一千五百米的配速

初二上学期的体育测试，项目是一千五百米。

跑到第三圈，我的嗓子开始冒烟，腿像灌了半桶沙，心里那个声音又出来了，走一走，走一走没人看见。

就在我脚步一乱的时候，一个人从内道慢下来，退到我旁边。

是周悦。她本来在第二梯队，跑得不紧不慢。

她也不看我，就盯着前面，说，跟着我的影子，别想圈数，想步子。

于是第三圈后半和第四圈，我一直踩着她的影子跑，她的影子长，我的步子就跟着变大。

收尾那一圈她忽然加速，甩开我十几米，回头喊了一句，冲，终点就一脚的事。

我冲了。成绩七分四十一，及格线是八分整。

过线那一刻我扶着膝盖喘，她递过来半瓶水，说，你看，没人看见你走，也没人看见你跑完。

那之后我们定了一个规矩，每天放学后绕操场慢跑三圈，谁也不许请假，请假的人第二天补一圈。

那三圈没有计时，没有名次，我们一边跑一边说今天哪道题难、食堂哪个菜咸。

有风的日子她会把围巾塞给我，有雨的日子我们就在体育馆走廊做高抬腿。

一个学期下来，一千五百米补测我跑进了七分十秒，她的八百米从班级中游进了前五。

体育委员说我们俩像换了个人，我们俩对视一眼，都想起那三圈没有计时的圈。

这件事我后来想了很久，想出三层意思。

头一层的道理，周悦那天最了不起的地方，不是她陪我跑，而是她先退到我能跟上的频率，再一点点把频率抬上去。鼓励不是喊快点，是先到你身边。

再往深一层，共同进步不是两个人比赛。我们那三圈要是比谁快，撑不过两个星期；正因为不比，才跑了一整个学期。一起走的路，比谁走得快走得远。

最里面一层是反思我自己。我以前不敢接受陪跑，怕拖累别人，也怕别人看出我弱。后来才懂，怕拖累是把友情当成绩，真正的友情不怕慢，怕的是一个人跑、一个人停。

我也学会了做那个退到别人旁边的人。上个月有个同学跑步落在最后，我退到他旁边，说，跟着我的影子。

好朋友让我变得更好，不是因为他带我飞，是因为他肯先慢下来，再带我一起快起来。

The Pacing of Fifteen Hundred Meters

In the PE test of the first term of junior two, the event was fifteen hundred meters.

Halfway through the third lap, my throat began to smoke, my legs felt half-filled with sand, and that voice came back: walk a bit, no one will see.

Just as my steps faltered, someone on the inner lane slowed down and dropped back beside me.

It was Zhou Yue. She had been running comfortably in the second group.

She did not even look at me; she kept her eyes ahead and said, follow my shadow, do not count laps, count steps.

So for the rest of the third lap and all of the fourth, I stepped on her shadow; her shadow was long, and my stride grew with it.

On the last lap she suddenly sped up, pulling ten-odd meters ahead, and turned back to shout one line: sprint, the finish is one stride away.

I sprinted. My time was seven minutes forty-one; the passing line was eight minutes flat.

The moment I crossed it I bent over my knees gasping, and she passed me half a bottle of water and said, see, no one saw you walk, and no one saw you finish either.

After that we made a rule: jog three laps around the field after school every day, no one may take a day off, and whoever does owes an extra lap the next day.

Those three laps were not timed and had no ranking; we ran and talked about which problem was hard today and which dish in the canteen was salty.

On windy days she stuffed her scarf into my hands; on rainy days we did high knees in the gym corridor.

Over one term, at the make-up test I ran fifteen hundred meters inside seven minutes ten, and her eight hundred meters moved from the middle of the class into the top five.

The PE monitor said we were like two different people; we looked at each other and both thought of those untimed laps.

I have thought about this for a long time, and thought out three layers.

The first layer: the most remarkable thing Zhou Yue did that day was not running with me, but first dropping to a pace I could keep up with, then raising the pace little by little. Encouragement is not shouting faster; it is arriving at your side first.

The second layer: mutual progress is not a race between two people. If our three laps had been a race, they would not have lasted two weeks; precisely because there was no racing, they lasted a whole term. A road walked together goes farther than whoever walks fast.

The third layer is reflection on myself. I used to dare not accept pacing, afraid of dragging someone down and afraid of showing my weakness. Only later did I understand that fearing to be a burden treats friendship as a grade; real friendship is not afraid of slowness, it is afraid of one person running while the other stops.

I also learned to be the one who drops back beside another person. Last month a classmate fell to the last place in running; I dropped back beside him and said, follow my shadow.

A good friend makes me better not because he lets me fly, but because he is willing to slow down first, then speed up together with me.