先记住的是笑声

我记故乡的雪，记得是倒过来的。别人想雪，先想它怎么落下来；我想雪，先听见笑声。

那场雪仗在村口的场院里。草垛是掩体，石磨是堡垒，雪球攥得不紧，飞出去半路就散，散成一蓬白雾，倒比砸中更让人乐。王来柱人高，站在场院当中不动，任雪球砸在他棉袄上，一朵一朵地开花，他只管往回扔，又准又狠。我蹲在石磨后头攒弹药，攒着攒着忘了扔，看别人追打，自己先笑了。村长赶着马车拐进场院，一只不知来路的雪球糊在他后背上，他回过头，胡子上挂着雪屑，我们以为要挨骂，他却把雪屑一抹，扬了扬鞭子走了。乌鸦从电线杆上炸开，扑棱棱飞远。那天的笑声，隔了这么多年，还比什么都清楚。

笑声往回退，退到清早的村口小路上。路冻成一条亮玻璃，两边的地白得平平整整，牛车的轮印冻成一排小槽，狗脚印像一列小梅花，通向地的深处。我们排着队走过去，哈出的气连成一串白雾。有人故意踩轮印，一脚一个，走得像跳舞；有人伸手去折柳枝上的雪，雪掉下来钻进脖领，跳起来嚷，嚷完接着走。老人站在门口喊，慢些，莫跌。那声喊，也是从雪里来的。

小路再往回退，退到头天夜里。雪是先落在屋顶上的。老屋的青瓦一层一层变白，屋脊圆了，像盖上了一床新絮的棉被。祖父清早踩梯上房，竹扫帚刮得沙沙响，雪末从檐口溜下去，冻成一排冰凌。我在底下仰着头接，接不住，冰凌化在眉毛上。晌午屋檐滴水，滴进院里的盆，滴答，滴答，房子在数它的日子。扫下来的雪堆在墙根，母亲顺手把灶房的柴码在雪上头，怕柴受了潮。

祖父扫完雪，还要背着手去村外的麦地转一圈。他回来说雪被盖得严实，麦苗在底下睡得香。老人家常说，雪下得越厚，来年的馒头蒸得越白。我们那时盼雪，一半为着馒头，一半为着场院。

记忆倒着退，退到雪最早落下的地方——屋顶。原来我对故乡的雪，先记住的是笑声，再记住的是路，最后才是屋顶上那个扫雪的人。雪落下来是往下走，我想起它，是一层一层往回走。

What I Remember First Is the Laughter

I remember the snow of my hometown backwards. Other people think of snow by first seeing how it falls; I think of snow by first hearing the laughter.

The snowball fight happened in the square by the village entrance. The haystacks were bunkers and the stone mill was a fortress. We packed the snowballs too loosely, so they burst halfway through the air into a puff of white mist, which made people laugh more than a direct hit ever did. Wang Laizhu was tall. He stood in the middle of the square without moving, letting snowballs bloom one after another on his padded coat, and he only threw back, hard and straight. I squatted behind the stone mill making ammunition, and as I kept making it I forgot to throw, watching others chase each other, laughing first myself. The village headman drove his cart into the square, and a snowball from nowhere splattered across his back. He turned his head, snow flakes on his beard. We expected a scolding, but he wiped the snow off, flicked his whip, and drove on. The crows exploded off the telephone poles and flew away

flapping. That day's laughter, after all these years, is clearer than anything else.

The laughter retreats backwards, to the village road in the early morning. The road had frozen into a strip of bright glass, the fields on both sides flat and white, the wheel marks of ox carts frozen into a line of small grooves, dog prints like a row of little plum blossoms leading into the depth of the field. We walked in line, our breath joining into a string of white mist. Some stepped deliberately into the wheel grooves, one step per groove, walking as if dancing; others reached out to break the snow off the willow branches, the snow fell into their collars, they jumped up and shouted, and kept walking after shouting. The old people stood at their doors and called, slowly, do not fall. That shout also came out of the snow.

The road retreats further, back to the night before. The snow fell first on the roof. The blue tiles of the old house turned white layer by layer, the ridge grew round, as if a freshly stuffed quilt had been laid over it. Early next morning Grandfather climbed the ladder onto the roof, the bamboo broom rustling, and the snow slid off the eaves and froze into a row of icicles. I stood below tilting my head to catch them, never caught one, and they melted on my eyebrows. At noon the eaves dripped into the basin in the yard, drip, drip, the house counting its days. The swept snow piled at the foot of the wall, and Mother stacked the kitchen firewood on top of it, afraid the wood would take in damp.

After sweeping, Grandfather walked a round in the wheat fields outside the village with his hands behind his back. He came back saying the quilt of snow lay tight and the wheat seedlings slept well underneath. The old folks used to say: the thicker the snow, the whiter the steamed buns next year. We wished for snow in those days, half for the buns and half for the square.

Memory keeps retreating, back to where the snow first fell - the roof. So of my hometown's snow, I remember the laughter first, then the road, and last of all the man sweeping snow on the roof. Snow falls downward; when I think of it, I walk back upward, layer by layer.