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.