鹅没赶走，我先跑了起来

外婆屋后养着三只大白鹅，白天放出来在河边吃草，傍晚自己知道回圈。那年暑假我回去，自告奋勇要赶鹅。外婆斜眼看我：你？鹅认生，不听你的。我拍胸脯，我在城里连狗都不怕。外婆笑出了声，全巷子的人都听见了。

傍晚我拿一根竹竿下到河边。三只鹅正在浅水里不紧不慢地吃草，脖子一伸一缩，像商量好的。我吆喝一声，竹竿往地上一顿：回圈！鹅抬起头看我，看得很慢，从我的鞋看到我的脸，那眼神不像看人，像看一个不懂事的东西。

领头的是一只豁嘴鹅，嘴尖缺了一小块，据说是抢食抢赢过狗留下的。它朝我走了两步，我后退一步。它再走两步，我又退一步。我嘴上还硬着，腿已经诚实了。豁嘴鹅忽然一伸脖子，翅膀半张，冲我扑过来，另外两只跟着一起上。我把竹竿扔了。

我跑，鹅追。半条巷子，我听见翅膀扑棱的声音在背后，比脚步声还密。鹅脖子长，追到跟前一伸嘴，拧住我小腿就是一拧。那种疼又钝又狠，我一路跳一路喊。巷子里的人从屋里探出头，看见一个男孩被三只白鹅追着跑，全都笑出了声，没有一个人来帮忙——他们都知道鹅不咬死人，就是拧人疼。

我情急之下扑进路边堆着的草垛。草垛深，鹅嘴够不着。三只鹅在草垛外站成一排，伸长脖子朝里看，像审一个躲起来的犯人。我埋在草里，心跳得像打鼓，裤腿上一处一处火辣辣的。僵持了能有五分钟，豁嘴鹅先掉头，三只鹅排着队，昂首挺胸回了自己的圈，走得不慌不忙，像赢的不是我。

我从草垛里爬出来，裤腿上五个针眼样的小孔，小腿青了一块。外婆迎出来，一边给我抹油一边笑：我说鹅不听你的，你还不信。我龇牙咧嘴地说，它们不是不听，它们是合伙。

晚上我坐在门槛上，看屋后的鹅圈。三只鹅已经睡了，缩着脖子，白成一团。白天那件事现在想起来还想跑，可又忍不住想笑。豁嘴鹅拧我那一下，是我整个暑假最疼的一下，也是最多人笑的一下。后来我再没自告奋勇过——不是怕，是懂了：不是所有看起来慢的东西，都好欺负。

The Geese Were Not Driven Off, and I Started Running First

Behind grandmothers house lived three big white geese, let out to graze by the river in the daytime and finding their own way back to the pen at dusk. That summer when I went back, I volunteered to drive them home. Grandma gave me a sidelong look: you? Geese distrust strangers; they will not listen to you. I thumped my chest: I am not even afraid of dogs in the city. Grandma laughed out loud, and the whole alley heard it.

At dusk I took a bamboo pole down to the river. The three geese were cropping grass in the shallow water at an unhurried pace, necks stretching in and out as if

rehearsed. I gave a shout and stamped the pole on the ground: go home! The geese raised their heads and looked at me, looking very slowly, from my shoes up to my face. Their eyes were not looking at a person; they were looking at something that did not know its place.

The leader was a goose with a notched bill, a small piece missing from the tip, said to be a wound from a food fight it once won against a dog. It took two steps toward me, and I took one step back. It took two more, and I stepped back again. My mouth was still tough, but my legs had already turned honest. Suddenly the notched goose shot its neck out, half-spread its wings, and charged at me, and the other two followed. I threw away the bamboo pole.

I ran, the geese chased. Half an alley long, I heard the beating of wings behind me, denser than footsteps. A goose neck is long; when it caught up, its bill shot out and twisted a wrench at my calf. The pain was blunt and vicious at once, and I hopped and shouted the whole way. People in the alley poked their heads out of their doors and saw a boy chased by three white geese, and everyone laughed, and not one person came to help — they all knew geese do not hurt people to death, they only twist terribly.

In desperation I threw myself into a haystack stacked by the road. The stack was deep, and goose bills could not reach in. The three geese stood in a row outside, necks stretched in, peering like interrogating a fugitive in hiding. Buried in the straw, my heart drummed, and my trouser legs burned in patch after patch. The standoff lasted about five minutes before the notched goose turned around first, and the three geese filed back to their pen, heads high, chests out, unhurried, as if the winner of the day had not been me.

I crawled out of the haystack with five needle-like holes in my trouser leg and a bruise rising on my calf. Grandma came out laughing while she rubbed oil on my leg: I said the geese would not listen to you, and you would not believe me. Through my grimace I said: it was not that they would not listen, it was that they conspired.

At night I sat on the doorstep looking at the goose pen behind the house. The three geese were already asleep, necks tucked in, white as one cloud. What happened by day still made me want to run when I thought of it, yet I could not help laughing too. The wrench the notched goose gave me was the most painful moment of that whole summer, and also the one that made the most people laugh. I never volunteered again after that — not from fear, but from understanding: not everything that looks slow is easy to bully.