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.

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