胡同里的水枪大战

蝉在槐树上叫得没完，下午两点，胡同里一个人影都没有。阿哲抱着一把比手臂还长的水枪拐进巷口，我和胖子正蹲在墙根弹玻璃球，头一抬，眼睛就直了。

水枪是阿哲他爸单位发的奖品，蓝黑色，枪身上印着一只卡通鸭子。阿哲把它往我们面前一举：打不打？我和胖子异口同声：打！可是两个人打不成仗，得凑够六个人。我们扯着嗓子挨家喊，最后喊出来六个：我们仨，对面是格子、丽丽和斌子。分组用猜拳，阿哲出剪刀，格子出石头，格子赢了当队长。他把手一挥，说我们守巷东，他们守巷西，谁被水滋透了就出局。

开战前的装水最麻烦。巷口的自来水龙头矮，我们蹲成一排，把水枪的储水仓按到出水口底下。水柱细细的一条，要接好几分钟。斌子急性子，接一半就拧上盖子，结果他的枪打三下就哑了。我的枪是老式抽拉式的，皮垫子松，得先把拉杆压到底再灌，水灌到一半从缝里冒泡，手背上凉丝丝的。

格子喊了一声开始，战斗就算打响了。斌子第一个冲出来，还没跑两步，躲在门墩后面的丽丽朝他胸口来了一枪，白T恤立刻洇出一大片深色。斌子不服，绕到电线杆后面反击，水柱歪歪斜斜，倒把出来收衣服的张奶奶浇了个正着，吓得他连连鞠躬，水枪都扔了。

胖子负责掩护我。他枪大，一次能滋两米远，就是装水慢。我们俩配合着往前压，我趁机绕到墙拐，朝格子后背补了两枪。格子回头追我，我钻进晒着的床单中间，水珠打在床单上，像下了一场小雨。我在床单里转圈，透过湿透的布看见格子站在原地找不到我，忍不住笑出了声，一笑就暴露了，隔着床单挨了一梭子。

打到第四轮，六个人全都湿透了。胖子的眼镜片上挂着水珠，他摘下来擦，擦完戴上，水又流下来，干脆不擦了。阿哲的鸭子水枪没水了，他举着空枪往桶里按，按半天进不了一点点水，我们全蹲在地上笑。

阿哲他爸下班回来，看见一巷子滴水的孩子，没批评，回家抱出一个冰镇西瓜，说谁先把水枪收好谁先吃。六把水枪哗啦一下全放进了塑料筐。我们坐在门槛上啃西瓜，衣服贴在背上，凉风一吹，浑身起小疙瘩。蝉还在叫，格子抹抹嘴说明天还打。我抱着我的抽拉枪点头，心想这个下午真长啊，长得够我记好多年。

The Water Fight in the Alley

The cicadas would not stop singing in the locust tree. At two in the afternoon, the alley was empty. A Zhe turned in at the mouth of the lane, carrying a water gun longer than his arm. Fatty and I were squatting by the wall playing marbles, and the moment we looked up, our eyes were fixed on it.

The gun was a prize from the workplace of the father of A Zhe, blue-black, with a cartoon duck printed on the body. A Zhe held it up in front of us: fight or not?

Fatty and I answered at the same time: fight! But two people could not make a battle; we needed six. We went from door to door shouting, and six showed up: the three of us against Gezi, Lili and Binzi. We split teams by rock-paper-scissors. A Zhe threw scissors and Gezi threw stone, so Gezi became captain. He waved his hand: we would hold the east end, they would hold the west end, and anyone soaked through was out.

Filling the guns was the hardest part before the fight. The tap at the mouth of the lane was low, and we squatted in a row, pressing the tanks of the guns under the spout. The water came in a thin line and took minutes. Binzi was impatient; he screwed the cap on when his gun was only half full, and his gun went silent after three shots. Mine was an old push-pull type with a loose rubber seal, so I had to push the rod all the way down first and then pour, and the water bubbled out of the seam halfway through, cool on the back of my hand.

