晒谷场上的稻子

少年时代的秋收，是从晒谷场开始的。天不亮，父亲就把谷担到场上，摊开，耙成一排一排的。我睡眼惺忪地被叫去守场，手里一把竹耙，任务是隔一阵推一遍谷，别让底下的焐出芽。

太阳上来，场上的谷子开始发烫。赤脚踩上去，烫得跳，跳着走。谷粒在脚下咯吱响，那声音现在想起来还是踏实。翻谷要翻得匀，翻过去是白面，翻过来是黄面，父亲说晒到牙一咬谷粒碎成两半，才算晒透了。夜里怕雨，全家半夜起来拢谷、盖油布，一场雨过去，场上一点没湿，父亲蹲在场边抽了半袋烟，算是谢天。

村东头的拖拉机突突突开进场，车斗里满是连夜脱好的谷。开拖拉机的老鲁叔按两下喇叭算是打招呼，谷从车斗里放下来，哗的一声，比任何音乐都好听。我们几个孩子帮着推铁锹，谁也不困了。

农忙那些天，家里没有准点吃饭的。母亲把饭热了又热，我们到晒谷场帮父亲装袋，装到月亮上来。装袋是细活，口袋要折角、要墩实，一袋一百八十斤，过秤时父亲总要再看一眼秤星，差半斤就得添。添谷的那一锹，父亲自己来，怕我们手轻。

回家路上，一担谷换到肩上，两个人换着走，田里的蛙声一路跟着。进门时饭又热第三遍了，母亲不骂，只说快吃。

后来我进城读书、工作，秋收在日历上只是一个节气。可每年九月，闻到街边新米的香，脚底下会自己往晒谷场走。走了几十年，脚上还留着那天的谷粒印子。

人长大以后才明白，晒谷场上晒的不只是谷。一家人起早贪黑，拖拉机从黑夜开到白天，那些日子把一个人晒透了，往后走到哪里，都是晒透了的粮，不焐，不霉。

The Rice on the Threshing Ground

The autumn harvest of my boyhood began on the threshing ground. Before dawn my father carried the grain out to the ground and spread it into rows with the rake. Half asleep, I was called to mind the grain, a bamboo rake in my hand, my job to push the grain over every while so the bottom layer would not sprout from the heat.

When the sun rose, the grain on the ground began to burn. Barefoot, I stepped on it and jumped, hopping as I walked. The grains creaked under my feet, and that sound still feels solid to me now. The turning had to be even: turn it over and the pale side shows, then the golden side. Father said the grain was dry enough only when a bitten kernel broke clean in two. At night we feared rain; the whole family got up at midnight to gather the grain and cover it with tarpaulin. After one rainstorm the ground stayed dry, and Father squatted at the edge of the ground smoking half a pouch of tobacco, as if thanking heaven.

The tractor from the east end of the village came rattling onto the ground, its

bed full of grain threshed through the night. Old Lu, the driver, gave the horn twice as a greeting, and the grain poured down from the bed with a roar better than any music. We children rushed to help with the shovels, and nobody was sleepy anymore.

In those busy days no one at home ate on time. My mother reheated the meal again and again while we helped Father fill sacks on the threshing ground until the moon came up. Filling sacks was fine work: the corner of the sack had to be folded, the fill packed firm. A sack weighed one hundred and eighty jin, and at the scale Father always glanced at the marks once more; half a jin short meant adding more. The shovel that added the grain, Father took himself, afraid our hands would be too light.

On the way home, a pole-load of grain went from one shoulder to the other between us, and the frogs in the fields followed the whole road. When we came in, the rice had been heated a third time. Mother did not scold; she only said, eat quickly.

Later I went to the city to study and work, and the autumn harvest became only a term on the calendar. But every September, when the smell of new rice drifts from a street stall, my feet walk by themselves toward a threshing ground. Decades have passed, and the imprint of those grains is still on my soles.

Only after growing up did I understand that the threshing ground dried more than grain. A family rising before dawn and working past dark, a tractor running from night into day — those days dried a person through. Wherever I go afterward, I am grain dried through: no rot, no mold.

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