扫雪的人

我是让扫帚声弄醒的。唰，唰，不紧不慢，一下比一下长。我趴在窗上往外看，天刚蒙蒙亮，雪还在落，父亲已经在院里扫了。

他扫雪有他的规矩。先扫出一条从屋门到街门的直路，两脚宽，扫帚一下压一下，扫过的地方露出黑土，黑土上又落雪，他也不管，先开路再说。路开好了，他退回来扫院子两边，扫帚斜着推，雪推成两道矮墙，齐腰的草垛让雪埋了半截，他绕着扫，扫到垛根，把垛上的雪也用扫帚柄敲下来，咚咚咚，雪塌下来一大片，他躲开，也不恼。

扫到枣树底下，他停了。树杈上的雪压得枝子弯着，他仰头看了看，抡起扫帚杆往低处那根枝上一磕，雪簌簌地落，一棵树磕下来，满地的雪坑。他退两步再看，又磕高处那根，枝子弹起来，抖落一层细雪，落他一头。他把帽子上的雪抹掉，接着扫。我在窗上看他，窗棂上的白边映着天光，他的背影在雪光里，蓝汪汪的，比什么都清楚。

他扫完院，又拿铁锨把街门口的雪掀开，掀出一小片黑土，插上一根树枝做记号，怕过路的人看不见道。做完这些，他回屋生火，烟囱冒起来了。我推窗，冷空气涌进来，混着柴烟味。窗棂上积了一道齐整的白边，最底下一横的白厚得能立住一根火柴。

麻雀就是这时候来的。雪地里一行行小脚印，院当中一跳一跳，扒开一层雪，再扒一层，找不着吃的，歪头往屋里看。父亲从灶房出来，抓了一把小米，隔着窗撒在窗台上，磕了三下窗框，磕磕磕，冲我喊，看。头一只麻雀跳近又跳远，到底落下来啄两口，飞上电线叫，眨眼落下来一排。父亲背着手站在廊下看，看得比我还认真。

吃早饭，父亲说，雪要下一晌午，路得再扫一遍。他说这话的时候很平，像说今天有饭吃一样。我忽然明白，这个清晨他一样也没问——没问雪为什么下，没问下多大，他只是把路扫出来，把树上的雪磕下来，把麻雀喂饱。雪年年下，路年年是他扫的。

上学出门，我踩着父亲扫出的黑路走，两边雪墙齐膝。身后他又在扫第二遍了，唰，唰。我回头，雪光里他的背影蓝汪汪的，和方才窗上看见的一模一样。

The One Who Sweeps the Snow

I was woken by the broom. Swish, swish, unhurried, each stroke longer than the last. I lay on the window and looked out: dawn was barely gray, snow still falling, and Father was already sweeping the yard.

He had his rules for sweeping snow. First he opened a straight path from the house door to the street gate, two feet wide, the broom one stroke pressing the next, black earth showing where he passed. Snow fell on the black earth again, and he ignored it - open the road first. With the road open, he came back to sweep both sides of the yard, pushing the broom at an angle, snow piling into two low walls. The waist-high haystack was half buried, and he swept around it, reaching the base of the stack, then knocked the snow off it with the broom handle, thud thud thud, a whole

sheet of snow collapsed, and he stepped aside, not angry.

When he reached the jujube tree he stopped. Snow on the forks bent the branches. He looked up, swung the broom handle, and tapped a low branch; the snow rustled down, and one tree knocked, the ground full of snow pits. He stepped back two paces, looked, then tapped the high branch; the branch sprang up and shook down a fine mist of snow, all over him. He wiped the snow off his cap and went on sweeping. I watched him from the window, the white edge on the lattice shining in the dawn light, his back in the snow-light blue and clearer than anything.

After the yard, he took the iron shovel to the street gate and lifted the snow away, uncovering a patch of black earth, and stuck a branch in it as a marker, afraid passersby would not see the path. When all that was done, he went in to start the fire, and the chimney began to smoke. I pushed the window open, cold air rushed in mixed with the smell of brushwood smoke. The window lattice had gathered a neat edge of white, thick enough on the bottom bar to stand a matchstick.

The sparrows came at just that moment. Rows of little footprints in the snow, sparrows hopping in the middle of the yard, scratching open one layer and then another, finding nothing, tilting their heads toward the house. Father came out of the kitchen, grabbed a handful of millet, scattered it on the windowsill through the window, knocked three times on the window frame, knock knock knock, and called to me, look. The first sparrow hopped closer and away, and finally landed and pecked twice, flew up to the wire and called, and in a blink a row landed. Father stood under the porch with his hands behind his back, watching more intently than I did.

At breakfast Father said the snow would fall till noon and the road would need another sweeping. He said it plainly, the way one says there is food today. It struck me then that through this whole morning he had asked nothing - not why the snow fell, not how much - he had only opened the road, knocked the snow off the tree, and fed the sparrows. The snow falls every year, and the road is his broom every year.

Leaving for school, I walked the black path Father had swept, snow walls knee-high on both sides. Behind him he was sweeping a second time, swish, swish. I looked back: in the snow-light his back was blue, exactly the one I had seen from the window.