When Gezi shouted start, the battle began. Binzi rushed out first, and before he had run two steps, Lili, hiding behind the door block, hit him in the chest, and a big dark patch spread across his white T-shirt. Binzi refused to accept it and circled behind the utility pole to shoot back, but his stream went crooked and soaked Grandma Zhang, who had come out to collect laundry. He bowed again and again and even dropped his gun.

Fatty covered me. His gun was big and could shoot two meters, but it filled slowly. We pushed forward together, and I slipped around the corner of the wall to fire two shots at the back of Gezi. He turned and chased me. I dived between the sheets hung out to dry. Water drops hit the sheets like a light rain. I spun around inside the sheet, and through the soaked cloth I saw Gezi standing there unable to find me, and I laughed out loud. The laugh gave me away, and I took a burst right through the sheet.

By the fourth round all six of us were soaked. Water beads hung on the lenses of Fatty. He took them off to wipe them, put them back, and the water ran down again, so he simply stopped wiping. The duck gun of A Zhe ran dry. He held the empty gun down into the bucket, and after a long press only a little water got in, and we all squatted on the ground laughing.

When the father of A Zhe came home from work and saw a lane full of dripping children, he did not scold anyone. He carried out a watermelon chilled on ice and said whoever put the gun away first would eat first. Six guns clattered into the plastic basket at once. We sat on the doorsteps eating watermelon, our clothes stuck to our backs, and the cool wind raised little bumps on our skin. The cicadas kept singing. Gezi wiped his mouth and said the fight would continue tomorrow. I hugged my push-pull gun and nodded, thinking what a long afternoon this was, long enough to remember for years.

送水的兵

天台的门一推开，热气先涌进来，水泥地被晒得发白。六个孩子抱着水枪鱼贯而出，最后出来的是刘小禾，她两手各提一只红塑料桶，桶里的水一晃一晃。她不会打仗，分组的时候被两边抢来抢去当送水的兵，两边队长最后猜拳，把她猜给了东队。

装水是她的活儿。水枪一只只排在天台沿上，她拿瓢从桶里舀水，顺着灌水口往里倒。新式水枪有盖子，老式抽拉枪张着嘴。她倒得慢，水线细细的，洒在天台地上，一小片一小片深色。打头阵的石头等不及，抢过她手里的瓢自己灌，灌得太急，水从枪缝里涌出来，流了他一裤腿，惹得对面那队隔着水塔笑。

开战是石头喊的。他喊完第一个翻过水塔，朝西队扑过去。西队的队长是隔壁班的马原，早就埋伏在遮阳棚后面，一抬手，石头的前胸就开了一朵深色的花。石头退回来，蹲在水塔后面给枪重新压弹，嘴里喊着小禾再送一桶。小禾提着桶沿铁皮楼梯跑，桶磕在台阶上，水泼出来浇湿了自己的鞋，她索性把鞋踢掉，光着脚继续跑。

打到第三轮，东队只剩石头和瘦猴还站着，马原他们三个围在水塔另一侧，一点点往前压。小禾站在楼道口，手里还攥着瓢。她看了很久，忽然把瓢往桶里一插，抓起地上那把没人用的绿枪，按进桶里灌满，翻过了水塔。

她做了一件所有人都没想到的事：不滋人，只滋枪。马原正抬手要射瘦猴，一注水从侧面兜头浇在他的枪身上，枪里的水混着新水哗啦流出来，马原整个人愣住。小禾转身就跑，光脚拍在水泥地上啪啪响。马原反应过来去追，绕着水塔追了三圈，每次都被从拐角伸出来的绿枪滋一下枪口。

这一仗是石头收尾的。他趁马原追小禾，从正面把他后背滋透了。按规矩马原出局，可他抹了一把脸，笑得直不起腰，说重新分组，下一局他要把小禾抢到自己队里。两个队长又猜拳，这回小禾猜给了西队，东队的人集体抗议，抗议完还是笑了。

