窗下的田，田埂上的发现

那天早上离开学校的时候，天很高，老师带着全班沿河堤走到村外的田埂上。班主任只说了一句话：中午之前，每个人要在田里找到一个自己从没见过东西。

稻子已经割了一多半。割过的田铺着短短的稻茬，割得平平的，像剃过头的头皮；没割的田还站着金黄的稻子，风一过，稻子齐齐低头，浪头朝着风吹的方向跑。我活了十几年，看过无数次稻子，却没有一次像这样站在田埂上，离它那么近。

声音比颜色多。联合收割机在田那头开，声音闷闷的，地面有一点抖。近处是麻雀，一群落在稻茬上，又被谁的喊声惊起来。我旁边的男生突然叫起来，说一只蚂蚱跳到了他手上。大家围过去看，蚂蚱黄绿的，腿很粗，一跳就跳进站着的稻子里，不见了。

田埂上还长着一排狗尾草，穗子沉得弯下来，毛茸茸的扎脖子。老师让我们每人摸一下狗尾草，再摸一下稻穗，问手感有什么不一样。有人说狗尾草是毛的，稻穗是硬的，一粒一粒顶着手指。老师让那个男生再说一遍，他红着脸又说了一遍，全班都记住了那个硬。

田边有一堆芦苇在烧，烟直直的，味道不难闻，焦里带一点甜。老师把我们带上风口的坡，让我们每人深吸一口。她说这就是秋天的味道。有人问甜是从哪来的，老师说，是稻穗被火烘出来的。

我的发现在田中间。一小捆稻穗插在稻茬里，用橡皮筋扎着，穗头很饱满，一看就是有人特意放的。我不敢去碰。老师说，那是收割的人留给鸟的。风一吹，那捆稻穗晃了晃，果然有几只麻雀落上去。

回去的路上，大家话都少了。每个人的鞋上都蒙了一层黄黄的土。回到教室，我朝窗外看，田就在窗下，却觉得有点不认识它了。下午我把田埂写进了笔记本，写了那捆留给鸟的稻穗。写完的时候窗外天暗下来，收割机的声音还隐隐的。

The Field Under Our Window and the Discovery on the Ridge

When we left school that morning, the sky was very high, and our teacher took the whole class along the river embankment to the field ridge outside the village. Our homeroom teacher said only one thing: before noon, each person had to find something in the field he or she had never seen before.

The rice had been cut a little more than half. The cut plots lay under short stubble, cut flat, like a head shaved clean; the uncut plots still stood golden, and when the wind rose, the rice bowed all at once, the waves running in the direction of the wind. I had seen rice all my life, but never once had I stood on a field ridge and looked at it so close.

The sounds were more than the colors. The combine harvester ran at the far end of

the field, its sound dull, the ground trembling a little. Near us were sparrows, a flock dropping onto the stubble and starting up again at some shout. The boy beside me suddenly yelled that a grasshopper had jumped onto his hand. Everyone crowded over to look. The grasshopper was yellow-green, its thighs thick, and one jump sent it into the standing rice, gone.

A row of green bristle grass grew along the ridge, its bristly heads heavy enough to bend down, tickling the neck. The teacher had each of us touch a bristly head first and then a rice ear, and asked how the feel differed. One boy said the bristle grass was fuzzy while the rice ear was hard, grain by grain pressing against the finger. The teacher asked him to say it again, and he said it once more with a red face, and the whole class remembered that hardness.

At the edge of the field a pile of reeds was burning, the smoke rising straight, and the smell was not bad, a little sweetness inside the burnt straw. The teacher took us up to the slope at the windward side and let each of us take a deep breath. She said this was the taste of autumn. Someone asked where the sweetness came from, and the teacher said it was the smell of rice ears roasted by the fire.

My discovery was in the middle of the field. A small bundle of rice ears stood stuck in the stubble, tied with a rubber band, the tips full, clearly placed there on purpose by someone. I did not dare touch it. The teacher said it was left for the birds by the harvesters. When the wind blew, the bundle swayed, and sure enough a few sparrows landed on it.

On the way back nobody talked much. The shoes of every child were covered with a layer of yellow dust. Back in the classroom I looked out of the window. The field was still under the window, and yet I felt I did not quite recognize it. That afternoon I wrote the field ridge into my notebook, and I wrote about the bundle of rice ears left for the birds. When I finished, the sky outside was dark, and the sound of the harvester was still faintly there.