# 10月26日 大黄的蹄印和我的鞋印

10月26日 星期日 晴

稻子收完半个月了，田空下来，只剩一茬一茬的稻桩。今天爷爷要犁地，说趁土还软，犁一遍，冻一冬，明年开春土就是酥的。我自告奋勇跟去，爷爷说，行，你今天负责牵牛。

大黄是家里那头水牛，角弯得像两个月牙。我把缰绳搭在肩上，在前头走，心想牵牛还不简单。结果我错了。大黄走它的，我在前头拽，缰绳绷得直直的，它看都不看我，蹄子踩在稻桩地里，噗嗤，噗嗤，比我还慢半拍。我回头求爷爷，爷爷也不帮，只说，别拽，跟着它走，它走过的地方比你直。

我没法子，只好掉转头，跟在牛屁股后面走。大黄倒不紧不慢，走几步还甩一下尾巴。我数它的蹄印，一个蹄印四个趾头，踩得又深又稳。走了一趟下来，我发现我的鞋印全落在它的蹄印缝里，像跟着它的脚印学写字。

爷爷在后头扶犁。犁是铁的，两个木把手，犁头插进土里，往前一推，土就哗地翻起来，卷成一卷，亮亮地躺在地面。爷爷的手在犁把上，眼睛不看犁，看前面的牛。他喊一声，驾，大黄就走；喊一声，转，到了地头，大黄绕着弯，犁头就把最后一拃土翻过来。

我看了半天手痒，求爷爷让我扶一回。爷爷把我拉到犁后头，手覆在我手上。我一扶才知道犁不是推着走的，是压着走的，土顶人，胳膊得一直使劲。半趟没扶完，我手心就热出了汗，胳膊酸得发抖。爷爷接过去，说，扶犁的劲在腰上不在胳膊上，你才十二，扶不动整趟，扶半趟就不少了。

下午我们歇了两回。我坐在田埂上，看翻过的地一大片一大片，黑褐色的土一卷挨一卷，掰开一卷，外头干，土心是湿的，有一股生土味，混着牛粪味和稻桩烂掉的味道。不难闻，那是地本身的味道。

收工回家，我鞋上糊了一层泥，大黄脖子上也蹭了泥。我在日记里数今天走的趟数，一共九趟。九趟里，大黄走前头六趟，我走前头三趟，三趟都是它拽着我。我在最后写：犁地最累的不是扶犁，是牵牛。可翻出来的土真好看，明年开春，我那些鞋印踩过的地方，会长出秧苗。

# October 26 The Hoofprints of Big Yellow and My Shoe Prints

October 26, Sunday, sunny

The rice was harvested half a month ago, and the field lies empty, only stubble row after row. Today Grandpa is plowing, saying while the soil is still soft, plow it once, let it freeze all winter, and next spring the soil will be crumbly. I volunteered to go along, and Grandpa said all right, today you are in charge of leading the ox.

Big Yellow is the water buffalo at home, its horns curved like two crescent moons. I slung the rope over my shoulder and walked in front, thinking leading an ox could not be simpler. I was wrong. Big Yellow walks its own way. I pull ahead, the rope stretched straight, and it does not even look at me. Its hoofs step into the stubble field, squelch, squelch, half a beat slower than me. I turned back to beg Grandpa for help. He would not help, and only said, stop pulling, follow it, the line it walks is straighter than yours.

No choice, I turned around and walked behind the ox instead. Big Yellow strolls unhurriedly, flicking its tail every few steps. I counted its hoofprints. One print, four toes, pressed deep and steady. After one pass I noticed all my shoe prints landed in the gaps between its hoofprints, like a child tracing letters by following the strokes.

Grandpa held the plow behind. The plow is iron with two wooden handles. Its share bites into the soil, pushed forward, and the earth turns over with a rustle, rolling up in coils lying glossy on the surface. The hands of Grandpa rest on the handles, and his eyes are not on the plow but on the ox ahead. He shouts, giddy-up, and Big Yellow walks; he shouts, turn, and at the headland the ox rounds the curve while the share flips the last span of soil.

I watched long enough to itch, and begged to hold the plow once. Grandpa pulled me behind it and covered my hands with his. Only then did I learn a plow is not pushed along, it is pressed along. The soil shoves back at you, and your arms must strain the whole time. I did not finish half a pass before my palms sweated hot and my arms ached and shook. Grandpa took over and said, the strength for plowing lives in the waist, not the arms. You are only twelve. You cannot hold a full pass, but half a pass is already no small thing.

We rested twice in the afternoon. I sat on the field ridge looking at the plowed ground, dark brown soil coil against coil over wide patches. Break one coil open, the outside is dry and the heart of the soil is wet, with a raw earth smell mixed with ox dung and rotting stubble. It is not unpleasant. That is the smell of the ground itself.

At the end of work we went home. My shoes were caked with mud, and the neck of Big Yellow was smudged too. In my diary I counted the passes of today, nine in all. In those nine, Big Yellow led six and I led three, and in all three it was dragging me. I wrote at the bottom: the most tiring part of plowing is not holding the plow, it is leading the ox. But the turned soil is truly beautiful. Next spring, rice seedlings will grow right where my shoe prints stepped.