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.