手抖着，也要往前站

星期六下午，爸爸把我带进电影院，银幕上放一部我很陌生的老动画。故事里有个小裁缝，个子还没有缝衣针高多少，听说山那边有两个巨人，就揣着四根针出门了。影厅里前排的小弟弟嚷嚷着要看别的，我攥着扶手，心想，这也太胆大了。

小裁缝一路上并不威风。他听见巨人的脚步声，整片叶子都在抖，他自己也抖，腿抖得像风里的草。可是他没往回走。他把四根针一根一根插进巨人的鞋带里，巨人摔倒了，他站在巨人的鼻尖上，声音还在打颤，却把话说完了一句。我听见自己心里咯噔一下：原来勇敢不是不害怕，是手抖着，还往前站。

我想起我自己。三年级以后，我上课再也没举过手。不是不会，是怕说错，怕全班安静的那几秒。老师的眼光扫过来，我就把头埋进课本，假装那道题我已经在心里答了一百遍。晚上在家，我对着镜子念课文，声音大得很；一到教室里，声音就缩进喉咙里了。

电影放到最黑的一段，两个巨人把小裁缝装进皮袋。影厅里也黑了，只有银幕上一点光。散场的时候，工作人员说放映厅到大街那段通道灯坏了，让我们贴着墙走。那段路又长又暗，爸爸在前面喊我。我站在入口，手心出汗，脑子里全是小裁缝站在巨人鼻尖上的样子。我深吸一口气，贴着墙，一步一步走过去。走到有光的地方，爸爸朝我竖起大拇指，我的手还在抖，可是我在笑。

星期一，语文课。老师问谁来讲讲昨天写的周末事。我的手举起来了，举到一半又想放下，手指头自己攥紧了。我想起那四根针。我站起来，声音有点颤，把通道里的事讲了一遍。讲完，教室里安静了两秒，然后啪啪啪，掌声响起来。那两秒没有我想象的可怕。

后来我把那张电影票根压在文具盒里。每次想缩回去的时候，我就看一眼。它提醒我一件很小的事：害怕是腿上的抖，勇敢是脚往前走。世界上没有不抖的勇敢，只有抖着也往前站的普通人。我现在举手还是会脸红，声音还是会颤，但我已经站到巨人鼻尖上了，哪怕只有一小步。

前几天，班里决定元旦谁来讲故事，我在纸条上写下了自己的名字。写完，手心的汗把纸条洇湿了一小块。我把纸条投进讲台前的盒子，走回座位，窗外的梧桐树正在掉叶子，一片一片，落得很稳。我想，小裁缝走在去巨人家的那条路上，大概也是这样的步子：不快，但是不停。

Even With Shaking Hands, I Stand Forward

On Saturday afternoon, Dad took me into the cinema, and an old cartoon I did not know played on the screen. In the story there was a little tailor, barely taller than a sewing needle, who heard that two giants lived beyond the mountain, so he set out with four needles in his pocket. A little boy in the front row shouted that he wanted another movie, and I gripped the armrest, thinking: how reckless can you get.

The little tailor was not impressive on his way. When he heard the footsteps of the giants, the whole leaf he stood on was shaking, and he himself shook, his legs

shaking like grass in the wind. But he did not turn back. He pushed his four needles one by one into the shoelaces of the giants, the giants fell over, and he stood on the tip of a giant's nose. His voice was still trembling, yet he finished every sentence. Inside my heart something clicked: courage is not being unafraid; it is standing forward even with shaking hands.

I thought of myself. Since Grade Three, I had never raised my hand in class again. Not because I did not know the answers, but because I feared saying them wrong, feared the few seconds when the whole class went silent. When the teacher's eyes swept over, I buried my head in the textbook, pretending I had already answered that question a hundred times in my heart. At night at home, I read the text aloud to the mirror, my voice loud and sure; the moment I was in the classroom, my voice shrank back into my throat.

