小河收留了整个暑假

最后一门考试收卷那天，我和表哥骑车直奔小河。路边的柳树把影子搭了半条路，暑气被压在叶缝里，吹到脸上的风已经是暑假的风。

小河不宽，也不深，最深处水到小腿肚。我们卷起裤腿踩进去，一整个下午的燥热凉得一激灵就散了。河床铺着圆石头，脚丫踩上去打滑，身子一晃，笑声先跑了出来。泡久了的石头捡起来对着太阳看，透亮得像一块玉。

表哥忽然掬起一捧水泼过来。水在太阳里碎开，水花的每一瓣都亮。我躲，还是溅了半脸，弯腰回敬两捧。我们一递一地泼，水花接连升起，落在水面上盘旋的蜻蜓背上，蜻蜓抖着翅膀飞走了。

泼累了，我们弯腰找扁石板打水漂。表哥挑一块，侧着身子一甩，石板贴着水面跳四下，每跳一下都顶起一小朵水花。我学着扔，前几块都直挺挺砸进水里，砸出一朵闷声的蘑菇水花。后来手腕学会了抖，石头跳了两下，我喊得比考场上答对题还响。

歇下来的时候，我在浅滩看见一条手指长的小鱼，立在水草边上一动不动。我拢起手去兜，它尾巴一摆蹿走了，尾巴带起的水花正打在我鼻尖上，凉得发酸。表哥说这条河里的鱼都精，年年看人，早看穿了。我们后来也不追了，就蹲在浅滩边看它立着，安安静静看了一小会儿。

那个下午，没有人问考试分数，也没有人提新学期的补习班。小河慢慢地流，水从脚丫边过去，时间也像被水冲得光滑了。我站在水里看云的影子从河面飘过去，觉得暑假真正开始，不是从散学那天，是从湿了脚丫的这一会儿。

傍晚回家，我从桥上回头望。夕阳把河面铺成金色，我们溅起的水花全都安静了下去，河重新平了，像什么都没发生。可我知道，这个暑假会记得我这双脚丫，我也会记得这条河。

The Little River Took In Our Whole Summer

The day the last exam papers were collected, my cousin and I biked straight to the little river. The willows along the road laid their shadows across half the path, the summer heat was pressed into the gaps between the leaves, and the wind on our faces was already the wind of vacation.

The little river is not wide and not deep; at its deepest the water reaches a calf. We rolled up our trouser legs and stepped in, and the stuffiness of a whole afternoon scattered in one shiver. The riverbed is paved with round stones; our feet slipped on them, our bodies swayed, and the laughter ran out first. Stones that had soaked a long time, picked up and held against the sun, were clear as a piece of jade.

Suddenly my cousin scooped up a handful of water and threw it at me. It broke

apart in the sun, every petal of the splash bright. I dodged and still got half my face wet, then bent down and answered with two handfuls. We splashed back and forth, the sprays rising one after another and falling on the backs of dragonflies circling above the water, which flew off shaking their wet wings.

Tired of splashing, we bent looking for flat stone slabs to skip. My cousin chose one, swung it sideways, and it hopped four times along the surface, each hop pushing up a small splash. I learned by throwing; my first stones plopped straight in, making muffled mushroom-shaped sprays. Later my wrist learned the flick, a stone skipped twice, and I shouted louder than when I got an answer right in an exam hall.

Taking a rest, I spotted a fish as long as a finger in the shallows, standing motionless by the watergrass. I cupped my hands to scoop it, and it flicked its tail and shot away; the splash from its tail landed right on the tip of my nose, cold enough to sting. My cousin said the fish in this river had all grown clever, watching people year after year until they saw right through us. We stopped chasing it after that, and squatted at the edge of the shallows watching it stand there, quiet for a little while.

That afternoon nobody asked about scores and nobody mentioned tutoring classes for the new term. The little river flowed slowly, water passing around our feet, and time itself seemed rinsed smooth. Standing in the water watching cloud shadows drift over the surface, I felt the summer vacation truly begin not on the day school closed but in this wet-footed moment.

Going home at dusk, I looked back from the bridge. The setting sun spread gold over the river, every splash we had raised had gone quiet, and the water lay flat again as if nothing had happened. But I knew this vacation would remember my pair of feet, and I would remember this river.

