伞下的对话

我在校门口跺成了一只陀螺，雪片子往领子里钻。远远看见妈妈，她一路小跑过来，羽绒服帽子都没戴，头发上顶着一层雪，像撒了层糖霜。伞在她手里呼扇呼扇，另一只手拢在兜里。我说下这么大您怎么不打伞就来，她说打伞跑不快，你等急了。说着从兜里掏出一个手炉，灌了热水的，布套子还是热的，塞进我手里。又掏出一副干手套，说看你那手套湿的，换上。我换上干手套，攥着手炉，我们俩挤到一把伞底下。

雪砸在伞面上，声音脆，像炒豆子。妈妈问，今天冷不冷，课间出去疯没有。我说冷，但是打雪仗打热了，我们班胖子脑袋上叫雪球砸了个正着，活像撒了把面粉。妈妈笑得伞都歪了，说你可别欺负人家。我说哪能，我个子矮，只配捏雪球。妈妈说，那你捏的雪球都飞哪儿去了。我说都飞班长那儿去了，他个子高，站那儿像靶子。我们俩说着说着，脚步都慢了。

雪越下越密，伞外白茫茫的，伞底下一小片干地方。妈妈忽然说，她小时候也遇过这样的大雪，路面积雪到小腿，她姥姥不放心，让她踩着前面人的脚印走，她排在一个高个儿叔叔后面，一路踩到镇上中学，鞋里灌了雪水，硬是在教室烤了一节课的火。我说那您没带伞吗。她说那年哪来的伞，全校就教导主任有一把，下雨天全校排队共用。我看看手里这把蓝格子伞，说那您现在这把伞归我了。妈妈说想得美，伞是家里的。

走到小区门口，雪把花坛、长椅都盖圆了，路灯把雪照得发亮，一粒一粒往下落。妈妈把伞换到我这边，说帮我举会儿，她腾出手拍头发上的雪。我举着伞，看她拍完雪又拢了拢羽绒服，忽然发现她左肩洇湿了一片，伞沿刚才一直挂在她那边。我说您肩膀湿了。她说没事，回去一抖就掉了。我把伞又往她那边挪，她也不推了，说这还差不多。我们俩在雪里走，伞歪过来歪过去，谁也没淋着。

上楼时电梯坏了，我们爬六层。妈妈在楼道里喘气，我在她后面数台阶，数到最后一层，她说今天路怎么这么短。我说因为一路都在说话。她回头看我一眼，笑了，从兜里又摸出一个手炉，说第二个也给你，路上捂的。我攥着两个手炉，看雪从窗户缝里飘进来一点，落在楼梯扶手上，一闪就没了。

Conversation Under the Umbrella

At the school gate I was spinning around like a top, stamping my feet, snowflakes drilling down my collar. I spotted Mum in the distance, jogging over with her down-jacket hood off, a layer of snow on her hair like a dusting of sugar. The umbrella flapped in her hand, and her other hand was tucked in her pocket. I said, it is snowing this hard, why did you come out without an umbrella. She said an umbrella slows you down and you would be waiting anxiously. She pulled out a hand warmer filled with hot water, its cloth cover still warm, and pressed it into my palm. Then she produced a pair of dry gloves, saying look how wet yours are, change them. I changed into the dry gloves, gripped the hand warmer, and the two of us squeezed under one umbrella.

The snow drummed on the canopy, a crisp sound like stir-fried beans. Mum asked whether it was cold today and whether I had gone out to play wild during the break. I said cold, but the snowball fight warmed us up, and the big boy in our class took a snowball square on the head, looking as if someone had thrown a handful of flour at him. Mum laughed so hard the umbrella tilted, and told me not to bully him. I said never, I am short, my job is only making snowballs. She asked where all my snowballs flew. I said every one went to the class monitor, since he is tall and stands there like a target. As we talked, our steps slowed without our noticing.

The snow thickened. Outside the umbrella everything was white; under it lay a small dry patch. Mum said suddenly that she had met a snow this heavy as a child. The snow on the road reached her calves, and her own mother, worried, made her walk in the footprints of the person ahead. She followed a tall uncle all the way to the town middle school, snowmelt soaking into her shoes, and she had to warm herself by the classroom stove for a whole period. I asked whether she had no umbrella. She said where would umbrellas come from in those years, the whole school had only one, owned by the dean of students, shared in a queue on rainy days. I looked at the blue-checked umbrella in my hand and said this one is mine now. Mum said in your dreams, it belongs to the family.

At the compound gate the snow had rounded off the flower beds and benches, the street lamps made the falling snow glitter, flake by flake. Mum passed the umbrella to my side, asking me to hold it a while while she patted the snow out of her hair. I held the umbrella and watched her finish patting and zip up her jacket, and suddenly noticed a wet patch spreading over her left shoulder, where the umbrella rim had hung toward her side all along. I told her shoulder was wet. She said it was nothing, a shake at home would do it. I slid the umbrella over to her side, and this time she did not push it back, saying that was more like it. We walked on through the snow, the umbrella leaning this way and that, and neither of us got wet.

The elevator was broken, so we climbed six floors. Mum panted in the stairwell, and I counted the steps behind her. At the last floor she said, why was the road so short today. I said because we talked the whole way. She glanced back at me and laughed, then fished another hand warmer out of her pocket and said the second one is yours too, to warm your hands on the way. I gripped two hand warmers and watched a few flakes of snow drift in through the window crack, land on the stair railing, and vanish in a blink.

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