螃蟹将军

暑假一开头，我和小满就成立了小队，目标是河湾水车旁石板底下的螃蟹。我们天天去，凉鞋踩着浅水，溅得河岸一片响。去得熟了，连哪块石板底下有青苔、哪丛水草里藏小鱼，都摸清楚了。小满说，谁捉的螃蟹最大，谁就是螃蟹将军。我说那捉到最小的呢。他想了想说，最小的放掉。

第三天真发现了。我掀开一块薄石板，底下趴着一只半个硬币大的螃蟹，一动不动，像块黑石头。我屏住气说，别动，有。小满冲过来，脚底踩滑了青苔，一把抓住我的肩膀，两个人就那么盯着螃蟹，连气都不敢出。螃蟹背上有个月牙形的花纹，小爪子一动一动。我数了三下，我俩一块儿伸手。

小满伸手去捉。他从正面捏，螃蟹举起两只钳子，正夹在他指头上。哎哟，他叫起来，可他不松手，螃蟹吊在他手指上，他甩手。我笑他，他冲我喊，笑什么，它夹我。他自己也在笑，笑着甩手，螃蟹被他甩回水里。两个人坐在石头上又笑了一阵。

我教他爷爷教过的办法：拇指和食指按住螃蟹的背，它的钳子够不回来。他再试，手抖，按实了又喊，动了动了，可这回捉住了。螃蟹两只钳子在空中张开，小满吓得赶紧把它放进桶里，又伸手进去数了一遍，确实在。

我们一块一块翻石板，太阳偏西，水面亮得睁不开眼。黄昏数一数，螃蟹七只，最大的是小满捉的，最小的是我捉的。最小的那只只剩一只钳子，它用剩下的那只钳子撑着地，一动不动。两个人对看一眼，放了。小满还冲它喊，走吧，螃蟹将军。桶盖压上石头，我们约好，明天去捉那块大石板底下的。

第二天，小满指头上留着两个小点，红得清清楚楚，我们互相展示，像展示勋章。大人说河边捉螃蟹危险，我们不这么想：被夹一次，笑一场，暑假本来就该这样。那一年，我们都觉得自己是螃蟹将军。如今见了小河沟，我还想弯腰去翻两块石头。

The Crab General

Summer vacation began, and Xiao Man and I formed a squad. Our target was the crabs under the stone slabs beside the waterwheel at the river bend. We went every day, our sandals slapping the shallow water, splashing the bank. As the days went by we knew the bank by heart: which slab had moss underneath, which clump of water grass hid small fish. Xiao Man said, whoever catches the biggest crab is the Crab General. I asked, and the one who catches the smallest. He thought a moment and said, the smallest one is released.

On the third day we really found one. I lifted a thin stone slab, and under it lay a crab the size of half a coin, motionless, like a black pebble. I held my breath and said, do not move, there is one. Xiao Man rushed over, his foot slipped on the

moss, and he grabbed my shoulder, and the two of us just stared at the crab, not daring to breathe. The crab had a mark like a crescent moon on its back, and its little legs moved very slightly. I counted to three with my lips, and we both reached out at once.

Xiao Man reached out and caught at it with his hand. He pinched from the front, and the crab raised its two pincers and clamped onto his finger. Ow, he shouted, but he did not let go, and the crab hung from his finger while he shook his hand. I laughed at him, and he shouted, what are you laughing at, it is pinching me. But he was laughing too, laughing and shaking, and the crab was shaken off into the water. We sat on the stone and laughed some more.

I taught him the method my grandfather taught me: press the back of the crab with thumb and forefinger, and its pincers cannot reach back. He tried again, his hand shaking, and when he really pressed it he shouted again, it is moving, it is moving. But this time he held it. The two pincers of the crab stretched in the air, and Xiao Man, frightened, put it into the bucket, then reached in again to count and make sure it was really there.

We turned slab after slab, and the sun slanted west, and the water glittered so brightly we could hardly keep our eyes open. At dusk we counted seven crabs. The biggest was caught by Xiao Man, the smallest by me. The smallest had only one pincer left, propping itself on the ground with that one pincer, not moving at all. The two of us looked at each other and set it free. Xiao Man even shouted after it, go on, General Crab. The lid of the bucket was weighed down with a stone, and we agreed that tomorrow we would catch the one under the big slab.

The next day two small dots stayed on the finger of Xiao Man, red and clear, and we showed them to each other like medals. Grown-ups say catching crabs at the river is dangerous. We do not think so: pinched once, laughing once, that is what summer vacation is for. That year, both of us believed we were the Crab General. Even now, grown up, whenever I see a small stream I still feel like bending down to turn over a couple of stones.

