田埂上的野菊花开了

放学回家的路要经过一条长田埂。稻子收完有些日子了，田里只剩一茬一茬的稻茬，整整齐齐立着，像谁把大地的头发剪短了，还没剪匀。

野菊花就是这时候开的。起先只有一两朵，在田埂的草里探头探脑，谁也没在意。等我们放学走过一次，它就开了一片，黄的、白的，一小簇一小簇，从桥头一直开到老槐树底下。风一过，细碎的花点全在晃，像田埂上落了一层会跳的星星。我们几个女生每天放学都要放慢脚步，一人摘几朵，摘下来又不知道拿它做什么，就是攥在手里，让那股又苦又清的香味沾满手心。

有同学贪多，想下田去摘埂那边开得最大的一丛。她刚跳下去就叫了起来——稻茬看着软，踩上去硬得很，一根一根顶着脚底，像踩在无数个小木桩上。我们在埂上笑得直不起腰。她一瘸一拐上来，鞋底下扎了两个小眼，第二天她穿了一双厚底鞋来，理直气壮地又下田了。

奶奶也爱野菊花。她不摘着玩，她摘。每天傍晚她拎一只竹篮到埂上来，专挑开得最盛的那几簇，连茎带花掐下来，说晒干了泡水，一整个冬天嗓子都不疼。她掐花的手法又快又稳，指头一捻就是一枝，竹篮里的花越堆越高，香味浓得招小虫。我帮她提篮子，篮子的边沿上沾满碎花瓣，走一路掉一路，掉在稻茬田的小路上，像给小路撒了花钱。

夕阳是慢慢压下来的。它压到西边的山头上时，整片稻茬田被照成红铜色，一根根稻茬的影子拉得很长，长到互相搭在一起。田埂上的野菊花被夕光照得透明，花瓣边缘亮亮的，像镶了一圈金。我们坐在埂上，把白天摘的菊花用草茎编成花环，戴在头上，谁也不笑话谁。远处有人赶着牛回家，牛的影子从稻茬田里斜斜地穿过去。

后来我长大，见过许多名贵的菊花，公园里的、花店里的，一朵就有碗口大。可我总记得田埂上那些野菊花，小，密，不要人管，一年一年自己开。夕阳一照，整条田埂都在发光，我们头顶着歪歪扭扭的花环，把秋天的影子拉得很长很长。

The Wild Chrysanthemums on the Field Ridge

The road home from school runs along a long field ridge. The rice had been harvested some time ago, and the fields held nothing but stubble, row after row standing neatly, as if someone had cut the hair of the earth short and not quite evenly.

The wild chrysanthemums bloomed just then. At first there were only one or two flowers, peeking out from the grass on the ridge, unnoticed by anyone. After we walked past once on our way home from school, they opened in whole patches, yellow and white, in small clusters, from the little bridge all the way to the old locust tree. When the wind passed, all the tiny flowers trembled, like a layer of jumping stars fallen on the ridge. We girls slowed our steps every day after school and picked a few blossoms each, without knowing what to do with them once picked. We just

held them in our fists until our palms were filled with their bitter, clean fragrance.

One classmate, greedy for more, climbed down into the field to pick the biggest cluster on the far side of the ridge. She cried out the moment she jumped down. The stubble looked soft, but underfoot it was hard, each stubble poking up at her soles like stepping on countless tiny wooden stakes. We doubled over laughing on the ridge. She came back up limping, two small holes punched in her shoe soles. The next day she came wearing thick-soled shoes and, without the least embarrassment, climbed down into the field again.

My grandmother also loved the wild chrysanthemums. She did not pick them for play; she picked them for use. Every evening she came to the ridge with a bamboo basket, choosing only the fullest clusters, pinching off stem and flower together, saying she would dry them for tea and my throat would not hurt the whole winter. Her fingers were quick and sure, one twist and a stem came off, and the flowers in the basket piled higher and higher, their fragrance strong enough to draw tiny insects. I carried the basket for her. Its rim was crusted with petals, which fell out all along the way onto the path between the stubble fields, scattering coins of flower along the trail.

The setting sun pressed down slowly. When it reached the hills in the west, the whole stubble field turned the color of red copper, and each stubble cast a long shadow, so long that the shadows leaned on one another. The wild chrysanthemums on the ridge glowed transparent in the evening light, the edges of their petals bright, as if rimmed with gold. We sat on the ridge and wove the flowers we had picked into rings with blades of grass, wore them on our heads, and no one laughed at anyone. Far off, someone drove cattle home, and the shadows of the cattle slanted across the stubble field.

Later, when I grew up, I saw many prized chrysanthemums, in parks and in flower shops, each blossom as wide as a bowl. But I always remember the wild ones on that field ridge, small and dense, needing no care from anyone, blooming year after year by themselves. When the setting sun shone on them, the whole ridge glowed, and we, with crooked flower rings on our heads, let autumn stretch our shadows long, long away.

