黄昏走田埂

下车的时候，太阳已经落到村西的树梢上。

回家的路要经过一大片收割后的稻田。稻子早割完了，田里只剩一茬一茬的稻桩，低低地、干干地立着，在夕阳里发黄。我沿着田埂慢慢走。在城里做事三年，我头一回在这个时辰走这条路。

晚霞从西边铺开，铺了半个天。有的红，有的镶着金边，边上又透出一点灰蓝。霞光落在田里，稻茬地整个变成暖红色，田埂的影子被拉得很长，横过整块田。

鸟从天边回来，三两只，飞得很低。我认不出是什么鸟。它们在田上盘了一圈，落进沟边的芦苇丛里，叫了几声，又静了。田里越发安静。

田头立着一垛稻草，码得整整齐齐，顶上扣着一把散草防雨。垛脚落下几头稻穗，不知是谁拾起来，齐齐地摆在垛顶上。收割收得干净，田里不留一根穗子。

田埂边还开着几朵野菊，小小的，黄的。菊边有一片豆地，叶子黄了一半，豆荚干得发脆，走过去衣角蹭一下，哗啦哗啦响。地头过来一个老头，牵着牛回家，牛脖子上的铃铛当啷当啷。他朝我点头，我喊了声叔。他应了，人和牛都走得很慢。牛走过后，田埂上留下几个蹄印，印里积了一点水，映着晚霞，红红的一点。

村里升起烟。天从红往灰里深，晚霞边上冒出第一颗星。我听见村口传来自行车的铃声，是有人收工回来了。

我在田边站了一会儿。风从田面上吹过来，带着稻草的气味，淡淡的，熟悉。小时候跟父亲拾稻穗，也是这个时辰，父亲总说回家吧，我总要再玩一会儿。

村里的灯次第亮了。我加紧脚步。田野在我身后安静下来，暮色一寸一寸盖过稻茬地，像给它盖上一床被子。

Walking the Ridge at Dusk

When I got off the bus, the sun had already fallen to the treetops at the west end of the village.

The road home passes along a large field of harvested rice. The rice had been cut long ago, and only stubble stood in the field, low and dry, yellow in the setting sun. I walked slowly along the ridge. I had worked in the city for three years, and this was the first time I walked this road at this hour.

The evening glow spread from the west across half the sky. Some of it was red, some edged with gold, and a little gray-blue showed at the edges. The light fell on the field, and the whole stubble field turned a warm red. The shadow of the ridge

stretched long across the whole field.

Birds came back from the horizon, two or three at a time, flying low. I could not tell what birds they were. They circled once over the field and dropped into the reeds by the ditch, called a few times, and fell silent. The field grew quieter still.

At the head of the field stood a stack of rice straw, piled neatly, topped with loose straw against the rain. A few heads of rice had fallen at the foot of the stack, and someone had gathered them and set them straight on top of the stack. The harvest was clean, and not one head of grain was left in the field.

A few wild chrysanthemums were still blooming on the ridge, small and yellow. Beside them lay a patch of beans, half their leaves yellow, the pods dry and brittle; the brush of a coat hem set them rattling. An old man came along the headland, leading an ox home, the bell on its neck clanging softly. He nodded at me, and I called out uncle to him. He answered, and both he and the ox walked very slowly. Behind the ox, a few hoofprints were left on the ridge, each holding a little water that mirrored the glow, a small red dot.

Smoke rose from the village. The sky deepened from red into gray, and the first star appeared at the edge of the glow. I heard a bicycle bell at the village entrance. Someone was coming back from work.

I stood at the edge of the field for a while. The wind crossed the field with the smell of straw, faint and familiar. When I was a child, my father and I used to glean rice at this hour. He always said let us go home, and I always wanted to play a little longer.

The lights in the village came on one by one. I quickened my steps. The field grew quiet behind me, and the dusk covered the stubble field inch by inch, like a quilt being pulled over it.

