绕远路的那个雪夜

那晚我出门的时候没带伞，也没好气。晚饭桌上因为手机的事跟妈妈吵起来，我撂下一句出去走走，摔门进了楼道。电梯下到一半我又上回来，把伞拿上了——跟谁过不去也不能跟天气过不去。门重新关上，声音轻得多。

雪是后半夜下的那种大雪，可街上还没多少人，雪也就没被糟蹋。我专挑远路走，往河堤那边走，多绕二十分钟。头一段路没什么看头，路灯稀，雪影在地上黑一块白一块。走到第二个路口，雪忽然密起来，路灯把雪照成金色，一片一片落得很慢，慢得能看清它们打着旋往下坠。我在灯下站住，看了一会儿。白天哪有时间这样看雪，雪原来长这样，不是白点，是一片一片有棱有角的薄东西，落到光里就亮一下，落到暗处就藏起来。

再往前走，鞋底开始出声。咯吱，咯吱。这条路白天是环卫车压实的雪，夜里又新铺了一层，踩上去声音又脆又实。我走得快，踩雪声就急；我放慢，它也跟着慢。有一阵我把步子迈得很大，一步跨两个坑，声音变成一声一声的咚，像敲一面蒙了布的鼓。没有人，没有车，只有这个声音跟着我，从前往后，从后往前。我忽然发现，刚才那股气不知什么时候泄了。气这个东西，堵在饭桌上是满的，走到雪地里，被这一路咯吱咯吱踩碎了。

河堤上风大，我把帽子扣上。对岸是城区，灯火连成一片，高的低的，密的疏的，红的招牌、白的窗、黄的街灯，在雪幕里都蒙了一层毛边。我挨着数过去，数到一片六层的旧楼，从东边数第七栋，三楼往西数第二扇窗，亮着，是那种家里常用的白炽灯的黄光。我盯着那扇窗看了很久。这个钟点，那盏灯底下要么坐着妈妈，要么她正一遍一遍往锅里看。她没追出来，也没打电话，只把灯留着。雪落在我的肩上、眉毛上，我站在河堤上，隔着一条结了冰的河，看对岸那一格黄光，喉咙有点发紧。

回家的路不用绕了，我掉头往回走，脚步比来时快。踩雪声还是咯吱咯吱，听着却顺耳了。楼下的单元门虚掩着，门厅的灯为我亮着。上楼，钥匙在门垫底下——妈妈从来不让任何人按我家的门铃。开门，客厅那盏黄光还亮着，锅里的菜扣着盘子，灶上的汤还温。妈妈从房间出来，看了我一眼，只说，鞋上的雪化了会脏，快擦擦。我蹲下来擦鞋，擦着擦着笑了一下。窗外雪还在下，落在窗台上，一点声音都没有。

The Snowy Night I Took the Long Way Home

That night I left without an umbrella and in a bad mood. At the dinner table we had quarreled over my phone, and I threw out a line about going for a walk and slammed into the stairwell. Halfway down in the elevator I came back up to grab the umbrella - no matter whose temper I was throwing, I could not pick a fight with the weather. The door closed again, much more softly this time.

It was the kind of heavy snow that starts late at night, and few people were out yet, so the snow lay unspoiled. I deliberately took the long way, walking toward the river embankment, twenty minutes extra. The first stretch had nothing to see, street lamps sparse, snow-shadows patchy black and white on the ground. At the second

crossing the snow suddenly thickened, and the lamps lit it gold, each flake falling slowly, slowly enough to watch it spin downward. I stopped under a lamp and watched for a while. In daytime there is never time to look at snow like this. So this is what snow actually looks like: not white dots, but thin flakes with edges and corners, flashing when they enter the light, hiding when they fall into shadow.

Walking on, my shoes began to speak. Crunch, crunch. This road had been packed flat by the sanitation truck in daytime and freshly blanketed at night, so the sound underfoot was crisp and firm. Walk fast and the crunching hurried; slow down and it slowed with me. For a stretch I took big strides, two dips per step, and the sound turned into thud, thud, like drumming on a cloth-covered drum. No people, no cars, only that sound following me, front and back. I suddenly realized the anger had drained away somewhere along the way. Anger, stuffed full at the dinner table, gets trampled to pieces by a roadful of crunching snow.

The wind was strong on the embankment, so I pulled my hood on. Across the river lay the city, its lights joined into one field, tall and low, dense and sparse, red shop signs, white windows, yellow street lamps, all fringed with haze through the snow curtain. I counted them one by one until I reached a block of old six-story buildings: the seventh from the east, the second window from the west on the third floor, lit with the yellow glow of an ordinary household bulb. I stared at that window for a long time. At this hour, under that lamp either Mum was sitting, or she kept checking the pots again and again. She had not come after me, had not called. She had only left the light on. Snow gathered on my shoulders and eyebrows, and I stood on the embankment, separated by a frozen river from that single square of yellow light across the way, my throat tightening.

The way home needed no detour now. I turned around and walked back, steps faster than on the way out. The snow still crunched underfoot, but the sound pleased my ears now. Downstairs the building door stood ajar, its lobby light left on for me. Upstairs, the key was under the doormat - Mother never let anyone ring our doorbell. I opened the door. The yellow light in the living room was still on; the dishes in the pot were covered with plates, the soup on the stove still warm. Mother came out of her room, glanced at me, and said only: the melted snow on your shoes will make a mess, wipe them quickly. I squatted down to wipe my shoes, and as I wiped, I laughed. Outside the window the snow kept falling onto the sill, without a single sound.