我们家的一次秋收日

春天我们在城郊的农庄包下一小丘田，租期一年，田主代管，秋收自己来收。说是为了孩子，其实大人比孩子还惦记这一天。十月中旬，农庄打电话说稻子熟透了，再等就要落粒。周六一早，我们全家带着镰刀和布袋就去了。

田主老徐已经把田围出一人宽的走道，让我们从走道下镰。爸爸自告奋勇先割，他在乡下待过几年，手生了，第一垄割得像锯齿。女儿站在田埂上指挥，说爸爸你弯的腰没有图片上标准。爸爸不理她，割到第三垄找回了手感，镰刀贴着稻根一咬一个准，稻子成片地倒，露出底下褐色的田面。他直起腰时后背的衣裳湿了一大片。

女儿的任务是拾谷穗。割过的田里掉落的稻穗，她一穗一穗捡进小竹篮。起先她捡十步歇一步，后来入了迷，专挑田角里藏着的，像寻宝。有一穗掉在水缺的泥里，她伸手去够，半条胳膊糊了泥，她举着那穗喊妈妈你看，一点不嫌脏。篮子里的穗攒到后来沉了，她换两只手捧，谁也不让碰，说是她拾的，要过秤。

中午老徐在地头打井水。井是老井，石头的井沿让绳子磨出几道深槽。水打上来的声音咕咚咕咚，带着地底下的凉气。我们一人一缸子，坐在稻把子上喝。女儿喝得急，冰得抱头，又舍不得放下缸子，含着一口水呜呜地说话。那水有股铁味和石头味，混着稻子的香，是我记忆里小时候的味道，多少年没喝到了。

收工过秤，我们那一丘田打了六十八斤谷。女儿把拾的穗单独放，最后也过了秤，四两七。她为这四两七高兴了一路，说要蒸一碗自己拾的米。回程车上她睡得很沉，小竹篮抱在怀里。我和爸爸对视一眼，都想起出发前她还在问秋收是什么。现在她知道秋收是什么了：是腰疼，是泥巴，是四两七，是甜。

后来女儿在作文里写，我们家过了一个秋收日。老师评语说细节真实。老师不知道，那些细节不是编出来的，是一镰刀一镰刀割出来的，是一穗一穗拾出来的，是一缸子井水喝出来的。

Our Family Harvest Day

In spring we rented a small paddy from a farm resort in the suburbs, a lease of one year, the field keeper tending it for us, the harvest ours to reap. We said it was for the children, but in truth the adults looked forward to that day more than the children did. In mid-October the farm called to say the rice was fully ripe and another wait would make the grains shatter. Early Saturday morning our whole family set off with sickles and cloth sacks.

The field keeper, Old Xu, had already cut a walking strip one person wide around the paddy so we could start from there. My husband volunteered to reap first. He had spent a few years in the countryside as a boy, but his hands were rusty; his first row came out jagged as a saw blade. Our daughter stood on the field ridge directing him, saying dad, your bent back does not look as standard as the picture. He ignored

her. By the third row his feel came back, the sickle biting clean at the rice roots, the stalks falling sheet by sheet to reveal the brown field beneath. When he straightened up, a wide patch of his shirt on his back was soaked through.

The job of gleaning fell to our daughter. The rice ears fallen in the cut field, she picked them one by one into a small bamboo basket. At first she rested every ten steps, then she got absorbed, hunting for the ones hidden in the corners of the field like treasure. One ear had fallen into the mud at the water inlet; she reached for it and smeared mud up to her elbow, and she held that ear up calling, mama look, not minding the dirt at all. As the basket filled it grew heavy, and she carried it with both hands cradled in front, letting no one touch it, saying she gleaned them and they must be weighed.

At noon Old Xu pumped well water at the edge of the field. The well was old, its stone curb worn with deep grooves by generations of rope. The water came up glugging, carrying the cold of deep earth. We each drank a mugful, sitting on bundles of straw. Our daughter gulped too fast, froze, clutched her head, yet could not bear to put the mug down, and spoke through a mouthful of water in hums. The water had a taste of iron and stone, mixed with the fragrance of rice. It was the taste of my own childhood, one I had not drunk in decades.

At the end we weighed the harvest: sixty-eight jin of grain from our paddy. Our daughter set her gleaned ears apart, and in the end they were weighed too: four liang and seven qian. She rejoiced over that four liang seven the whole way home, saying she would steam a bowl of rice from her own gleaning. In the car back she slept deeply, the little bamboo basket hugged in her arms. My husband and I exchanged a glance, both remembering how before we left she had asked what a harvest even was. Now she knows what a harvest is: it is a sore back, it is mud, it is four liang seven, it is sweetness.

Later our daughter wrote a composition: Our Family Had a Harvest Day. The comment from the teacher said the details felt real. The teacher does not know those details were not invented. They were cut sickle stroke by sickle stroke, gleaned ear by ear, and drunk mugful by mugful of well water.

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