田边的父亲

稻子进仓的最后一天晚上，父亲说，走，去田边看看。我跟着他出了门。

天还没黑透。晚霞横在西边，红得沉，像烧过一遍又没熄透的炭。父亲走在前头，叉着腰，步子不快。他到田头就蹲下来，蹲在田埂上，看着田里。我也不说话，在他旁边站着。

田是白天拾完的。稻茬齐得像剃过的头发，地里干干净净，连散穗都没有。沟边的芦苇叫风吹得一摆一摆。父亲看田，看得很慢，眼睛从东头挪到西头，又从西头挪回东头。

鸟回来的时候，父亲抬了抬下巴，说，今年这些鸟比往年晚。它们落在远处的电线上，黑压压一小排，过一会儿又起一阵，往林子那边去了。起的时候扑棱棱一片响，落下去就没了声。

父亲从兜里摸出烟，点上。他不常抽烟，只在田边抽。烟往上升，被风扯斜。他吸一口，又看田。晚霞的光落在他脸上，把他额上的沟壑照得清清楚楚。

过了一会儿他开口，像是自言自语：这块田，明年还种。我说，你都六十多了。他没接这句，只说，稻茬留得不深，冬天冻得透，开春土就酥。又说，明年开春我教你开秧门，你爷爷就是这么教我的。

天暗得快。晚霞从边上往里退，退到一半，西边剩一小条红，像谁把一块烧红的铁浸进水里，滋地一下凉了。第一颗星出来的时候，田里的稻茬已经看不太清，只剩一片灰白。

父亲磕了磕烟袋，站起来，膝盖咔地响了一声。他最后朝田里看了一眼，转身往家走。走了几步他又回头，指着田头：那边沟里的水明早得通一通，别积着冻了根。

我应了。家里的灯在前头亮起来，灶房的烟带着饭味。我走在父亲后头，看他背影从灰白里一点点沉进暮色里。

那块空田在我们身后坐着，父亲在头里走着。他们是一样的：都不言语，都踏实。

Father at the Edge of the Field

On the last evening after the rice was stored, Father said, come, let us go look at the field. I followed him out.

The sky was not fully dark. The evening glow lay across the west, a deep red, like coals burned through but not yet out. Father walked in front, hands on his hips, unhurried. When he reached the head of the field he squatted down on the ridge and looked into the field. I stood beside him without speaking.

The field had been finished in the daytime. The stubble was even as a shaved head, the ground clean, not a loose head of grain anywhere. The reeds by the ditch swayed in the wind. Father looked at the field slowly, his eyes moving from the east end to the west, then back from the west to the east.

When the birds came back, Father lifted his chin and said, this year these birds are later than usual. They landed on the wires in the distance, a small dark row, and after a while they rose again in a burst and headed for the woods. Rising, they made a rustling roar; falling, they went silent.

Father took out a cigarette and lit it. He rarely smoked, except at the edge of the field. The smoke rose and the wind slanted it. He took a draw and looked at the field again. The light of the glow fell on his face and showed every furrow on his forehead.

After a while he spoke, as if to himself: this field, I will still plant next year. I said, you are over sixty. He did not take up that remark, and only said, the stubble is left shallow, the winter will freeze it through, and the soil will be crumbly in spring. Then he said, next spring I will teach you to start the seedlings; your grandfather taught me the same way.

The sky darkened fast. The glow retreated from its edges inward, and when it had retreated halfway, only a strip of red was left in the west, like someone dipping a bar of red-hot iron into water, cooling with a hiss. When the first star came out, the stubble in the field could hardly be seen, only a sheet of gray-white.

Father knocked out his pipe and stood up; his knee cracked. He took one last look at the field and turned toward home. A few steps later he looked back and pointed at the head of the field: the water in the ditch over there must be cleared tomorrow morning, so it does not freeze and hurt the roots.

I said all right. The lights of our house came on ahead, and the smoke from the kitchen carried the smell of dinner. I walked behind Father, watching his figure sink little by little from the gray-white into the dusk.

The empty field sat behind us, and Father walked ahead. They were alike: neither spoke, and both were steady.