The darkest part of the movie came, when the two giants put the little tailor into a leather bag. The hall went dark too, with only a point of light on the screen. When it ended, an attendant said the lamps in the passage from the hall to the street were broken, and asked us to walk along the wall. The passage was long and dark, and Dad called me from ahead. I stood at the entrance, my palms sweating, my head full of the little tailor standing on the tip of the giant's nose. I took a deep breath, kept to the wall, and walked step by step. When I reached the light, Dad gave me a thumbs-up. My hands were still shaking, but I was smiling.

On Monday, in Chinese class, the teacher asked who would like to tell about yesterday's weekend story. My hand went up; halfway up I wanted to pull it down, and my fingers clenched by themselves. I thought of the four needles. I stood up, my voice a little unsteady, and told the story of the dark passage. When I finished, the room was quiet for two seconds, and then clap, clap, clap, the applause came. Those two seconds were not as scary as I had imagined.

Later I pressed the ticket stub inside my pencil case. Every time I wanted to shrink back, I took a look at it. It reminds me of one very small thing: fear is the shaking in your legs, courage is your foot moving forward. There is no courage that does not shake, only ordinary people who stand forward while shaking. My face still turns red and my voice still trembles when I raise my hand now, but I have already stood on the tip of the giant's nose, even if only for one small step.

A few days ago, our class decided who would tell stories at the New Year party, and I wrote my own name on a slip of paper. After writing, the sweat in my palm dampened a small corner of it. I dropped the slip into the box in front of the podium and walked back to my seat. Outside the window the plane trees were dropping their leaves, one by one, landing very steadily. I thought the little tailor walking toward the giants' home must have taken steps like these: not fast, but never stopping.

深水区的那声对不起

银幕上那头小鲸鱼，怕深水区怕得厉害。每次游到深浅交界的蓝线，它就停住，鳍贴着身体发抖。可是朋友的海龟被卷进了深水，它一次一次潜下去，潜到一半害怕了，浮上来喘几口气，再潜。影厅里我屏着呼吸，好像自己也泡在凉凉的水里。

小鲸鱼最让我心里一动的，不是救海龟那一段，是它认错那一段。它因为害怕，对海龟吼过一句再也不要跟你玩了。后来它游回海龟身边，把头低进水里，吐出一串小小的泡泡。那串泡泡就是它的对不起。它没有辩解说是因为水太冷、浪太大，它只是把对不起吐出来，然后重新往深水游。

我想起暑假游泳班的事。教练让我从浅水区游进深水区，我站在池边台阶上，脚趾扣着瓷砖，怎么都不肯下。教练伸手来扶，我一把甩开，还冲他喊：我讨厌你。那句话说出口，我自己都愣住了。教练没生气，只说了一句：怕水不丢人，甩开别人的手才可惜。那天晚上我翻来覆去，越想越觉得自己像那头对海龟吼叫的小鲸鱼。

电影散场，我在通道里跟爸爸说：我下周要回游泳班。爸爸说：那你知道该先做什么。我说：先说对不起。爸爸没说话，揉了揉我的脑袋。

星期二晚上，泳池边人不多。我走到教练面前，手心全是池水味道的汗。我说：教练，上次那句话不对，对不起。教练愣了一下，笑了，说：这句话比深水区难游多了，你游过来了。那晚我站在台阶上，深吸一口气，松手，滑进水里。深水区的水漫过耳朵，世界一下子安静，只有咕咚咕咚的心跳。我蹬壁、划水，游出五米，浮上来，教练在池边朝我点头。

五米，跟小鲸鱼潜进深海比，小得不值一提。可我知道那五米是怎么来的：是先把对不起说出口，才换得来的。以前我以为勇敢是胆子大、不怕疼、不哭。现在我知道勇敢有两副样子：一副是往深水游，一副是把做错的话捡回来，说对不起。第二副比第一副沉，像背着水走路。

现在我在游泳班已经能游完整个深水区了。每次经过那条深浅交界的蓝线，我还是会紧一下，然后想起小鲸鱼浮上来喘几口气、再潜下去的样子。喘几口气不丢人。要紧的是，喘完，还往下潜。

The Sorry I Said in the Deep End

That little whale on the screen was terribly afraid of the deep end. Every time it swam to the blue line between shallow and deep, it stopped, its fins pressed tight to its body, trembling. But its friend the sea turtle was swept into the deep water, and the whale dived again and again, halfway down fear would catch it, it would surface for a few breaths, and dive again. In the hall I held my breath, as if I myself were soaking in cool water.

