他回村那天，雪正在落

他回村那天，雪正在落。班车在村口停下，他拎着行李下来，雪落在他的呢子大衣上，化得比落在土路上快。他站在路口没动，先抬头去看村子高处——老屋的屋顶还在，青瓦一层一层正在变白，屋脊的线条让雪盖圆了，像谁给房子絮上一床新棉被。

老屋的烟囱冒着烟。他走到院门口，祖父正踩着梯子上房扫雪，竹扫帚刮得沙沙响，雪末从檐口溜下去，冻成一排冰凌。祖父在房上先看见他，也不喊，扫帚停了停，接着扫，扫完那一面才下来，进屋给他倒水，倒完才说，回来就好，落雪的天，路滑。他捧着碗，看檐口的冰凌一滴一滴落进院里的盆中，滴答，滴答，和二十年前一个声音。

晌午他沿着村口的小路走。路还是那条路，只是两边的地白得平平整整，牛车的轮印冻成一排小槽。有一队孩子放学走过，布鞋踩得小心翼翼，顺手抓住道旁的柳枝。有个小的故意踩轮印，一脚一个，走得像跳舞，雪从柳枝上掉下来钻进他的脖领，他跳起来嚷，嚷完接着走。路过的老人冲他们喊，娃，慢些走，莫跌。他站在路边听这一声喊，喉咙发紧。二十年前，喊的人站在原地，喊的也是这样的娃。

傍晚，村口的场院里聚起几十个娃打雪仗。草垛是掩体，石磨是堡垒，雪球飞出去半路散成一蓬白雾。他站在场院边上看，看了半场，手痒。有个娃认得他，喊他进城回来的叔，塞给他一只攥好的雪球。他攥着那只雪，犹豫了一下，扬手扔出去，扔偏了，砸在赶马车拐弯的村长后背上。所有人愣了一瞬，接着哄堂大笑，乌鸦从电线杆上炸开，扑棱棱飞远。他也笑，笑得眼角全是纹。

夜里雪下大了。他躺在老屋的炕上听见雪落瓦片的声音，极轻，一片一片。他想，屋顶还在，小路还在，场院里的笑声还在，雪把故乡原样还给了他。只有他自己知道，他攥雪球的那只手，和二十年前不一样了。

第二天走的时候，祖父送到村口，只说了一句，落雪的天，路上慢些。他上了班车，回头，老屋的屋顶白了，祖父站在雪里，也白了。

The Day He Returned to the Village, Snow Was Falling

The day he returned to the village, snow was falling. The bus stopped at the village entrance, and he stepped down with his luggage. The snow landed on his wool coat and melted faster than it did on the dirt road. He stood at the crossroads without moving and looked first toward the high ground of the village - the roof of the old house was still there, its blue tiles turning white layer by layer, the ridge line rounded by snow, as if someone had draped a freshly stuffed quilt over the house.

Smoke came from the old house's chimney. He walked to the yard gate. Grandfather was on the ladder sweeping snow off the roof, the bamboo broom rustling, the snow sliding off the eaves and freezing into a row of icicles. Grandfather spotted him

from the roof first, did not call out, paused the broom for a moment, then finished that side before climbing down. He went inside and poured him water, and only after pouring said, good that you are back, snowy day, the road is slippery. He held the bowl and watched the icicles at the eaves drip into the basin in the yard, drip, drip, the same sound as twenty years ago.

At noon he walked along the road at the village entrance. The road was still the road, only the fields on both sides lay flat and white, and the wheel marks of ox carts were frozen into a line of small grooves. A line of children passed by after school, cloth shoes stepping carefully, holding on to the willow branches. One of the little ones stepped deliberately into the wheel grooves, one step per groove, walking as if dancing, until snow fell from a branch into his collar and he jumped up shouting, then kept walking after shouting. An old man passing by called out to them, children, walk slowly, do not fall. He stood at the roadside hearing that shout, his throat tight. Twenty years ago, the one who shouted stood in the same spot, shouting at children just the same.

In the evening, dozens of children gathered in the square by the village entrance for a snowball fight. The haystacks were bunkers and the stone mill was a fortress, and snowballs burst halfway through the air into puffs of white mist. He stood at the edge of the square and watched for half the fight before his hands itched. One child recognized him, called him the uncle back from the city, and pressed a packed snowball into his hand. He held it, hesitated a moment, then threw, and missed, hitting the village headman in the back as he turned his cart. Everyone froze for a moment, then burst out laughing, and the crows exploded off the telephone poles and flew away flapping. He laughed too, his laughter crowding lines into the corners of his eyes.

At night the snow fell heavier. Lying on the kang of the old house, he could hear snowflakes landing on the tiles, very light, one by one. He thought: the roof is still here, the road is still here, the laughter in the square is still here - the snow had handed the hometown back to him whole. Only he himself knew that the hand holding the snowball was no longer the hand of twenty years ago.

When he left the next day, Grandfather saw him off at the village entrance and said only one line: snowy day, take it slow on the road. He boarded the bus and looked back. The roof of the old house was white, and Grandfather standing in the snow was white too.

www.vv99.net