农忙假的第一课

农忙假的第一天，我没有让学生回家就玩。我在黑板上写：今天的作业，去晒谷场干两个钟头的活，写一篇三百字的记。有学生笑，说老师这是布置劳动。我说，秋收就是课本，晒谷场就是课堂。

我自己先下场。村西头陈家的谷摊在场东，人手不够，我挽起裤腿帮他推谷。竹耙推过去，谷浪翻起来，热浪扑脸。学生在边上看着，我喊人来搭手，十几个孩子一人一把小耙，场面一下子热闹了。陈家婶子过意不去，要给我工钱，我摆手说我们是来上课的。她说那上课管饭不，中午管，她笑了，说那这课上得值。

拖拉机突突突进场的时候，全班都在看。车斗里堆着连夜脱的谷，老鲁叔跳下车，抓一把场上的干谷闻闻，又抓一把车斗里的，说这批还潮，摊薄些晒。学生们围着听，比上自然课还专心。有个孩子问什么叫潮，老鲁叔把谷塞他手里让他咬，咬不碎的就是潮的。

傍晚帮陈家装袋，学生排成一串传口袋。装完过秤，陈家给每个孩子一把炒花生，孩子们捧着不急着吃。回学校的路上天擦黑，拖拉机在前面走，车灯扫过田野，我们跟在后面，影子一个挨一个。有学生问我，老师，明年农忙假还上晒谷场吗。我说上，年年上。

到家已经很晚，母亲留的饭扣在锅里还温着。吃饭时我想，孩子们今晚写的记，一定比我备课本上写的活。他们的手上有谷灰，口袋压过肩膀，拖拉机声还在耳朵里，这样的作文不用教。

后来批那些三百字的记，最好的那句是个平时最怕写作文的孩子写的：拖拉机一进场，我们全班的肚子都不饿了。我在下面回他：这就是秋收的力量。

The First Lesson of the Harvest Holiday

On the first day of the harvest holiday, I did not let the students go home to play. I wrote on the blackboard: the assignment for today, work two hours on the threshing ground, then write a note of three hundred words. Some students laughed and said the teacher was assigning labor. I said the autumn harvest is the textbook, and the threshing ground is the classroom.

I went down to the ground first. The Chen family at the west end of the village had their grain spread on the east side of the ground, short of hands. I rolled up my trouser legs and helped them push the grain. The bamboo rake went through and waves of grain rolled up, hot air on the face. The students watched from the edge; I called them to help, and a dozen children each took a small rake, and the ground turned lively at once. Auntie Chen felt bad and wanted to pay me wages. I waved it off and said we were there for a class. She asked if the class came with a meal. Lunch, yes, I said. She laughed and said that was a class worth taking.

When the tractor rattled onto the ground, the whole class watched. Its bed was piled with grain threshed through the night. Old Lu jumped down, sniffed a handful of

the dry grain on the ground, then a handful from the bed, and said this batch was still damp — spread it thinner to dry. The students gathered around listening, more focused than in science class. One child asked what damp meant. Old Lu pressed grain into his hand and told him to bite: what will not break is damp.

At dusk we helped the Chens fill sacks, the students in a line passing the sacks down. After weighing, the Chen family gave each child a handful of roasted peanuts, and the children held them, in no hurry to eat. On the way back to school the sky dimmed. The tractor went ahead, its lamp sweeping the fields, and we followed behind, shadow beside shadow. One student asked me: teacher, will we go to the threshing ground again next harvest holiday? I said yes, every year.

I got home late. The meal my mother left was upside down in the pot, still warm. Eating, I thought: the notes the children write tonight will surely be livelier than anything in my lesson plans. Grain dust on their hands, sacks pressed on their shoulders, the tractor still in their ears — such essays need no teaching.

Later, grading those three-hundred-word notes, the best line came from a child who usually feared composition most: when the tractor came onto the ground, the whole class forgot we were hungry. I wrote under it: this is the power of the autumn harvest.

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