田小禾带来的那把稻穗

田小禾的课桌抽屉里常年放着一小把稻穗，是去年秋天在奶奶田里捡的，穗尖扎手，她也不扔。班会课那天，她把那把稻穗带到了教室。

黑板上写着走进秋收。老师贴照片的时候，田小禾一眼认出晒谷场那张跟奶奶家门前那块水泥地像：谷子摊开，木耙推过去，边上蹲着赶麻雀的孩子。她六岁起就蹲在那块地上赶麻雀，太阳把后颈晒得发烫，麻雀不怕生，要扔土疙瘩才走。照片里没拍到她，可她觉得那张照片里有她。

问答环节，第一题稻谷什么时候开始黄，半个班答错了，田小禾没有马上举手。她听同学抢答六月、七月，听老师摇头，才慢慢把手举起来。她说奶奶讲过，处暑之后稻子才低头，早的八月底，晚的到十月。说晚的到十月时她声音大了一点，因为奶奶家那几丘冷浸田，真要到十月才割，割稻时手上全是裂口。她没讲裂口，只说十月。掌声响起来的时候，她低头看自己手心里那把稻穗。

数稻穗那一题，老师让举手的人上台数。田小禾上去，把带来的稻穗放在讲台上，一串一串掰开数。她数得慢，掰一粒放一粒。第一串，八十九粒。第二串，一百零四粒。老师说数一串就够了，她摇头，把第三串也数完，九十七粒。下台时她把数过的稻穗拢在一起，用橡皮筋扎好，留在讲台上，说留给班里没数过的同学接着数。

最后一环，老师端来一盘撒出来的米粒，让全班看三十秒。三十秒里，田小禾想起的是奶奶。奶奶扫谷的时候腰弯得很低，扫成一堆后用簸箕扬谷，风把瘪谷吹走，好谷落回簸箕。奶奶扬完一批总要直一次腰，手在后腰上捶两下。三十秒结束，老师说什么她后来记不清了，只记得自己那天中午把碗里的饭吃得干干净净，连泡饭的汤都喝了。

放学，田小禾路过班教室，看见黑板上七张照片还贴着。她在门口站了一会儿，数了数，第七张是晒谷场。她书包里那把稻穗的橡皮筋还留在讲台上，明天会有同学接着数。

The Handful of Rice Ears Tian Xiaohe Brought

In the drawer of Tian Xiaohe desk there always sat a small handful of rice ears, picked up in her grandmother field last autumn. The tips pricked her fingers, and she never threw them away. On the day of the class meeting, she brought that handful to the classroom.

Walking into Harvest was written on the blackboard. When the teacher put up the photographs, Tian Xiaohe recognized the one of the grain-drying ground at once. It looked like the concrete yard in front of her grandmother house: grain spread open, a wooden rake pushed through it, children squatting at the edge chasing sparrows. She had squatted on that yard chasing sparrows since she was six. The sun made the back of her neck hot, the sparrows were not afraid, and you had to throw clods of dirt to move them. The photo did not show her, yet she felt she was inside that photo.

In the quiz round, half the class got the first question wrong about when the

rice begins to turn yellow, and Tian Xiaohe did not raise her hand right away. She listened to classmates blurt out June, July, listened to the teacher shake her head, and only then raised her hand slowly. She said her grandmother had taught her that the rice bows its head only after the End of Heat, the early fields by the end of August, the late ones not until October. Her voice grew a little louder on the word October, because the cold-water paddies at her grandmother place really were not cut until October, and her grandmother hands were full of cracks when cutting. She did not mention the cracks. She only said October. When the applause rose, she looked down at the rice ears in her own palm.

For the counting question, the teacher asked volunteers to come up and count. Tian Xiaohe went up and placed the rice ears she had brought on the platform, breaking them open strand by strand. She counted slowly, one grain broken, one grain set aside. First strand, eighty-nine grains. Second strand, one hundred and four. The teacher said one strand was enough; she shook her head and counted a third, ninety-seven. Going back to her seat she gathered the counted ears, tied them with a rubber band, and left them on the platform, saying they were for classmates who had not yet counted.

In the last round the teacher brought a plate of spilled rice grains and let the class look for thirty seconds. During those thirty seconds, what Tian Xiaohe thought of was her grandmother. When sweeping grain her grandmother bent very low, piled it up, then winnowed it with a bamboo tray, the wind carrying off the empty grains while the good ones fell back. After each batch she straightened up and knocked her lower back twice with her hand. When the thirty seconds ended, she later could not remember what the teacher said; she only remembered finishing every grain in her bowl at lunch that day, even drinking the rice soup.

At the end of school, Tian Xiaohe passed the classroom door and saw that the seven photographs were still on the blackboard. She stood there for a while and counted them; the seventh was the drying ground. The rubber band from the rice ears in her schoolbag was still on the platform, and tomorrow some classmate would go on counting.