老头儿的雪天

老周退休第七年，雪天还是老作息。六点醒，不急着起，先躺着听外头。没声音，他就知道下雪了。城里下雪是不响的，但他听得出来——那种静本身就是一种响。

起来烧水，抓一把茶叶捂在缸子里，抱进书房。书房朝北，窗大。他坐下，从桌上那摞书里抽出一本，是他翻过不知多少遍的《水浒传》，书脊都软了，夹着几张药盒剪的书签。窗外雪正飘，一片一片，斜着往窗玻璃上贴，贴上来又滑下去。他看几页，抬头看一会儿雪，再低头看几页。这个读法四十年了，在厂里值夜班也是这个读法，那时候手边是一缸子高末，现在是龙井，他其实喝不出多少分别。

雪越下越大。他起身把窗开了条缝，说下雪天屋里闷，得见见外头。冷风进来，茶凉得快，他也不介意，凉了就再倒热的。书里打到景阳冈，武松那一段他熟得能背，可雪天读就是不一样，读到店家说三碗不过冈，他停了停，想起自己年轻时在厂门口的小馆子，也是这样的冷天，也是三碗酒——他喝的是白酒，喝完去上夜班，风一吹全醒了。他笑了一下，给自己又倒了半缸子茶。

一上午就这么过去，书读了四十来页，雪把外头全白了。老伴在客厅喊他吃晌午饭，他应了，没动，说再读两页。这两页读到晌午一点才放下。他吃饭的时候还在想武松过冈那段，跟老伴说，下雪天就该读这个。老伴说下雪天你读了一辈子了。他说对，读了一辈子，没读够。

下午他本来要午睡，没睡，接着读。读到林教头风雪山神庙，外头的雪恰好也下到了最密的时候，草料场那一段，他读得特别慢，一个字一个字，好像怕读快了雪就停了。读完这段他坐到窗边看真雪，看了怕有半个钟头。茶缸子里的水续了三回，最后一缸已经没什么色了。

傍晚雪停，老周合上书，书里那片雪和窗外那片雪一起白着。他说明天还下，明天接着读。老伴问读哪回。他说林冲的下一回。他说这话的时候像个等着明天上课的学生。书房灯亮起来，窗台上积的白还没扫，一小片，端端正正，像谁给这个雪天盖的章。

The Old Man's Snowy Day

In his seventh year of retirement, Old Zhou still kept the old hours on snowy days. Awake at six, he did not hurry up. He lay listening first. If there was no sound outside, he knew it was snowing. Snow in the city makes no noise, but he could tell - the silence itself was a kind of sound.

He got up, boiled water, grabbed a handful of tea leaves, smothered them in his thermos mug, and carried it into the study. The study faced north and had a large window. He sat down and drew one book from the stack on his desk - a Water Margin he had leafed through who knows how many times, its spine gone soft, bookmarks cut from medicine boxes tucked between its pages. Outside, snow was drifting, flake by flake slanting onto the window glass, sliding back down. He read a few pages, raised his head to watch the snow a while, then bent back to the pages. This was his way of reading for forty years. On night shifts at the factory he read the same way; then

his mug held the lowest grade of tea dust, now it held longjing, though truthfully he could not taste much difference.

The snow grew heavier. He got up and cracked the window open a sliver, saying a room on a snowy day gets stuffy and must breathe the outside. Cold air came in and the tea cooled faster; he did not mind - when it cooled he poured more hot. In the book the fight on Jingyang Ridge had begun, a passage he knew by heart, yet reading it on a snowy day was different. When the tavern keeper said three bowls do not cross the ridge, Zhou paused and remembered the little eatery by his factory gate in his young days - such a cold day then too, and three bowls of wine - he drank the white liquor, then walked out into his night shift, and the wind sobered him completely. He smiled, and poured himself another half mug of tea.

The whole morning passed this way: some forty pages read, and the outside world gone wholly white. His wife called from the living room for lunch. He answered but did not move, saying two more pages. Those two pages lasted until one in the afternoon before he put the book down. Over lunch he was still on the passage of Wu Song crossing the ridge, and told his wife that snowy days are for reading this. She said you have read this on snowy days your whole life. He said true, a whole life, and never enough.

He meant to take his afternoon nap and did not; he went on reading. He reached the chapter where Lin the instructor shelters from the snow at the mountain shrine, and outside the snow happened to be falling at its densest then. At the fodder depot passage he read very slowly, one character after another, as if afraid that reading fast would stop the snow. When he finished that chapter he sat by the window watching the real snow, perhaps for half an hour. His mug was refilled three times; the last round had almost no color left.

By evening the snow stopped. Old Zhou closed the book, its snow and the snow outside white together. He said it would snow again tomorrow, and he would go on reading tomorrow. His wife asked which chapter next. He said the one after Lin Chong's. Saying it, he sounded like a schoolboy waiting for tomorrow's class. The study light came on. The thin white gathered on the windowsill had not been swept - a small neat patch, like a stamp pressed onto the snowy day.