and only said dinner is ready. After the meal, A He pulled the exam paper from her schoolbag, spread it on the desk, and went through her mistakes one by one. Outside, the wind in the field came in wave after wave, like someone far away, applauding slowly.

埂上的半小时

回城的班车上，我把脸贴在车窗上，看最后一排白杨树往后倒。校服袖口上沾着几根稻芒，我没弹掉。同桌问我周末去哪儿了，我说去了一趟乡下，站了半小时田埂。他说田埂有什么好看的。我想了想，没答。有些东西得自己站过才算数。

事情是这样的。爸的朋友老陈在乡下教书，周末请爸去家里吃饭，我跟着去了。饭前老陈留了个活，说带我们看看他学生的稻田。我本来兴致缺缺，稻田我在课本里见得多了。可老陈把我们领上田埂就不再说话，只说，站一会儿，别动。

我最先看到的是远山。城里的天是被楼切开的，一条一条；这里的天空整个罩着山，山又罩着田。秋天的山颜色旧旧的，黄褐的坡、墨绿的林、青灰的顶，一层压一层，最远处那一重淡得几乎要化进天里。老陈说，山那边还是山，再过去才是城。我顺着他的手指看，忽然觉得自己是站在一个很大很大的东西中间。

然后风来了，稻浪起了。这是我第一次看见浪从田的另一头长起来：先是远处稻子齐齐一伏，露

出一线深黄，那道黄推着浪往前滚，越滚越近，声音也越滚越大，到我跟前变成一片哗啦啦。稻浪过去，田又平了，像什么都没发生。老陈说，这样的浪一天要过几十遍，稻子练出来的，风越大它腰越软，腰软的才不折。我听着，觉得这话不像只说稻子。

鸟是最后出场的。稻浪一起，鸟就起。先是几只麻雀，贴着浪尖飞，忽高忽低；接着整片田的鸟都惊了，黑压压腾起来，在田上空绕成一个圈，又落下去，像撒出去又收回的一张网。电线上停着几只灰喜鹊，不慌，只歪头看我们。更高处一行雁往南，叫声细细的，落在很远的地方。老陈说，鸟吃落谷，不赶，稻子白种；赶了，它们吃几口又走。我点头，心里记下一条看不见的规矩。

那半小时里我没动，鞋边站出两个印。回城的车上，我把手腕翻过来看，袖口的稻芒扎在布上，一根一根，像小小的箭。我想起稻浪里那些弯下去又直起来的腰，想起绕圈又落回的鸟，想起一层压一层的远山。

车进了城，楼把天空重新切成一条一条。我把袖口的稻芒轻轻抚平，没有弹掉。同桌还在讲游戏，我望着窗外，耳朵里还留着那片田哗啦啦的声音，一阵，又一阵。

Half an Hour on the Ridge

On the bus back to town, I pressed my face to the window and watched the last row of poplars fall backward. A few rice awns clung to my uniform cuff; I did not flick them off. My deskmate asked where I had spent the weekend. I said I went to the countryside and stood on a field ridge for half an hour. He said, what is there to see on a ridge? I thought about it and did not answer. Some things only count if you have stood there yourself.

Here is how it happened. Dad’s friend Old Chen teaches in the country and invited Dad to dinner over the weekend, so I came along. Before the meal Old Chen kept us with one task: come see his students’ rice fields. I was not keen at first; I had seen plenty of rice fields in textbooks. But once Old Chen led us onto the ridge he stopped talking and only said: stand a while, do not move.

The distant mountains came into view first. In town the sky is sliced by buildings, strip by strip; here the sky covers the mountains whole, and the mountains cover the fields. The autumn mountains wore old colors: tan slopes, ink-green woods, gray-blue tops, layer upon layer, the farthest one so faint it nearly melted into the sky. Old Chen said there are more mountains beyond these, and only past them lies the town. I followed his finger and suddenly felt I was standing in the middle of something very, very large.

Then the wind came, and the rice waves rose. It was the first time I saw a wave grow up from the far end of a field: the distant rice dipped all at once, revealing a

line of deep yellow, and that yellow rolled forward, nearer and nearer, louder and louder, until at my feet it became a whole wash of rustling. When it passed, the field lay flat again, as if nothing had happened. Old Chen said such waves cross the field dozens of times a day, and it is how rice trains itself: the stronger the wind, the softer its waist bends; only a soft waist does not snap. I listened, and it did not sound like a sentence about rice alone.

The birds arrived last. When the waves rose, the birds rose. First a few sparrows, flying low along the crests, rising and dipping; then the whole field's birds startled up, a dark cloud wheeling into a ring over the field before settling back, like a net cast out and drawn in again. A few gray magpies sat on the wire, unhurried, tilting their heads at us. Higher still a line of geese moved south, their cries thin, falling far away. Old Chen said birds eat the fallen grain and need not be chased off, or the rice is sown in vain; chase them, and they take a few bites and leave anyway. I nodded, filing away an invisible rule.

In that half hour I did not move, and my shoes pressed two prints into the ridge. On the bus home I turned my wrist over: the awns on my cuff were stuck in the cloth, one by one, like tiny arrows. I thought of the waists bending and rising in the waves, of the birds wheeling back down, of the mountains layered one over another.

The bus entered town, and the buildings sliced the sky into strips again. I smoothed the awns on my cuff flat without flicking them off. My deskmate went on talking about his game, and I looked out the window, the rustling of that field still in my ears, wave after wave.

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