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.