故乡的稻浪

离开故乡的第二十年，我还在梦里见过那片稻浪。梦里的稻浪跟记忆里不一样，总是从田的那头先白起来，像水开了锅，白浪一直滚到我跟前。我就蹲在田埂上，手扶着稻穗，抬手时谷粒就落进掌心，一颗一颗，带着体温。

故乡没有多少平地，田顺着山坡一层一层铺上去，像一摞金色的碗摞在高处。秋风来的时候，稻浪不是一齐起的，它从最低那丘田先起，一层一层往上赶，赶到最顶上一层，浪就细了，像谁在上头低声说了一句什么。站在山下的小路上看那些浪满山跑，你会忽然明白老辈人为什么说稻子越熟头越低——整座山都在同一刻低头，光在芒尖上碎开，晃得人不敢久看。

山脚下是打谷场，一块夯实了的泥地，被大人扫得干干净净，四角堆着几垛旧稻草。日头最毒的时候全村都在场上，掼稻的掼床一响一响，谷粒四散，地上像铺了一层金粉。我们小孩子没有别的事做，只往稻草垛上爬，在垛顶打滚，谷壳钻进领口，痒得一边挠一边笑。大人不骂我们，只直起腰看一眼，抹一把汗，又接着掼。

最难忘的是打谷场的夜晚。谷子晒干收进仓后，场上只剩薄薄一层谷壳，大人搬了竹床到场中央坐着，聊这一年的收成，说谁家多打了几担谷，说谷价又涨了。我们小孩子躺在竹床上数星星，稻茬的凉气从脚底慢慢升上来，混着露水和干草的味道，不知不觉就睡过去了，第二天清早被人抱回家，身上还沾着谷壳。

炊烟是傍晚升起来的，没有谁通知谁。先是一缕，再是两缕，然后整个谷口都是烟，低低地走，跟落日的余晖搅在一起。谁家的奶奶站在弄口喊一声吃饭，声音拉得又细又长，一直能传到田那头。我们从草垛上溜下来，饿着肚子往家跑，炊烟味混着新谷味，浓得几乎可以嚼。

后来我在很多地方吃过米饭，都没有那个味道。我知道故乡的稻浪早就退出山坡了，打谷场也铺了水泥。可每年秋风穿过城里的梧桐树时，我就知道，心里那片浪又起来了，一层一层，一直滚到我站着的地方。

The Rice Waves of My Hometown

Twenty years after leaving my hometown, I still see those rice waves in my dreams. In dreams they never look quite like the ones in my memory. They always turn pale first at the far end of the field, as if the water had come to a boil, and the pale waves roll all the way to my feet. I crouch on the field ridge, my hand resting on the rice ears, and when I lift my palm, the grains fall into it one by one, warm.

My hometown has little flat land. The paddies lie along the hillside, tier above tier, like golden bowls stacked one over another. When the autumn wind passes, the waves do not rise all at once. They begin in the lowest paddy and climb, layer by layer, until they reach the topmost terrace and thin into a faint ripple, as if someone up there had whispered a single word. Standing on the path at the foot of the hill, watching the waves run across the whole slope, you finally understand why the

elders say the rice ears bow lower when they are riper. The entire hillside is bowing at the same moment, and the light breaks on the tips of the awns, too bright to look at for long.

At the foot of the hill lies the threshing ground, a yard of packed clay swept spotless, with old straw piles stacked in the corners. At noon the whole village is out there, the flails rising and falling in a steady beat, rice grains scattering like gold dust over the ground. We children do nothing but climb the straw piles and roll on top of them, chaff sliding into our collars, itching everywhere, and we laugh while we scratch. The adults do not scold us. They only pause, wipe their sweat, glance at us, and swing the flail again.

The night on the threshing ground is what I miss most. Once the grain was dried and stored, only a thin layer of husks was left on the ground. The adults carried bamboo beds out to the middle of the yard and sat down to talk about the year, saying how many more baskets one family had threshed, saying the price of grain had gone up again. We children lay on the beds counting stars, the coolness of the rice stubble rising slowly from under our feet, mixed with the smell of dew and dry grass, and before we knew it we fell asleep, only to be carried home early the next morning with husks still clinging to our clothes.

The cooking smoke rises at dusk without warning. First one wisp, then another, until the whole valley is filled with it, drifting low, mixed with the last light of the setting sun. Some grandmother stands at the mouth of a lane and calls everyone home for supper, her voice stretched thin enough to reach the far end of the paddies. We scramble down from the straw piles and run home hungry, the smell of cooking smoke tangled with the smell of newly hulled rice, so thick you could almost chew it.

Since then I have eaten rice in many places, and none of it ever carried that smell again. I know the rice waves of my hometown have long left that hillside, and the threshing ground has been paved with cement. But whenever an autumn wind moves through the plane trees in the city, I know the waves in my heart are rising again, layer by layer, all the way to where I stand.

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