一条河的距离

七月中，孩子点名要去那条有小鱼的小河。那条河是我小时候的河，离城九十多公里，导航要一个半小时。他爸发动车，说走就走。后座上装着小网兜、水枪和一条大毛巾，孩子把脸贴在车窗上，一路问到了没有。他爸说快了，他就掰手指算，算不清，改问还有几个红绿灯。

河比记忆里浅。孩子穿着凉鞋踩进去，第一脚就缩回来，喊凉。第二脚就不缩了，站在水里喊妈妈快下来。他爸下水比他早，蹲在水里装石头，被他识破，笑得直不起腰。我在岸上脱了鞋陪他走了几步，水到小腿，凉意顺着腿往上爬。他忽然弯腰去捧水，捧起一捧，指缝里漏光了，只剩一条手指长的小鱼在掌心扑腾。他蹲下去把鱼放回水里，放得比谁都轻。

我们在河边待了整整一个下午。河风一吹，湿衣服贴在他背上，他也不喊冷，只顾弯腰去摸石头缝。他捉了放，放了捉，网兜挥得呼呼响，最后什么也没捉住，人倒湿透了。太阳落下去，他胳膊晒脱了一层皮，不喊疼，还笑。回家路上他在后座睡着了，睫毛上挂着河沙。保温壶里的水他一口没喝，反倒灌了半壶河水回去，说要带给我养在阳台的那条鱼住。

我坐在河边的石头上看他的时候，忽然发现他长高了。去年抱在怀里过门槛的孩子，如今自己蹚水，蹚得比我还稳。河还是那条河，水还是那个凉，我小时候泡过的河，如今泡着他。时间过去的方式，在这一刻看得见摸得着。

出发的早上，他爸只问了一句去哪儿，孩子答了那条河，于是我们真的去了。没有攻略，没有订房，一个背包一条毛巾。我从前觉得出游要郑重其事，如今觉得，孩子要的不是景点，是他说了有人当真。他记不住公里数，也记不住路，他记得的是那捧从指缝里漏掉的水，和那条被放生的小鱼。

晚上他泡在浴缸里还在笑，忽然说，明年暑假还去。我说好。就为这一句，那条河值得跑九十多公里。

The Distance of One River

In mid-July my son named the little river with the small fish as his wish. That river was the river of my own childhood, ninety kilometers out of the city, an hour and a half by navigation. His father started the engine and we simply went. The back seat held a small net, a water gun, and a big towel, and the boy pressed his face to the window asking all the way whether we had arrived. His father said soon, and he counted on his fingers, could not count it out, and switched to asking how many traffic lights were left.

The river was shallower than in memory. He stepped in wearing sandals and pulled the first foot right back, calling it cold. The second foot stayed, and he stood in the water calling me to come down. His father got in before me, crouched in the river pretending to be a stone, was seen through by the boy, and laughed until he could not straighten up. I took off my shoes on the bank and walked a few steps with him; the

water reached my calves and the coolness climbed up my legs. Suddenly he bent to cup water, lifted a handful, and it leaked away through his fingers, leaving only a small fish as long as a finger flopping in his palm. He crouched and returned the fish to the water, gentler than anyone.

We stayed by the river the whole afternoon. A wind off the river pressed his wet clothes against his back; he did not complain of the cold, bent over, and felt along the cracks between stones. He caught and released, released and caught, swinging the net until it whistled, and in the end caught nothing but soaked himself through. When the sun went down he had peeled an armful of sunburned skin and did not complain of pain, only laughed. On the way home he fell asleep in the back seat with river sand clinging to his eyelashes. He drank none of the water from the thermos; instead he poured in half a pot of river water, saying it was for the fish I keep on the balcony to live in.

As I sat on the stone by the river watching him, I suddenly noticed that he had grown tall. The child I had carried over the threshold last year now waded through water on his own, steadier than I was. The river was still that river, the water still that coolness; the river I had soaked in as a girl was soaking him now. The way time passes became visible and touchable in that moment.

On the morning we left, his father asked only one question, where to, and the boy answered, that river, so we really went. No guidebook, no hotel booking, one backpack and one towel. I used to think an outing must be solemn and well-prepared; now I think what the child wants is not a scenic spot but the feeling that when he speaks, someone takes him seriously. He will not remember the kilometers or the road; he will remember that handful of water leaking through his fingers and the little fish set free.

At night, soaking in the bathtub, he was still laughing when he suddenly said, let us go again next summer. I said yes. For that one sentence alone, the river is worth ninety kilometers.