写给小南：外婆家的这一场雪

小南：

你总说没见过大雪，让我一定替你看一眼。好，我现在就替你看，你看仔细了，这是我在外婆家窗台上给你写的，我们这儿刚停。

先说睡前。外婆家睡前要封灶，外公往灶膛里塞最后一把柴，火苗噼啪响，灶口的红光映到院子里。我就是在那个时候看见初雪的——灶膛的光把院子照出一块橘黄，雪片飘进那块橘黄里，一片，又一片，慢悠悠的，落在院子里的石磨上，落在腌菜缸的木盖上。我蹲在灶口边烤火，一边数。你猜一晚上前落了几片？我数到三十几就不数了，因为越落越密，数不过来了。外婆说，这雪是夜里的雪，下整宿。外公立在门口看天，说了句瑞雪，就把门闩上了。

再说半夜。半夜狗叫了两声，我醒了。外婆家的窗户是木头框的，糊的塑料布，我掀开一角往外看——你不许笑，我看得浑身发麻。外面不用点灯就看得见东西，雪地自己在发光。院子里的石磨白了，柴堆白了，篱笆一根一根都白了。远处的田野平平整整，像铺了一层没熨过的白布，亮得能照见影子。狗不叫了，雪落在塑料布上，沙沙的，比狗叫还响。我把被角拉到下巴，舍不得闭眼，又实在困，迷迷糊糊睡过去，梦里还在下。

早晨我是被鸡叫醒的。雪停了。我连鞋都顾不上穿好就跑到门口，一开门，冷气扑了满脸。田野白得望不到边，东边的天刚红，雪面上干干净净，一个脚印都没有，只有风扫出来的一道一道波纹。走近了看，雪底下压着麦苗，雪化开一小块，麦苗是绿的，绿得发黑，冻得贴在土上。屋檐下的冰凌挂了一排，尖上滴水，滴答，滴答，比屋里的钟还准。外公拿扫帚扫出一条路，回头说，雪化的时候比下的时候冷，你穿厚实些。我在雪地里踩了自己的第一串脚印，从门口一直踩到柴堆，又原样踩回来。

临走那天，外婆给我们煮鸡蛋。我跟外公拉了钩：等明年开春化雪，他还给我留一块麦苗地看；我回去攒一瓶干净的雪水带来浇他的菜。外公笑，说雪水哪有带来的道理。我说有的，落在我窗前的那一场，和我在这儿看见的是同一场雪，它认得路。小南，等你放假，我把这一页抄给你。你不用回信，回信就写你那儿下雪没有。

表姐 小满

十二月十九日，于外婆家

A Letter to Xiaonan: This Snow at Grandma's House

Xiao Nan: I am writing this diary-letter to you by the stove at Grandma's house, because last night it snowed here, and you always say my stories about snow are the closest you get to seeing it yourself.

First, the evening. Grandma was cooking supper, and the fire in the stove lit the yard in a patch of orange. That is where I saw the first flakes — drifting into the orange light, one, then another, slow, landing on the stone mill and on the wooden

lid of the pickle jar. I squatted by the stove mouth warming my hands, counting. Guess how many fell before I gave up? I stopped at thirty-something, because they came faster than counting. Grandma said this is night snow, it will fall all night. Grandpa looked at the sky from the door, said one word about a good snow, and bolted the door.

Now the middle of the night. The dog barked twice and I woke up. The window here has a wooden frame covered with plastic sheeting. I lifted a corner and looked out — don't laugh, my whole body went numb with wonder. Outside you could see everything without a lamp; the snowy ground glowed by itself. The stone mill was white, the woodpile was white, every rail of the fence was white. The field far away lay flat like unironed white cloth, bright enough to cast a shadow. The dog stopped barking. Snow falling on the plastic was rustling, louder than the dog. I pulled the quilt to my chin, unwilling to close my eyes, yet terribly sleepy; I fell asleep and kept snowing inside the dream.

In the morning the chickens woke me. The snow had stopped. I ran to the door without getting my shoes on properly, and the cold hit my whole face. The field was white beyond the end of sight; the sky in the east had just turned red; the snow surface was clean, not a single footprint, only ridges combed by the wind. Up close, wheat seedlings lay under the snow — where a little had melted, they were green, green almost to black, pressed flat against the earth by the frost. A row of icicles hung under the eaves, dripping from their tips, tick, tick, more punctual than the clock inside. Grandpa swept a path and said over his shoulder: melting is colder than falling, wear something thick. I stamped my first string of footprints in the snow, from the door to the woodpile and back along the same marks.

The day we left, Grandma boiled eggs for us. I made a pinky promise with Grandpa: next spring when the snow melts, he will keep a patch of wheat seedlings for me to see; I will bring back a bottle of clean snow water to water his vegetables. Grandpa laughed and said snow water has no logic for being carried around. I said it does — the snow that fell by my window and the snow I saw here are the same snow, and it knows the way home. Xiao Nan, when you are on holiday, I will copy this page for you. You don't have to write back; if you do, just write whether it snowed where you are.

Your cousin, Xiao Man

December 19, at Grandma's house