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.