收工

最后一捆稻草码上垛顶，码草的老人直起腰，拍了拍手上的草屑。这一天，田里的活儿就算收完了。

收割机开走以后，田野一下子空了，也一下子静了。先前还有机器的轰隆声、人喊话的声音、稻子倒下的声音，现在只剩下风。稻茬地铺到天边，一茬一茬，茬口都朝着一个方向倒，那是机器走过的方向。

收工的人三三两两往村里走。有人骑摩托，车斗里横着镰刀和绳子；有人挑着空担子，扁担两头晃；有两个人并排走，商量着明天谁帮谁。他们的影子在前面的田上拖着，被晚霞拉得老长。

晚霞这时候正红。红得不均匀，西边最深处发紫，往上退成橘红，再退成淡金。云一层压一层，像码草垛那样码在天边。田里的颜色跟着天走，稻茬地一会儿红，一会儿金，一会儿又灰下去。

鸟成群回来，落在田边的电线上，一根线落一排，像五线谱上落了音符。它们叫了一阵，声音在空田上传得很远。叫完了，又一批鸟低低掠过田面，落进远处的林子。

田埂上有孩子跑过去，手里举着一截稻穗，是白天拾下的。有个女人蹲在沟边洗一把铁锹，水声哗哗，洗完了在田埂上墩两下，扛上肩。狗跟着人跑，跑进草垛的影子里。

码草的老人最后一个走。他绕着草垛走了一圈，踢了踢垛脚，把一把散草重新按在垛顶，压上两块旧砖。然后他背上空叉，慢慢往村里走。

天暗下来。晚霞从边上开始退，退得很快，像有人从天边把一块红布慢慢抽走。第一盏灯在村里亮起来，接着第二盏、第三盏。

空下来的田野在暮色里歇着。白天的活儿都落在地上：垛是码好的，田是拾净的，沟是通开的。人回了家，灶上的烟升起来。田野歇下来的样子，跟人收工坐在门槛上的样子，是一样的。

Knocking Off

When the last bundle of straw was stacked on top, the old man who piled the straw straightened his back and brushed the chaff from his hands. That day, the work in the field was done.

After the harvester drove away, the field was empty all at once, and quiet all at once. Before, there had been the rumble of the machine, people shouting, and the sound of rice falling; now only the wind was left. The stubble field spread to the horizon, stubble by stubble, all leaning the same way, the way the machine had gone.

People knocking off walked home in twos and threes. Some rode motorcycles, with sickles and rope lying in the sidecar; some carried empty shoulder poles, the two ends swinging; two walked side by side, arranging who would help whom tomorrow. Their shadows trailed across the field ahead, stretched long by the evening glow.

At this hour the glow was at its reddest. It was not an even red: the deepest part in the west was purple, fading upward into orange, then into pale gold. Cloud lay on cloud, stacked against the horizon the way straw is stacked. The color of the field followed the sky: the stubble ground turned red, then gold, then gray.

Birds came back in flocks and landed on the wires along the field, a row on each

wire, like notes fallen onto a staff. They called for a while, their voices carrying far over the empty field. When they finished, another batch of birds skimmed low across the field and dropped into the woods in the distance.

A child ran along the ridge holding a head of rice picked up during the day. A woman crouched by the ditch washing a spade; the water splashed, and when she finished she knocked it twice on the ridge, shouldered it, and went. A dog ran after its person and ran into the shadow of the straw stack.

The old man who piled the straw left last. He walked once around the stack, kicked at its foot, pressed a handful of loose straw back on top, and weighted it with two old bricks. Then he took up his empty pitchfork and walked slowly toward the village.

The sky darkened. The glow began to retreat from its edges, quickly, as if someone were slowly pulling a red cloth away from the horizon. The first light came on in the village, then the second, then the third.

The emptied field rested in the dusk. The work of the day lay settled on the ground: the stacks were piled, the field was gleaned clean, the ditches were opened. People were home, and smoke rose from the stoves. The way the field rested was the same as the way a person rested, sitting on the threshold after knocking off.

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.