儿子第一次握镰刀

国庆回村，表哥家的稻正好开镰。我跟儿子说，走，下田看看去。他在城里只会背锄禾日当午，背了三年，米粒长在哪根秆上都不知道。

表哥递给他一把小镰刀，是他这个头专用的，刃不长。表哥教他左手拢稻秆，右手下刀，刀口斜着往上走。儿子第一把拢得太少，两三根，割得磕磕绊绊。第二把拢多了，镰刀吃不住，稻秆倒了一片，他自己也坐在地里。我在田埂上没笑，表哥也没笑，表哥伸手把他拎起来，说再来。第三把起他就顺了，虽然割出来的稻子铺得歪歪扭扭，像一排没站齐的兵。他割了半垄就直腰，学着大人的样子用胳膊肘蹭鼻子上的汗，那个动作学得惟妙惟肖，我忍住了笑。

割完的田轮到他拾谷穗。掉在地上的稻穗，一穗一穗捡起来归堆。他起先捡得随意，抓一把塞兜里。表哥说不行，掉一穗是一穗，种稻的人见不得田里留穗。他就认真起来，低着头沿着割过的垄一穗一穗数着捡，半垄下来捡了小半抱，兜里那几穗又补进堆里。直起腰时他说了句，原来米真的是一穗一穗来的。

歇晌时儿子问表哥，这一亩田能打多少米。表哥掐着指头算，说好的年成一千二，今年雨水匀，能有一千一。儿子掰着手指换算，说一碗饭二两米，这一亩够我们家吃大半年。表哥说账不是这么算的，还要留种子、交租、喂鸡鸭，七折八扣，落进碗里的没几成。儿子不信，表哥抓了把谷在掌心搓开，摊给他看，瘪的、断的、壳里空的，都在那一把里。

歇晌时表哥从地头井里打上水来，用吊桶，摇得吱呀响。井水拔凉，灌进搪瓷缸，白汽在缸壁上凝成水珠。儿子捧过缸子咕咚咕咚灌了半缸，抹嘴说比家里冰箱里的凉水好喝。表哥乐了，让他再喝一缸。他自己蹲在井台边，就着桶沿喝，喉结一动一动。

回程的路上儿子睡着了，指甲缝里还嵌着泥。我开着车想，割稻、拾穗、喝井水，这些事我小时候天天做，后来忘了，如今要带着儿子回一趟乡下才能重新记起来。田还是那片田，镰刀换了几代，握镰刀的手也换了几代。他长大未必记得这一天的太阳，但他的手握过镰刀，他的嘴喝过刚打上来的井水，这就够了。

The First Time My Son Held a Sickle

During the National Day holiday I drove back to the village, and the family of my cousin was just beginning to reap their rice. I said to my son, come on, let us go down to the field and watch. In the city he has only ever recited the old poem about hoeing weeding at noon, recited it for three years, and still does not know which stalk a grain of rice grows on.

My cousin handed him a small sickle, the size made for a boy his height, with a short blade. Cousin taught him to gather the rice stalks with his left hand, cut with his right, and let the blade bite upward at a slant. His first grab held only two or three stalks, and he sawed them off clumsily. The second grab held too many; the

sickle could not bite through, the stalks fell in a heap, and he sat down in the middle of the field himself. I did not laugh from the field ridge, and neither did cousin. Cousin reached down, hauled him up, and said, try again. From the third grab on he found the rhythm, though the cut rice lay in a crooked row, like soldiers who failed to stand in line. After half a ridge he straightened up and wiped the sweat off his nose with his elbow, the way adults do, mimicked so perfectly that I had to bite back a laugh.

After the reaping was done it was his turn to glean. The rice ears that had fallen on the ground, pick them up one by one and gather them into a pile. At first he gleaned carelessly, grabbing handfuls into his pocket. Cousin said no, one fallen ear counts as one ear, and no rice farmer can bear to leave ears in the field. So he got serious, head down, counting and picking along the cut rows, and after half a ridge he held a small armful, then added the few ears in his pocket to the pile. Straightening up, he said one sentence: so rice really does come ear by ear.

At the break my son asked cousin how many jin of rice one mu of this field can yield. Cousin counted on his fingers and said a good year gives twelve hundred jin, and this year the rain was even, so maybe eleven hundred. My son counted on his fingers to convert it: one bowl of rice takes two liang of grain, so this one mu could feed our family for most of half a year. Cousin said the math does not work that way. You must keep seed, pay the fees, feed the chickens and ducks, and after seven discounts and eight deductions, only a few bowls of rice actually reach the table. My son did not believe it, so cousin grabbed a handful of grain, rubbed the husks open in his palm, and spread it out for him to see: the shriveled ones, the broken ones, the ones hollow inside the shell, all in that one handful.

At the midday break cousin pumped water up from the well at the edge of the field with a bucket on a windlass, the crank creaking away. The well water was ice-cold; poured into an enamel mug, it left beads of condensation on the white surface. My son took the mug and gulped down half of it, then wiped his mouth and said it tasted better than the cold water from our refrigerator at home. Cousin laughed and told him to drink another mug. He himself squatted by the well curb, drinking straight from the rim of the bucket, his throat working up and down.

