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.

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.

包了三十亩田的第一年

四十岁那年我从城里回来，包了村里三十亩田，头一年就赶上秋收。父亲站在田头看我，那眼神像在看一个外行。我没说话，把镰刀磨了，把麻袋备了，把晒谷场的位子提前跟村组说好了。

晒谷场还是那个晒谷场，水泥地上刷着各家的记号。我的谷摊开以后，白天请人看，夜里自己守。守场那几夜我睡在场边的棚子里，头一晚翻来覆去，第二晚听着谷粒在风里沙沙响，居然睡得很沉。那种踏实，在城里的楼房里没有过。天亮时露水打在谷上，我起来推一遍，谷香混着土腥气，直冲鼻子。

拖拉机也还是拖拉机，只是排队了。全村十几家的谷都指着老鲁叔一台车，晒谷场上贴了张排期表，我的排在第三天下午。拖拉机进场的时候，我跟着卸，谷从车斗里哗下来，热气扑面。老鲁叔叼着烟说，急不得，机器就一台，地都赶在这几天。

农忙最紧的那天，我从早上五点干到夜里十一点才回家。骑电动车进村，路上一个人没有，车灯照着两边的稻田茬子。进门，妻子把饭在锅里温了四遍，菜是剩的，饭是新焖的。她说，地里的活，误不得。

收完那天，父亲到场上来抓了一把我的干谷，看了看成色，没夸，只说了句，明年接着包。就这一句，我在场边站了半天。三十亩田，一年下来挣的钱不如城里一个月，可父亲那句话，比城里任何一次涨薪都重。妻子在场边听见了，什么都没说，回家路上把电动车骑得飞快，像是替我高兴。

夜里十一点回家这条路，我后来年年走。蛙声稀了，路灯亮了，可那种累到骨头里、心里却满的感觉没变。农忙变了模样，晒谷场还在，拖拉机还在排队，晚归的人还是我。

The First Year of Leasing Thirty Mu of Fields

The year I turned forty I came back from the city and leased thirty mu of the village fields, and the first year I hit the autumn harvest at once. Father stood at the edge of the field watching me, his eyes looking at an outsider. I said nothing. I

sharpened the sickle, prepared the sacks, and arranged my spot on the threshing ground with the village group ahead of time.

The threshing ground was still the same ground, its concrete marked with the signs of each family. After my grain was spread, I paid someone to mind it by day and minded it myself at night. Those nights I slept in the shed at the edge of the ground. The first night I tossed and turned; the second night, listening to the grains rustling in the wind, I slept deeply. That kind of settled feeling never came in a city apartment. At daybreak the dew fell on the grain; I got up and pushed it over once, the smell of grain mixed with the raw scent of earth, straight into the nose.

The tractor was still a tractor, only now there was a queue. A dozen families in the village all depended on one machine of Old Lu, and a schedule sheet was posted on the threshing ground; my turn fell on the afternoon of the third day. When the tractor came in, I followed to unload, the grain pouring down from the bed with heat on my face. Old Lu, cigarette in mouth, said there was no rushing: one machine, and the fields of everyone fell on these same few days.

On the busiest day of the harvest I worked from five in the morning until eleven at night before going home. Riding the electric bike into the village, no one on the road, my headlamp lighting the rice stubble on both sides. When I came in, my wife had reheated the meal four times in the pot; the dishes were leftovers, the rice freshly steamed. She said, work in the fields cannot wait.

The day the harvest ended, Father came to the ground and grabbed a handful of my dry grain, looked at its quality, praised nothing, and only said, keep leasing next year. That one sentence. I stood at the edge of the ground for a long while. Thirty mu of fields earn less in a year than one month in the city, but that sentence of Father weighed more than any raise I ever got there. My wife heard it at the edge of the ground and said nothing; on the way home she rode the electric bike very fast, as if glad for me.

The road home at eleven at night, I have walked it every year since. The frogs are fewer, the street lamps are on, but that feeling — tired to the bone yet full inside — has not changed. The harvest busy season has changed its shape. The threshing ground is still here, the tractor still has a queue, and the one coming home late is still me.

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