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.

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老周头最后一次走过那条田埂

儿子把车停在村口，是来接老周头进城过冬的。老周头答应得很爽快，只提了一个要求：先让他去村后走一圈，走那条老田埂。儿子说那田都收完了，有什么好看的。老周头不辩解，回屋换了那双解放鞋，就出门了。儿子拗不过，跟在后头。

田埂上的野菊花正开得满埂都是。老周头走得慢，走几步停一停。他不摘花，只低头看，看完了接着走。有一段埂塌了半边，野菊花从塌口垂下来，开成了一个小瀑布。他用鞋底蹭了蹭埂边的土，说这条埂是他当年一担一担土垫起来的，稻子收完那阵，他挑了整整一个秋天的夜土。儿子第一次知道这件事，没接话，掏出手机想拍，老周头说拍它做什么，明年它还开。

埂左边是稻茬田，茬子立得齐整。老周头下了田，儿子怕他摔，伸手要扶，被他挡开。他在田里走了半圈，弯腰拔起一棵稻茬，根上还带着干泥，他用手把泥抠掉，凑近闻了闻，又闻了闻手里的土，说这田今年墒情好，明年开春不用多上肥。他把稻茬放回茬坑里，插回去，像给它重新站好。

埂尽头有块青石，是给歇脚的人留的。石头让几代人的裤子磨出了浅浅的弧，弧上落着野菊花的花瓣。

夕阳这时候压到山头上了。整片稻茬田烧成红金色，野菊花在埂上亮成一条花边。老周头从田里上来，在埂尽头那块青石上坐下，面朝西。他不说话，儿子也不说话。炊烟从村里升起来，一缕一缕，跟夕阳搅在一起。坐了很久，老周头站起来，拍了拍裤子上的土，说走吧。走了几步他又回头看了一眼，那一眼很长，长得把整片田都收进去了。

车开出村口，儿子从后视镜里看，那条田埂上的野菊花在夕阳里亮成一线金。老周头在副驾上靠着椅背闭了眼。他不知道城里的阳台能不能种活野菊花，他只知道明天就要走，而今天，田埂走完了，稻茬看过了，夕阳也看过了，他可以走了。

The Last Time Old Zhou Walked That Field Ridge

His son parked the car at the village entrance, come to take Old Zhou to the city for the winter. Old Zhou agreed readily, with only one request: let him first walk a loop behind the village, along that old field ridge. His son said the fields were already harvested, what was there to see. Old Zhou did not argue. He went inside, changed into his cloth shoes, and walked out. His son could not persuade him otherwise and followed behind.

The wild chrysanthemums on the ridge were in full bloom along its whole length. Old Zhou walked slowly, stopping every few steps. He did not pick the flowers; he only lowered his head to look, then walked on. A section of the ridge had collapsed on one side, and the chrysanthemums hung down from the broken edge, blooming into a small waterfall. He scuffed the soil at the foot of the ridge with his sole and said

he had built this ridge himself, basket of soil after basket of soil; in the season after the rice harvest, he had carried night soil for an entire autumn. It was the first time his son heard this. He said nothing, took out his phone to photograph it, and Old Zhou said, what for, it will bloom again next year.

To the left of the ridge lay the stubble field, its stubble standing in tidy rows. Old Zhou stepped down into the field. His son, afraid he would fall, reached out a hand, and Old Zhou waved it off. He walked half a circuit through the field, pulled up one stubble, its roots still holding dried mud, picked the mud off with his fingers, sniffed it, then sniffed the soil in his hand, and said this field had good moisture this year and would not need much fertilizer in the spring. He put the stubble back into its hole and pressed it in, as if standing it upright again.

At the end of the ridge sits a flat blue stone, left there for people to rest on. Generations of trousers have worn a shallow arc into it, and petals of wild chrysanthemum lie in the arc.

By then the setting sun was pressing down on the hilltops. The whole stubble field burned red-gold, and the chrysanthemums on the ridge glowed like a floral trim. Old Zhou climbed back onto the ridge and sat down on the flat stone at its end, facing west. He did not speak, and neither did his son. Cooking smoke rose from the village, wisp after wisp, mingling with the setting sun. After a long while Old Zhou stood, brushed the dust from his trousers, and said, let us go. A few steps later he turned to look back once more, and that glance was long, long enough to take the whole field into it.

As the car left the village entrance, his son watched in the rearview mirror: the wild chrysanthemums on that field ridge shone in the setting sun as a single line of gold. Old Zhou leaned back in the passenger seat and closed his eyes. He did not know whether a city balcony could keep wild chrysanthemums alive. He only knew he would leave tomorrow, and that today he had finished walking the ridge, finished seeing the stubble, finished seeing the setting sun, and now he could go.