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.

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