What moved me most about the little whale was not the rescue of the sea turtle, but the moment it admitted its mistake. Because it was afraid, it had once shouted at

the turtle: I never want to play with you again. Later it swam back to the turtle, lowered its head into the water, and blew out a string of tiny bubbles. That string of bubbles was its sorry. It made no excuses about the cold water or the big waves. It simply blew out its sorry, and swam toward the deep again.

I remembered my summer swimming class. The coach asked me to swim from the shallow end into the deep end. I stood on the pool steps, my toes gripping the tiles, refusing to go in. The coach reached out a hand to steady me, and I shook it off, shouting at him: I hate you. The words were out before I could stop them, and I froze myself. The coach did not get angry. He only said: being afraid of water is nothing to be ashamed of; it is pushing away someone's hand that is a pity. That night I tossed and turned, and the more I thought, the more I felt like that little whale shouting at the turtle.

After the movie ended, I said to Dad in the passage: I want to go back to swimming class next week. Dad said: then you know what to do first. I said: say sorry first. Dad said nothing, and ruffled my hair.

Tuesday evening, there were not many people by the pool. I walked up to the coach, my palms sweaty with the smell of pool water. I said: Coach, what I said last time was wrong. I am sorry. The coach froze for a moment, then laughed, and said: that sentence was harder to swim than the deep end, and you have swum it. That night I stood on the steps, took a deep breath, let go, and slid into the water. The water of the deep end covered my ears, the world went suddenly quiet, with only the thump-thump of my heart. I pushed off the wall, pulled through the water, swam five meters, surfaced, and the coach nodded to me from the edge.

Five meters, compared with the little whale diving into the deep sea, is far too small to mention. But I know how those five meters were earned: they came only after the sorry was spoken out loud. I used to think courage meant a big nerve, no fear of pain, no crying. Now I know courage has two faces: one swims into the deep end; the other picks up the wrong words you threw away and says sorry. The second face is heavier than the first, like walking while carrying water.

Now in swimming class I can finish the whole deep end. Every time I pass the blue line between shallow and deep, my body still tightens for a moment, and then I remember the little whale surfacing for a few breaths before diving again. Catching your breath is nothing to be ashamed of. What matters is that when the breaths are done, you dive down again.

八百米跑道上的小跛马

元旦前班里报运动会八百米，没人举手，体育老师问我敢不敢。我的头摇得很快。去年我报过一次，跑到第二圈嗓子发腥，腿灌了铅，在全班面前走了最后一段，从那以后，八百米这三个字我一听就耳朵热。

星期六全家去看动画电影，银幕上是一群雪谷里的矮马，跑接力。领头安排错了，把一条后腿有点跛的小跛马排进了最长的一段。小跛马站在风口，耳朵压得平平的。它跑起来一瘸一拐，雪雾里别的马一个个超过它，它的风声却一直没停。最险的一段是冰桥，它的一条腿卡进冰缝，我以为它会停下等救援，它把腿拔出来，换了个姿势，驮着布包继续跑。影厅里有人小声说：它又没跑第一。我听见这话，心里却咚咚地响——它跑完了。

灯亮起来的时候，我在座位上想了很久。去年我走最后一段的时候，全班是什么表情？我记得自己不敢抬头，却好像听见有人说：她走完了也算厉害。那时我把这句话当成了可怜，现在想起来，那也许是真的。小跛马也没跑第一，可雪谷里的马都记得它驮着布包过冰桥的样子。

