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.