外婆门前的那条河

外婆家在河边。土墙的房子，后门出去走十几步就是河滩，河滩上三块大石板，是被村里人洗衣的棒槌捶出亮来的。

暑假一到外婆家，我就把鞋甩在门槛外。脚丫踩上河滩的沙子，白天晒过的沙烫一层，底下却是凉的，越往下挖越凉。挖到一半还挖出过半只螺壳，外婆说早年河水就涨到脚边这个位置。我蹲在石板边上把脚伸进水，河水漫过脚背，暑气从脚趾缝里一根根抽走，我舒服得直叹气。

外婆在石板上洗衣，棒槌一起一落。她搓一把，在河里涮一把，水花跟着她的手落在石板上，亮一下就没入石头的纹路里。皂角的气味顺水漂过来，混着河草的青腥。我泡着脚看她洗衣，一看

就是一个上午，谁也不说话，河水替我们把话都说完了。

中午外婆拿木桶挑水，两只桶晃着走，水面在桶口荡出水花，一路洒到院里的石榴树下。我跟在后头扶桶，水花溅上我的脚背。院里的石榴树刚坐住果，青的小石榴挂在枝上，被洒到的水珠亮了一下。她说这河水甜，井水硬，烧水结垢，河水不结。我那时不懂什么叫硬，只觉得这河连喝水都替人想着。

傍晚河上浮起蛙声。外婆搬了竹椅在河边乘凉，我们看对岸的灯一盏一盏亮。萤火虫也从草里飞出来，这边一个，那边一个，跟灯对得上号。她讲她小时候也在这些石板上洗过衣裳，脚丫泡的是同一条河。我低头看水里自己模糊的影子，影子脚边是河，河那边是她的六十年前。

后来我到城里读书，暑假短得像别人的一顿饭。有一年夏天回去，石板还在，棒槌换成了塑料盆，河水浅了一截。我把脚伸进去，凉还是那个凉。原来有些东西一直在原地等，等你把脚丫重新放进它的水里。

The River in Front of the Door of My Grandmother

The house of my grandmother stood by the river. An earthen-walled house; out the back door and a dozen steps was the riverbank, where three big stone slabs had been beaten glossy by the washing bats of the whole village.

Once summer vacation brought me to the house of my grandmother, I flung my shoes outside the threshold. My bare feet met the sand of the bank: the layer the sun had baked all day was hot, but underneath it was cool, cooler the deeper you dug. Halfway through I dug out half a snail shell, and grandmother said in earlier years the river rose right to this edge. I squatted at the edge of the slabs and put my feet in the water. The river rose over the tops of my feet, and the summer heat was drawn out of my toes strand by strand until I sighed with relief.

Grandmother washed clothes on the slab, her bat rising and falling. She scrubbed a handful, rinsed it in the river, and the splashes from her hands fell on the stone, shining once before sinking into the grain of the rock. The smell of soap pods drifted over on the water, mixed with the green raw scent of river grass. I soaked my feet and watched her wash, and a whole morning passed that way. Neither of us spoke; the river said everything for us.

At noon grandmother carried water with a pole and two wooden buckets. The water swung at the mouths of the buckets, spilling splashes all the way to the pomegranate tree in the yard. I walked behind steadying a bucket, and droplets landed on my feet. The pomegranate tree in the yard had just set fruit; small green pomegranates hung on the branches, and the spilled droplets made them shine for a moment. She said river water is sweet, well water is hard, kettle scale forms in it, but not in river water.

I did not know what hard meant then; I only felt the river even thought of people while they drank.

In the evening frogs rose on the river. Grandmother moved a bamboo chair to the bank to cool off, and we watched the lamps on the far shore light one by one. Fireflies came out of the grass too, one on this side, one on that, answering the lamps. She told us she had washed clothes on these same slabs as a girl, her feet soaking in the same river. I looked down at my blurred reflection in the water, my reflected feet beside the river, and on the other side of the river her life sixty years ago.

Later I went to school in the city, and summer vacations were as short as a meal of other people. One summer I went back. The slabs were still there, the washing bats replaced by plastic basins, and the river had grown a notch shallower. I put my feet in, and the coolness was the same coolness. So some things wait in one place all along, waiting for you to put your bare feet back into their water.