星期一我找到体育老师，说我要重新报八百米。老师挑了下眉毛，在名单上写下我的名字。那几天我放学后绕操场走圈，走到第二圈就喘，喘完接着走。妈妈在单杠那边择菜，头也不抬，只在我经过时说：今天比昨天多走了半圈。

比赛那天风很大。枪响之后我落在最后，第一圈还行，第二圈嗓子开始发腥——就是去年那个味道。腿想停，我听见看台上有节奏地喊我的名字，是我们全班，喊得乱七八糟，一个调都不在。我把步子缩小，小步，不停。最后五十米，前面两个人手拉手冲线，看台上喊声一下子炸开，我的名字混在里面，谁也听不清谁，可每一声都砸在我背上。

我撞线的时候是最后一名，弯着腰干呕，体育老师递来一瓶水。我拧了半天拧不开，手抖。老师帮我把盖子拧开，说：跑完了。三个字，跟电影里那匹小跛马一样。我咕咚咕咚喝半瓶，咸的，分不清是汗还是别的。

现在那张运动会号码布还贴在我书桌侧面，六号，边角卷起来了。它提醒我：勇敢不是把别人甩在身后，是把想停下来的自己甩在身后。跑道很长，我跑得最慢，可我跑完了。这就够了，这就很勇敢。

The Little Lame Horse on the Eight-Hundred-Meter Track

Before the New Year party, our class needed someone for the eight hundred meters at the sports meet, and nobody raised a hand. The PE teacher asked me if I dared. I shook my head fast. I had signed up once last year: at the second lap my throat tasted of blood, my legs turned to lead, and in front of the whole class I walked the last stretch. Ever since, just hearing the words eight hundred meters made my ears burn.

On Saturday the whole family went to a cartoon about a herd of little horses running a relay in Snow Valley. The leader made a mistake and put a small lame horse, one hind leg a little crooked, on the longest leg of the race. The little lame horse stood in the wind with its ears pressed flat. It ran with a limp, other horses passed it one by one in the snow mist, yet the sound of its wind never stopped. The most dangerous part was the ice bridge: one of its legs jammed into a crack in the ice. I thought it would stop and wait for rescue. It pulled its leg out, changed the way it carried the load, and went on running with the cloth bundle on its back. Someone in the hall whispered: it is not winning either. I heard that, and my heart went boom boom — it finished.

When the lights came on, I sat there thinking for a long time. When I walked the last stretch last year, what did the class look like? I remember I could not lift my head, yet I seemed to hear someone say: finishing on foot is still impressive. At the time I took those words as pity. Now, thinking it over, they may have been true. The little lame horse did not win either, but every horse in Snow Valley remembers it crossing the ice bridge with the bundle on its back.

On Monday I found the PE teacher and said I wanted to sign up for the eight hundred meters again. The teacher lifted an eyebrow and wrote my name on the list. For days after that, I walked laps of the playground after school, out of breath by the second lap, and kept walking after catching my breath. Mom shelled vegetables by the horizontal bar without lifting her head, and only said as I passed: today you walked half a lap more than yesterday.

The day of the race the wind was strong. After the gun I fell to the back. The first lap was fine; at the second lap my throat began to taste of blood — the same taste as last year. My legs wanted to stop, and I heard the stands chanting my name in rhythm, the whole class, shouting all jumbled, not one note in tune. I made my steps smaller, small steps, never stopping. In the last fifty meters, two runners ahead crossed the line hand in hand, and the shouting in the stands suddenly burst open. My name was mixed in there, no one could tell whose voice was whose, yet every shout landed on my back.

When I crossed the line I was last, bent over retching, and the PE teacher handed me a bottle of water. I twisted the cap for ages without opening it, my hands shaking. The teacher twisted it open for me and said: you finished. Three words, just like that little lame horse in the movie. I gulped down half the bottle. It was salty, and I could not tell whether it was sweat or something else.

Now my race number from the sports meet is still taped to the side of my desk, number six, its corners curling up. It reminds me: courage is not leaving others behind you, it is leaving the part of you that wants to stop behind you. The track is

long, I ran the slowest, but I finished. That is enough. That is brave.