表哥的螃蟹课

表弟来乡下过暑假，天天缠着我带他出去玩。我带他去河边捉螃蟹，他头一回下河堤，在堤上抢先跑了几步，喊着他要先找到螃蟹，一路蹦，把凉鞋都跑掉了一只，嘴里问个不停，螃蟹咬人吗，螃蟹有多大，我敢捉吗。我说，螃蟹夹人，但不咬，敢不敢自己到了再说。

河边的石头底下螃蟹多。我翻开一块，他凑过来看，一只螃蟹横着跑，他喊，它跑歪的。我

说螃蟹都横着跑。他说它怎么不直着跑。我说不知道。他说为什么。我说不知道，你长大自己查。他说那我长大查好了再告诉你。我说好，这个话我记住了。

石缝里卡着一只螃蟹，指头那么大。我说你来捉。他卷袖子，先拿小石子捅螃蟹，捅得螃蟹举钳子，他再伸手捏，捏的不是背，是钳子根，螃蟹一夹，夹住了。他愣了一秒才叫，哇地一声，眼泪在眼眶里转，可手没松。螃蟹吊在他手上晃，他另一只手乱挥，喊表哥表哥。

我把螃蟹从他手上取下来，他甩着手哭，哭着哭着忽然笑场了，说他刚才捏的是螃蟹的钳子，螃蟹不夹他夹谁。他自己笑自己，笑得蹲下去。我把那只螃蟹拎起来给他看，螃蟹的背在哪里，钳子根在哪里，还让他摸了摸蟹背。我说我再教你一遍，按住背，别碰钳子。他点头，手还疼着，又去捉第二只，这回按对了，举着螃蟹跑，喊我来看，喊得比谁都响。

走的时候桶里五只螃蟹。表弟忽然说不想带走了。我说为什么。他说，螃蟹也有家，它家里说不定也有小螃蟹。我想了想，把桶里的螃蟹一只一只倒回石缝边。他蹲着跟螃蟹说话，说回家吧，明年我再来看你。

回去的路上他举着被夹过的手指，逢人就说他被螃蟹夹了，讲一遍笑一遍，路过小卖部连看店的阿姨也讲了，阿姨笑着给了他一颗糖。奶奶心疼，他反过来安慰奶奶，说螃蟹就夹了他一下，他按了螃蟹两下，算他赢。我走在后头笑，这个暑假，他大概会把螃蟹讲一整个学期。

The Crab Lesson of My Cousin

My cousin came to the village for summer vacation and pestered me every day to take him out. I took him to the river to catch crabs. It was his first time on the river bank, and he ran a few steps ahead of me, shouting that he would find the crab first, bouncing along, even losing one sandal on the way, asking question after question: do crabs bite, how big are crabs, am I brave enough to catch one. I said crabs pinch but do not bite, and whether you are brave we will see when we get there.

Under the stones by the river there were many crabs. I turned one over and he came close to look. A crab ran sideways and he shouted, it runs crooked. I said all crabs run sideways. He asked why they do not run straight. I said I do not know. He asked why. I said I do not know, look it up yourself when you grow up. He said then when I grow up I will look it up and tell you. I said good, I will remember those words.

A crab was wedged in a crack of rock, as big as a finger. I said, you catch it. He rolled up his sleeves, first poking the crab with a small pebble until the crab raised its pincers, then reaching out to pinch — not the back but the base of the pincers — and the crab clamped on. He froze for one second before crying out, a loud wah, tears rolling in his eyes, yet his hand did not let go. The crab dangled from his hand and swung, and his other hand waved wildly, shouting, cousin, cousin.

I took the crab off his hand. He shook his hand and cried, and crying, he suddenly burst into laughter himself, saying he had pinched the pincers of the crab, so of course the crab pinched him. He laughed at himself until he squatted down. I lifted that crab and showed him where the back of the crab is and where the base of the pincers is, and I even let him stroke the back of the crab once. Then I said, let me teach you once more: press the back, do not touch the pincers. He nodded, his hand still aching, and went to catch a second crab. This time he pressed right, and ran holding the crab up, shouting for me to come and see, louder than anyone.

When we left there were five crabs in the bucket. My cousin suddenly said he did not want to take them home. I asked why. He said crabs have homes too, and maybe there are baby crabs at home. I thought a moment and poured the crabs back one by one beside the cracks. He squatted and talked to the crabs, saying go home, I will come see you next year.

On the way back he held up the pinched finger and told everyone he met that a crab had pinched him, laughing each time he told it. Passing the little shop, he told the shopkeeper auntie as well, and she laughed and gave him a sweet. Grandma felt sorry for him, and he comforted her in return, saying the crab only pinched him once and he had pressed the crab twice, so he had won. I walked behind laughing. This summer, he will probably talk about crabs the whole term.