水花落下去的地方

暑假第二周，大刘和阿贵拉着我去小河游泳。我站在河滩上脱了鞋又穿上，脚丫刚碰水就缩回来。他们说水浅，我说不深才怪，去年大人下去都到腰。河滩的沙子晒得烫脚，我们光着脚一路小跑冲进河水里，凉得一激灵，人这才算活过来。

大刘一把拽住我胳膊往河里走。水先到脚踝，再到膝盖，凉意一层层往上咬。走到齐腰的地方他松了手，我脚下一空，慌得双手乱扒，呛了一小口水，咸的，其实只是河水混着泥腥。阿贵在岸上喊踩水，脚别着地，身子立着就行。

我扶着大刘的肩膀练踩水。两条腿在浑水里乱蹬，水花把我自己罩在中间，透过水花看太阳，碎成一把一把的金。练到第十几回，手一松，身子居然自己立住了。我喊我会了，声音把对岸的鸭子惊得上了岸。阿贵在岸上喊，手一离开水就完了，脚找不着底也别怕，越怕越往下沉。我照他说的，眼睛盯着对岸的柳树，身子慢慢就稳了。

那天我们比谁溅的水花高。大刘猛扎一个猛子，起来时水花像一小棵树；阿贵仰泳打腿，水花连成一串白链子；我学他们的样子，水花只溅起半人高，但每一滴都晒得滚烫又透亮。扎进水里睁开眼，浑是浑的，能看见的只有自己的气泡一串一串往上跑。我们泡到嘴唇发白才上岸，脚丫在晒热的石板上烫得跳，一路跳着笑。

后来我们升了不同的中学，暑假凑不齐人。前年冬天大刘结婚，我们几个老同学聚在镇上，酒过三巡他又提那条河，说你还记得你呛的那口水吗。满桌人笑，我忽然喉咙一紧。原来那年夏天一直泡在河里等我们，脚丫一伸进去，水还是凉的，水花还是亮的，自由和快乐还在原来的地方。

Where the Splashes Came Down

In the second week of summer vacation, Da Liu and A Gui dragged me to swim in the little river. I stood on the riverbank, took my shoes off and put them back on; my feet touched the water and jerked right back. They said the water was shallow. I said it would be strange if it were not deep, because last year even the grown-ups went in to waist height. The sand on the bank was sun-hot, and we ran barefoot all the way and plunged into the river, the cold hitting us like a jolt that brought us back to life.

Da Liu grabbed my arm and walked me into the river. The water came first to my ankles, then to my knees, the cold biting upward layer by layer. At waist height he let go. My feet found nothing under them; I panicked, clawed the surface with both hands, and swallowed a mouthful of water. It tasted salty, or rather it was river water mixed with the rawness of mud. A Gui shouted from the bank: tread water, do not let your feet touch the bottom, just keep your body upright.

I practiced treading water while holding the shoulder of Da Liu. My two legs kicked wildly in the muddy water, and the splashes enclosed me in their middle. Through the spray I looked at the sun, and it broke into handfuls of gold. Around the fifteenth try, I let go with my hands, and my body stayed upright on its own. I shouted that I had learned it, and my voice scared the ducks on the far bank ashore. A Gui shouted from the bank: the moment your hands leave the water you are done for, do not be afraid that your feet cannot find the bottom, for the more you fear the more you sink. I did as he said, kept my eyes on the willow tree on the far bank, and my body steadied little by little.

That day we competed over who could splash the highest. Da Liu dove in hard, and when he rose the spray stood like a small tree; A Gui kicked on his back and the splashes joined into a string of white chain; I copied them, and my splash rose only half a person high, but every drop was sun-hot and clear as glass. Underwater I opened my eyes: all was murky, and the only thing to see was my own bubbles running upward string after string. We soaked until our lips turned pale before climbing out; our feet bounced on the sun-heated flagstones, hopping and laughing all the way.

Later we went to different middle schools, and no summer could gather us again. The winter before last, Da Liu got married and we old classmates met in the town. After the third round of wine he brought up that river again and asked whether I remembered the mouthful of water I had swallowed. The whole table laughed, and my throat tightened all at once. It turned out that the summer of that year had been soaking in the river, waiting for us. Put your feet in, and the water is still cool, the splashes are still bright, and the freedom and the joy are still in the place they were.

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