伞是斜的

放学铃响的时候，雪正下得紧。我背着书包走到教学楼口就停住了：雪片又大又密，斜着横过来，路灯还没亮，天黑沉沉地压着操场，雪地里白茫茫一片，几步外的篮球架只剩一个模糊的影子。同学们一个一个被接走，伞在雪幕里晃一晃就不见了。我退到门房的屋檐下，把书包带子紧了紧，跺着脚看校门口。

屋檐下的雪化成水，一滴一滴砸在地上。卖烤红薯的老爷爷收摊，炉子盖得严严实实，热气从缝里冒出来，白烟和雪搅在一起。我摸出手机想打电话，又塞回去——妈妈今天上午刚发了烧，早上出门时嗓子还是哑的。雪越下越大，我的眉毛上、肩膀上落了薄薄一层，我干脆把校服帽子扣上，继续等。校门口的人越来越少，最后只剩门房里的灯和雪落下来的沙沙声。

雪幕里忽然走来一个人，伞压得很低，伞面上的雪厚得发亮。走到近前，是妈妈。她的围巾上、头发上全是雪，棉袄的右肩那一片已经白了，伞却完完整整罩在我头顶。她说，等急了吧，路上滑，走得慢。她把一个保温杯塞进我手里，说红薯粥还热的。我攥着杯子，烫得倒了一下手，心里却跟着烫了一下。

我们共撑一把伞往家走。雪打在伞面上，噗噗地响，像有人在头顶撒一把一把的米。路口的雪被踩成了稀泥，妈妈走在外侧，一步一步踩得很稳。我走着走着发现伞是斜的，斜在我这边，她那边伞沿上挂着一线雪帘，她的右肩一直在雪里。我把伞往她那边推，她马上又推回来，手很用力，说我不冷，你书包都湿了。我抬头看她，她的睫毛上挂着细小的雪粒，一眨眼就化成水。我不再推了，改成整个人往她那边靠，肩膀挨着她的肩膀走。她胳膊僵了一下，后来就松下来，由我靠着。

到家楼下的时候，我半边身子干的，她右肩的雪化成了一片深色。她上楼开门，我站在楼道里看她拍肩膀上的雪，拍不掉的，就用手一抹，抹成一小片水。那把伞立在门边，伞骨上还挂着没化的雪。我忽然想起小时候也是这把伞，也是这样的斜法，原来这么多年，伞一直是斜的。

The Umbrella Tilted Sideways

When the dismissal bell rang, the snow was falling hard. I walked to the doorway of the teaching building with my schoolbag and stopped. The flakes were big and dense, slanting sideways. The street lamps had not come on yet; the sky pressed down black over the playground, everything white and blurred, and the basketball hoop a few meters away was only a fuzzy shadow. One by one my classmates were picked up, their umbrellas swaying once in the curtain of snow and vanishing. I retreated under the eave of the gatehouse, tightened my bag straps, and stood stamping my feet, watching the school gate.

Under the eave the snow melted and dripped onto the ground, drop by drop. The old man who sold roasted sweet potatoes was closing his stall, covering the stove tightly, its heat escaping through the cracks as white smoke that tangled with the snow. I took out my phone, thought about calling, then put it back. Mum had run a

fever just that morning, and her voice was still hoarse when she left home. The snow fell harder. A thin layer gathered on my eyebrows and shoulders, so I pulled my uniform hood on and kept waiting. Fewer and fewer people remained at the gate, until only the light in the gatehouse and the hush of falling snow were left.

Suddenly a figure appeared through the snow curtain, umbrella pulled low, its top bright with a thick layer of snow. As it came closer, it was Mum. Her scarf and hair were covered with snow, the right shoulder of her padded jacket already white, yet the umbrella hung completely over my head. She said, you must have been waiting long. The road is slippery, so I walked slowly. She pressed a thermos cup into my hand and said the sweet potato porridge is still hot. I gripped the cup, so hot that I switched hands, and something inside me turned hot too.

We walked home under one umbrella. The snow drummed on the canopy, puff, puff, like someone scattering handfuls of rice overhead. At the crossing the snow had been trodden into slush. Mum walked on the outer side, each step steady. Walking along, I noticed the umbrella was tilted, tilted toward my side. On her side its rim hung with a thin curtain of snow, and her right shoulder stayed out in the open. I pushed the umbrella toward her; she pushed it right back, her hand firm, saying she was not cold and my schoolbag was already wet. I looked up at her. Tiny grains of snow clung to her eyelashes and melted into water the moment she blinked. I stopped pushing and instead leaned my whole body toward her, shoulder against shoulder. Her arm stiffened for a moment, then relaxed and let me lean.

By the time we reached our building, half of me was dry and the snow on her right shoulder had melted into a dark patch. She went upstairs to open the door, and I stood in the stairway watching her pat the snow off her shoulder. What she could not pat off she wiped away with her hand, wiping it into a small wet patch. The umbrella stood by the door, its ribs still holding unmelted snow. It suddenly came back to me that when I was little it was the same umbrella, tilted the same way. All these years, the umbrella had always been tilted.