沿着田埂走一下午

十一月的第一个晴天后，我决定沿着村后的田埂走一下午。不为别的，稻子收完了，田空了，这种空阔的田只在秋天有。

田埂窄，刚好放下一双脚。埂两边的野菊花开得正闹，我不弯腰就看不见它们，弯下腰才看见另一个世界。花小，指甲盖大，花瓣一层一层排得极整齐，黄芯子密得像一小片麦田。叶子背面是灰绿的，捏碎一股冲鼻的苦香。一丛一丛数过去，白花的少，黄花的多，还有一种贴地开的，茎短得几乎看不见，花却开得理直气壮。我蹲下去看一丛花的时候，一只小蜂从花心里钻出来，懵了一下，又飞走了。

田埂左边是一大片稻茬田。走近了才看清，稻茬不是胡乱立着的，一行一行，茬口斜斜地切齐，是镰刀留下的角度。茬根还带着干泥，茬尖被日头晒得发白。踩上去咯吱作响，硬茬顶着鞋底。田面裂着细缝，缝里钻出几棵落谷自己发的苗，绿得突兀。一群麻雀落在田中央，跳一阵，啄一阵，飞起又落下。它们不慌，我也就不慌，站在埂上看它们。

半路上遇见田主老陈在翻整田边的一小块地。他弯着腰，把松动的稻茬一棵一棵拔出来，抖掉根上的土，顺手丢到田角的肥堆上。拔过的地方露出深色的湿土，跟周围发白的干茬田像打了补丁。他直腰歇气的工夫，我们隔着田埂搭了几句话，他说这块田明年开春下秧，又说今年稻价还行，说完冲我点点头，接着拔他的茬。他手边插着一小束不知谁丢在埂上的野菊花，也不见扔，也不见收，就那么立着，像田自己长出来的一支花。

日头偏西的时候，我走到田埂的尽头，回头来看来路。夕阳正落在收割机留下的空场上，光斜斜地扫过稻茬田，每一根茬都变成一根细金线，整片田像被谁用金粉扫过一遍。田埂上的野菊花逆着光，花瓣透出毛茸茸的亮边。远处村子的白墙被照成橘色，第一缕炊烟刚起，直直地立着，到半空才被风揉散。

我在埂尽头坐到天暗下来才回去。野菊花明年还会开，稻茬田翻过一冬就是软泥，夕阳每天落下。可这一下午，我什么也没做，只是走，只是看，田把它的空和它的满都摊开给我看了个仔细。

An Afternoon Walk Along the Field Ridge

After the first clear day of November, I decided to walk along the field ridge behind the village for a whole afternoon. For no other reason: the rice was harvested, the fields lay empty, and the openness of the fields belongs to autumn alone.

The ridge is narrow, exactly wide enough for a pair of feet. The wild chrysanthemums on both sides were blooming in full commotion; I could not see them without bending down, and only when I bent down did I see another world. The flowers are small, no bigger than a fingernail, their petals arranged in layers so neat, and the yellow centers dense like a tiny wheat field. The undersides of the leaves are

gray-green, and crushed between the fingers they give off a sharp bitter fragrance. Counting cluster after cluster, the white ones are few and the yellow ones many, and there is one kind that hugs the ground, its stem so short it is almost invisible, yet its flowers open with full confidence. As I crouched to study one cluster, a small bee buzzed out of the heart of the flower, dazed for a moment, then flew off.

On the left of the ridge lay a vast field of rice stubble. Only when I came close could I see that the stubble does not stand at random. It stands row by row, each stubble cut at a slant, angled, the angle left by the sickle. The bases still carry dried mud, and the tips have been bleached pale by the sun. Stepping on them makes a creaking sound, the hard stubble pushing back against the soles. The field surface is cracked with fine seams, and a few seedlings sprouted from fallen grain push up through the seams, green out of place. A flock of sparrows landed in the middle of the field, hopping, pecking, rising and settling again. They were unhurried, so I was unhurried too, standing on the ridge to watch them.

Halfway along I met Old Chen, the owner of the field, working over a small corner of his land. He was bent at the waist, pulling up the loose rice stubble one plant at a time, shaking the soil off its roots and tossing it onto a compost heap at the corner of the field. Where he had pulled, dark moist soil showed through, like patches patched onto the pale dry stubble around it. While he straightened up to catch his breath, we exchanged a few words across the ridge. He said this field would have seedlings in the spring, and that this year the grain price was decent; then he nodded at me and went back to pulling stubble. Stuck in the ground beside his hands was a small bunch of wild chrysanthemums someone had left on the ridge. He neither threw them away nor gathered them in. They just stood there, as if the field had grown a bouquet of its own.

When the sun swung west, I reached the end of the ridge and looked back along the way I had come. The setting sun was falling on the bare ground left by the harvester, and its light swept slantwise across the stubble field until every stubble became a thin thread of gold, the whole field as if someone had swept it over with gold dust. The wild chrysanthemums on the ridge stood against the light, their petals fringed with a fuzzy bright edge. In the distance the white walls of the village turned orange, and the first wisp of cooking smoke had just risen, standing straight up until the wind kneaded it apart at mid-height.

I sat at the end of the ridge until the sky went dark, then walked home. The wild chrysanthemums will bloom again next year, the stubble field will turn to soft mud after one winter, and the sun will set every day. But that afternoon I did nothing at all, only walked, only looked, and the field spread out both its emptiness and its fullness for me to read closely.