On the way home my son fell asleep, mud still wedged under his fingernails. Driving, I thought: reaping, gleaning, drinking well water, I did these things every day as a child, then forgot them, and now I have to bring my son back to the countryside once to remember them again. The field is still that field; the sickles have changed through a few generations, and the hands gripping them have changed too. He may not remember the sun of this day when he grows up, but his hand has held a sickle, and his mouth has drunk water just pumped from the well. That is enough.

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.

爷爷带孙子看秋收的那天

儿子儿媳出差，把五岁的小满送回老屋住一周。爷爷老周头从田里回来的头一个早上，就把孙子叫醒了：走，爷爷带你去看秋收。小满问秋收是什么。老周头说不清，只说，去了就看见了。

到了田头，老周头把最小的一把镰刀递到孙子手里，自己的大手包着小手。割稻就这样，左手把住稻秆，右手带镰。小满第一下把稻子割歪了，第二下找到了感觉。老周头说，比你爸小时候割得好。小满不知道爸爸小时候是什么样，只管一下一下地割。

割完稻，爷孙俩弯腰拾谷穗。小满拾一把掉一把，可篮子见了半底，眼睛就亮了。老周头说，拾满一篮，场屋婶给糖。小满越跑越快，晌午就把篮子拾满了。夜里他把篮里的谷穗倒在灯下数，数到三十七根，抱着睡着了。

晌午坐在田头树下，老周头去老井打水，拿葫芦瓢舀了半瓢井水递给孙子。小满喝一口，整张脸皱起来，说凉。老周头自己灌了一大口，说，你们城里的冰水，是冰箱的味，这水是井的味。小满听不懂，又喝了瓢。

那篮谷穗拿去场屋换了糖，婶子过秤，说二两四。小满攥着糖不撒手，老周头给他拌上热饭，他吃了两碗。老周头看他吃，自己倒没吃几口，碗见了底，又给他盛了一碗。

晌午歇晌，田埂上摆开饭。老周头给孙子夹菜，自己蹲在田埂边吃。小满指着远处的收割机问，那个大个子是谁家的。老周头说，是村里承包大户的，一天收的稻，够爷孙俩割一个月。小满问那爷爷为什么还用手割。老周头想了半天，说，手割的稻，穗子完整，拾穗的孩子才有的拾。

回家的路上，孙子趴在老周头背上睡着了。老周头走得很慢，对着睡熟的孩子说，你爸小时候，我没带他看过田，是我错了。到家把他放到炕上，把孩子手上的谷壳一根一根擦干净。

几天后小满被接回城里。车发动前他在村口又喝了一瓢井水，这回没皱脸。上车睡着，手里还攥着那根最饱满的谷穗。老周头站在村口看车走远，回头去看他的田。

The Day Grandfather Took His Grandson to See the Autumn Harvest

The son and daughter-in-law were away on a business trip, and five-year-old Xiaoman was sent back to the old house for a week. On the first morning after Grandfather Lao Zhoutou came back from the fields, he woke the boy: come, grandpa will take you to see the autumn harvest. Xiaoman asked what the autumn harvest was. Lao Zhoutou could not explain it clearly, and only said, go there and you will see.

At the edge of the field, Lao Zhoutou put the smallest sickle into the hand of his grandson, his big hand wrapping the small one. This is how you cut rice: the left hand holds the stalks, the right hand leads the sickle. The first swing of the boy cut the rice crooked; the second found the feel. Lao Zhoutou said, better than your father did at your age. Xiaoman did not know what his father was like as a child, and only kept swinging, one stroke after another.

After the cutting, the two bent down to glean the fallen ears of grain. The boy

picked up one and dropped one, but when the basket was half full his eyes lit up. Lao Zhoutou said, fill the basket and the auntie at the threshing house gives candy. The boy ran faster and faster, and by noon the basket was full. At night he poured the ears under the lamp and counted them, thirty-seven in all, then fell asleep holding them.

At noon they sat under the tree by the field. Lao Zhoutou went to the old well for water and ladled half a gourd dipper of well water for the boy. Xiaoman took one sip and his whole face scrunched up, saying it was cold. Lao Zhoutou took a big drink himself and said, the iced water in your city tastes of the fridge; this water tastes of the well. The boy did not understand, and drank the dipper again.

At the midday rest, the meal was laid out on the ridge. Lao Zhoutou served food for the boy and squatted at the edge of the ridge to eat. Xiaoman pointed at the harvester in the distance and asked whose big machine that was. Lao Zhoutou said it belonged to the big contractor of the village; what it reaps in one day would take the two of them a month to cut by hand. The boy asked why grandpa still cut by hand. The old man thought a long while and said, cutting by hand keeps the ears whole, so the children who glean have something to pick up.

The basket of ears went to the threshing house for candy. The auntie weighed it: two liang and four qian. The boy would not let go of the candy. Lao Zhoutou mixed it into hot rice for him, and he ate two bowls. The old man watched him eat and barely touched his own; when the bowl was empty he filled another for the boy.

On the way home the boy fell asleep on the back of his grandfather. Lao Zhoutou walked very slowly, saying to the sleeping child, when your father was small, I never took him to see the fields. That was my mistake. At home he laid him on the kang and wiped the rice husks off the small hands, one by one.

A few days later Xiaoman was taken back to the city. Before the car started he drank another dipper of well water at the village entrance, and this time his face did not scrunch. He fell asleep in the car still holding the fullest ear of grain. Lao Zhoutou stood at the village entrance watching the car go away, then turned back to look at his fields.