爷爷田里的秋天

八月底，奶奶让我给爷爷送水。我提着水壶走到田埂上，爷爷正背对着我看田。稻子还青着，可细看就不一样了：向阳的坡先黄，背阴的沟边还青，一片田里两种颜色，像一块洗旧了的蓝布被太阳晒脱了色。爷爷接过水壶，不喝，先举到鼻子底下闻了闻，说：快了，穗子沉了。

九月中，我放学就往后山跑。整片田黄透了。风从西边来，黄就跟着风走，从田那头卷过来，先到脚边，又退回去，露出底下直立的稻秆。我站在田埂上，听见田里有声音，不是虫叫，是稻穗互相碰的沙沙声，比虫叫还轻。爷爷蹲下来捏开一个稻穗，一颗一颗数粒数，说这一穗有八十多粒，今年是个好年成。田边的水沟里水浅了，沟沿上的草黄了一半，一只小螃蟹横着爬进石头缝里。

开镰那天是个晴天。爷爷先割出一小排，留出走路的地方。镰刀从稻子根部斜过去，唰的一声，一排稻子朝同一个方向倒下。爷爷弯着腰从这头走到那头，身后留下一条弯弯的路。奶奶和叔叔把割下的稻子抱到拌桶前，抓住稻把往桶壁上摔，谷粒脱下来，噼里啪啦溅进桶里。我帮忙扶桶，谷粒打在胳膊上，不疼，就是痒。叔叔把拌桶边的稻草抱到田那头堆成一个小垛，说冬天可以垫牛圈。我在草垛边翻找掉下的稻穗，翻出两只蚂蚱，都让它跳走了。

傍晚装袋。爷爷过秤，一袋有七十多公斤。他拍拍袋子说，回去晒三天，就能吃新米了。晒谷的场上，奶奶拿木耙把谷子摊开，一层薄薄的，在夕阳里像撒了一地碎金。晚上桌上有一碗新米饭，我没吃出什么不一样，可爷爷吃得慢，一粒一粒的，像把一整年的日子都嚼了一遍。

Autumn in the Field of Grandpa

Late in August, Grandma sent me to bring water to Grandpa. Carrying the kettle, I walked up to the ridge. He stood with his back to me, looking over the field. The rice was still green, but look closely and it was already different: the sunny slope had yellowed first, while the shaded ditch side stayed green, two colours in one field, like an old blue cloth faded by the sun. Grandpa took the kettle, did not drink, and first lifted it to his nose to smell the air, then said: soon. The heads have grown heavy.

Mid-September, I ran to the hill after school. The whole field had ripened to gold. The wind came from the west, and the yellow followed it, rolling in from the far end, reaching my feet, then pulling back to show the upright stalks underneath. Standing on the ridge, I heard a sound in the field. It was not insects. It was the soft rustle of grain heads knocking against one another, lighter than any insect song. Grandpa squatted down, cracked open a head, and counted the grains one by one. This head has more than eighty grains, he said. It is a good year. The water in the ditch by the field had grown shallow, half the grass along its bank had turned yellow, and a small crab scuttled sideways into a crack between the stones.

The first day of harvest was clear. Grandpa cut a short row first, leaving room

to walk. The sickle slanted in at the roots, and with one swish a row of rice fell the same way. He bent low and walked from one end to the other, leaving a curved path behind. Grandma and my uncle carried the cut rice to the threshing tub, gripped a bundle and beat it against the tub wall. The grains came loose and splashed into the tub with a crackle. I helped hold the tub. Kernels struck my arms. They did not hurt. They only itched. Uncle carried the straw from the edge of the tub to the far end of the field and piled it into a small stack. It can line the cow shed in winter, he said. By the stack I searched for fallen heads and turned up two grasshoppers, and let both of them jump away.

At dusk they filled the sacks. Grandpa weighed them: over seventy kilos each. He patted a sack and said: three days of sun, and we can eat the new rice. On the drying ground, Grandma spread the grain thin with a wooden rake, a delicate layer that looked like scattered gold flakes in the setting sun. That evening there was a bowl of new rice on the table. I could not taste anything different, but Grandpa ate slowly, grain by grain, as if he were chewing over the whole year.