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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