河边捉蟹比赛

暑假里我们仨在河边立了个比赛：用手捉螃蟹，一人十分钟，谁捉得多谁赢，输的人请吃冰棍。规则是阿亮定的，他还在石板上用粉笔画了条线，当作起点。大勇说画线没用，螃蟹又不认线。阿亮说，认不认是螃蟹的事，画不画是我的事。

第一个上的是阿亮。他翻石板的动作轻，翻一块看一块，半天没动静。忽然他压着嗓子喊，快来，大的。我们凑过去，石板底下一只螃蟹，指甲盖那么大，两只钳子张着。阿亮伸手去捉，从背上下手，捉是捉住了，螃蟹一挣，从他指头缝里滑走，钻进水草不见了。三个人趴在岸边朝水里看，谁也不说话，那样子现在想起来还好笑。

第二个上的是大勇。他自告奋勇，说看我的。他捉法野，手直接往石缝里抄，抄到一只，螃蟹夹住他大拇指。他哎哟一声跳起来，单脚在石头上蹦，蹦到水里又蹦回来。我们笑得直不起腰。他甩手，螃蟹落回水里。他举着大拇指给大家看，上面两个小红点，说，看见没有，螃蟹给我盖了个章。

我第三个上，捉了三只小的，最大的一只还没指甲盖大。数下来我赢，阿亮不服，说大勇被夹的不能算，大勇说被夹也是捉过。争了半天，最后的办法是三只螃蟹重新放水里，让它们自己游，谁先游到对岸算谁赢。螃蟹哪里肯游，三只挤在一块儿不动。我们仨干脆一起把螃蟹全放了，

反正比赛本来也就是个名头。

回家的路上大勇还在讲他盖章的事，讲到第三遍，我们配合着笑了第三遍。阿亮说明年夏天还比，谁也不许用网兜，谁用网兜谁是小狗。我们把手上的泥在裤腿上蹭干净，太阳把三个影子拉得很长。

那天的冰棍最后是三个人一人一根，谁也没请谁。大勇说，被螃蟹夹过的人有资格吃冰棍。我们觉得这话有道理，就都吃了。河边的事就是这样，捉到捉不到不要紧，笑够了才算过完暑假。

The Crab Catching Contest

Over summer vacation the three of us set up a contest at the river: catching crabs by hand, ten minutes each, whoever catches more wins, and the loser buys popsicles. The rules were set by A Liang, who even drew a line on the stone slab with chalk as a starting line. Da Yong said drawing a line was useless, crabs do not recognize lines. A Liang said whether they recognize it is the crabs affair, whether I draw it is my affair.

A Liang went first. He lifted the stone slabs gently, turning one and checking one, and for a long while nothing happened. Suddenly he called out in a low voice, come quick, a big one. We crowded over. Under the slab was a crab as big as a fingernail, its two pincers stretched open. A Liang reached for it from the back. He did catch it, but the crab struggled and slid out between his fingers into the water grass and vanished. The three of us lay along the bank staring into the water, nobody saying a word, a sight that is funny just to remember now.

Da Yong went second. He volunteered, saying watch me. His method was wild: his hand swept straight into the rock crack. He swept up a crab, and the crab clamped onto his thumb. He cried out and jumped, hopping on one foot across the stones, hopping into the water and back out again. We laughed until we could not stand straight. He shook his hand and the crab fell back into the water. He held up his thumb for everyone to see, two small red dots on it, and said, see that, the crab stamped me with its seal.

I went third and caught three small ones, the biggest still smaller than a fingernail. Counting up, I won. A Liang was not convinced, saying a crab that pinched Da Yong should not count. Da Yong said being pinched still counts as catching. We argued for half a day, and in the end the solution was to put the three crabs back into the water and let them swim, and whichever reached the far bank first would win. The crabs had no wish to swim; all three huddled together and would not move. So the three of us simply released them all — the contest had only ever been a pretext anyway.

On the way home Da Yong was still telling the story of his seal, on its third telling, and we laughed along for the third time. A Liang said next summer we compete again, nobody allowed to use a net, and whoever uses a net is a puppy. We wiped the mud off our hands on our trouser legs, and the sun stretched three shadows long.

The popsicles that day ended up one each for all three, and nobody treated anybody. Da Yong said a person pinched by a crab has earned the right to a popsicle. We thought that made sense, so we all ate. That is how things at the river go: catching or not catching does not matter; only when you have laughed enough has the summer truly passed.