储藏洞里的冬天来客

阿灰是个小田鼠，一整个秋天没睡过懒觉。稻子镰的时候他收稻米，豆子拔的时候他收豆子，玉米运进场院那天，他在筐子底下钻来钻去，捡漏下的玉米粒。他的储藏洞在老坟后头的坡上，三个小间装得满满当当，顶上还加了第二层。

蚂蚁路过他的洞口，进来参观了一圈，说：你这洞，够吃到明年麦子了。阿灰不客气地承认：一粒一粒攒的，数得清。

头场雪那天夜里，阿灰正啃玉米粒，洞口扑地掉进来一个东西。是只小鹌鹑，翅膀上挂着雪，抖得像风里的草叶。

小鹌鹑说不出完整的话，只会说：冷，冷。阿灰把她扒拉到干草堆里，又扒拉了两下。他自己缩在洞口，把背对着风口。

第二天雪没停。小鹌鹑的腿伤了，走不了。阿灰围着她转了三圈，然后从最大那间里抱出一捧玉米粒，放在她面前。

那是他数得清的玉米，一百二十粒，每一粒都是他自己拖回来的。小鹌鹑啄了两粒，抬头看他。阿灰把爪子摆一摆：吃吧，秋天还长，洞还深。

雪下了七天。阿灰的玉米少了三十粒，稻米少了小半捧。他有点心疼，夜里一个人爬到最大那间，借着洞口漏进来的一点光，把剩下的粮食重新码整齐，码完数一遍，还是很多。

第八天雪停了。小鹌鹑的腿好了，扑棱着翅膀在洞里飞了一圈，撞掉两根干草。她飞出洞口，在雪地上转了两圈，又飞回来，放下一把草籽。

小鹌鹑走后的日子，洞里安静。阿灰啃一粒玉米，听一会儿风。他发现草籽堆在门口，整整齐齐，像有人码过。

开春化雪，阿灰的粮食还剩一小间。不多，但够。他把最后一粒玉米种在洞口旁边，浇了一点化雪水。

夏天，洞口旁边长出一棵玉米秆，比别人的矮半头，结了一棒小小的玉米。阿灰把它收进洞的时候，数了数，正好一百二十粒。

那年秋天，储藏洞还是三个小间，只是最大那间的墙上，插着一根鹌鹑的羽毛。

A Winter Guest in the Storage Burrow

A-Hui the vole did not sleep in once the whole autumn. When the rice was cut he gathered rice grains; when the beans were pulled he gathered beans; on the day the corn was carted to the yard he darted under the baskets and picked up the kernels that fell. His storage burrow was on the slope behind the old grave, its three rooms packed full, with a second story added on top.

An ant passed by, came in for a tour, and said: this burrow of yours will feed you until the wheat of next year. A-Hui admitted it without ceremony: saved kernel by kernel, and I can count every one.

On the night of the first snow, A-Hui was nibbling a corn kernel when something fell into the burrow with a thump. It was a little quail, snow hanging on her wings, trembling like a leaf in wind.

The little quail could not form whole sentences; she could only say: cold, cold. A-Hui nudged her into the dry grass pile, and nudged her twice more. He himself curled at the burrow mouth, back to the wind.

The next day the snow did not stop. The little quail had a hurt leg and could not walk. A-Hui circled her three times, then carried out a paw-full of corn kernels from the biggest room and set them before her.

Those were his counted corn: one hundred and twenty kernels, every one dragged home by himself. The little quail pecked two and looked up at him. A-Hui waved his paw: eat. The autumn is long, and the burrow is deep.

The snow fell for seven days. The corn of A-Hui dropped by thirty kernels, and his rice by nearly half a pawful. It pained him a little. At night he climbed alone into the biggest room, and by the faint light leaking from the mouth he restacked the grain neatly, then counted it once more. Still plenty.

On the eighth day the snow stopped. The leg of the little quail was well. She fluttered a lap around the burrow and knocked down two pieces of dry grass. She flew out, circled twice over the snow, flew back, and dropped a handful of grass seeds.

In the days after she left, the burrow was quiet. A-Hui nibbled one corn kernel and listened to the wind for a while. He noticed the grass seeds piled at the door, neat and tidy, as if someone had stacked them.

When the snow melted in spring, A-Hui had one small room of food left. Not much, but enough. He planted the last corn kernel beside the burrow mouth and watered it with a little meltwater.

In summer a corn stalk grew beside his door, half a head shorter than the others, bearing one small cob. When A-Hui carried it into the burrow, he counted: exactly one hundred and twenty kernels.

That autumn the storage burrow still had three small rooms, only on the wall of the biggest one there was a quail feather tucked.

www.vv99.net