那年秋天，我回到稻浪中间

那年十月，我请了几天假回故乡。车在镇口停下，我背着包往村里走，走出不到一里路，路两边的田就把我整个人包住了。

稻子熟了，是我小时候看熟的那种熟，黄得发沉，不是城里公园草地的黄。风一来，稻浪从远处压过来，先压弯最外一圈，再往里一层一层地弯，弯下去的时候不响，等风头过去才哗地响成一片，像有人在很远的地方抖开一匹布。我站在路中间让那阵声音从头到脚过了一遍，站了很久。路边一丘田的田缺开着水，水声很轻，田里的稻茬影子落在浅水上，一晃一晃。

再往前走就听见掼稻的声音了。打谷场还在老地方，村尾那棵大樟树底下。场上谷子堆成小山，几个老人光着脚在谷堆上翻晒，木耙推过去，谷粒沙沙地响。一个老人直起腰看我，看了两秒，喊出我的小名。他认出了我，我一时却没认出他——他从前是生产队里掼稻最快的一条好汉。他拉我去场边的草垛坐着，抓一把新谷塞进我手心，让我闻。新谷的香是清的，带着太阳晒过的气味，我捏着那把谷没舍得撒。

中场休息时，场上的人围坐成一圈，谁家婆婆提来一桶泡了茶的新米团子，一人一个，咬开是红糖馅，烫得直吸气。米团子就是场上刚打下来的新米做的，软糯里带一点谷壳的涩，城里点心铺做不出这种涩。老人们一边吃一边讲旧事，讲哪一年秋天雨连下了半个月，全村抢在雨前抢收，打谷场的灯点到后半夜。我听着那些年份，像听一段不属于我却又确实发生过的历史。

傍晚我往家走，炊烟已经起来了。各家各户的烟从屋后升起来，先笔直，再被风压弯，在村子顶上连成薄薄一层。有家的烟囱冒的是柴烟，有家的冒的是稻草烟，稻草烟里有一股甜。走到自家屋前，灶间的火光从门缝里漏出来，我妈在灶前添草，锅里的水正响。那一刻我心里某个放了很久的东西忽然落了地。

假满回城，我在车上回头看那些田一直退到山背后。我想，稻浪年年都起，炊烟年年都升，只是看它们的人一年一年走远了。可只要秋天一到，我手心还留着那把新谷的香。

That Autumn, I Walked Back Into the Rice Waves

That October I took a few days off and went back to my hometown. When the bus stopped at the town entrance, I set off for the village with my bag on my back, and less than a li down the road, the paddies on both sides closed over me like water.

The rice was ripe in the old way I remembered from childhood, a heavy yellow, not the pale yellow of city park lawns. When the wind came, the waves pressed in from far away, bending the outermost ring of rice first, then layer after layer inward. They bent down without a sound, and only after the gust passed did they burst into a rustle all at once, like someone shaking out a long bolt of cloth somewhere in the distance. I stood in the middle of the road and let that sound pass through me from head to foot, and I stood there a long time. A paddy by the road had its water inlet open, the water murmuring softly, and the shadows of rice stubble swayed in the

shallow water.

Farther on I heard the sound of threshing. The threshing ground was still in its old place, under the big camphor tree at the end of the village. Grain was piled into small hills on the yard, and several old men with bare feet were turning it in the sun, pushing wooden rakes through it so the grains hissed. One old man straightened up, looked at me for two seconds, and called out my childhood name. He recognized me, though for a moment I could not place him. He had once been the fastest thresher in the production team. He pulled me to sit by a straw pile at the edge of the yard, pressed a handful of new grain into my palm, and told me to smell it. The fragrance of fresh rice is clean, carrying the smell of sun on it, and I held that handful without wanting to let it go.

At the midday break the people on the yard sat in a circle, and a grandmother from one of the houses brought over a bucket of new-rice dumplings soaked in tea, one for each person. Bitten open, they were filled with brown sugar, so hot that we kept inhaling sharply. The dumplings were made from the new rice threshed on that very yard, soft and chewy with a faint astringency of husk in them, the kind no pastry shop in the city can produce. The old people ate while telling old stories, about the year the autumn rain lasted half a month without stopping and the whole village raced to harvest before the storm, the lights on the threshing ground burning past midnight. I listened to those years as if hearing a history that was not mine yet had truly happened.

In the evening I walked home. The cooking smoke had already risen. Wisps climbed from the chimneys behind each house, straight at first, then bent by the wind, joining into a thin layer over the village. Some chimneys gave off wood smoke, others rice-straw smoke, and the straw smoke had a sweetness in it. When I reached my own house, light from the stove leaked through the door crack. My mother was feeding straw into the fire, and the water in the wok was beginning to sing. At that moment something in my heart that had been held up for years suddenly settled.

When my leave was over I looked back from the bus as the fields retreated behind the hills one by one. The rice waves rise every year, I thought, and the cooking smoke rises every year; only the people watching them walk farther away year by year. But once autumn arrives, the fragrance of that handful of new grain is still on my palm.

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