太阳偏西，六把枪全空了，六个人全湿透了，贴在背上的衣服被风吹得鼓起来。小禾坐在天台沿上，脚边是两只空桶，她低头看自己泡白的手心，忽然咧嘴笑了。石头隔着水塔朝她喊：明天还让你送水。她冲他挥了挥那只瓢。这个下午后来被他们记了很多年，记得水，记得枪，也记得那个光脚绕着水塔跑的人。

The Water Carrier

The door of the rooftop swung open and the heat rushed in first; the concrete had been baked pale white. Six children filed out hugging water guns, and last came Liu Xiaohe, carrying a red plastic bucket in each hand, the water inside swinging. She could not fight. During the team picking both sides kept claiming her as their water carrier, and in the end the two captains settled it with rock-paper-scissors, which gave her to the east team.

Filling the guns was her job. The guns lined up along the edge of the roof, and she scooped water from the buckets with a ladle and poured it into their filling mouths. The new guns had caps; the old push-pull guns stood with their mouths open. She poured slowly, a thin line of water, spilling on the roof in small dark patches. Shitou at the front could not wait and grabbed the ladle to fill his own gun, too fast, and the water gushed out of the seams and ran down his pant leg, while the other team laughed at him across the water tower.

Shitou shouted the start. No sooner had he shouted than he vaulted over the water tower and charged the west team. Their captain was Ma Yuan from the class next door, long hidden behind the shade canopy, and with one raised hand he opened a dark flower on the chest of Shitou. Shitou fell back, squatted behind the water tower to pump his gun again, calling for Xiaohe to bring another bucket. She ran along the metal stairs with the buckets, the buckets banging on the steps, water sloshing out over her own shoes, and she simply kicked the shoes off and ran on barefoot.

By the third round only Shitou and Skinny Monkey were still standing on the east side, while the three of the west team pressed forward inch by inch on the other side of the tower. Xiaohe stood at the stairway opening, the ladle still in her hand. She watched for a long moment, then stuck the ladle into the bucket, grabbed the unused green gun lying on the ground, pressed it into the water until it was full, and climbed over the tower.

She did something nobody expected: she never shot at people, only at guns. Ma Yuan had his hand raised to shoot Skinny Monkey when a stream of water from the side drenched his gun, and the old water mixed with the new poured out of it, leaving him frozen in surprise. She turned and ran, her bare feet slapping the concrete. When Ma Yuan came after her, he chased her three times around the tower, and every time a green gun poked out of a corner and wet his muzzle.

The battle was finished by Shitou. While Ma Yuan was chasing Xiaohe, he soaked his back from the front. By the rules Ma Yuan was out, but he wiped his face, laughing too hard to stand, and said they would pick teams again and that in the next round he would take Xiaohe to his side. The captains threw hands once more, and this time she went to the west team, and the east team protested all together, then laughed after protesting.

The sun leaned west. All six guns were empty and all six children were soaked, their shirts puffing out as the wind found them. Xiaohe sat on the edge of the roof with two empty buckets at her feet, looked down at her palm whitened by water, and suddenly grinned. Shitou shouted across the water tower that tomorrow she would still be their water. She waved the ladle at him. They remembered this afternoon for years: the water, the guns, and the barefoot person running circles around the water tower.

表哥的水枪

我到表哥家那年暑假，最后那天下午的事，我是从表哥的水枪想起的。那把枪后来挂在杂物间的钉子上，枪身上有一道用胶带缠过的裂缝。可那天下午，它是全稻场最威风的东西。

头一天傍晚，村里的孩子就约好了：明天午后，稻场打一场水枪仗。表哥问我敢不敢来。我把头点得很用力。我在城里没打过这样的仗，我们那儿的仗都在楼下的空地上，几个人，几把枪，打完就各自回家。村里的仗不一样，人从四面八方来，最大的小虎拎着一种压杆的大炮枪，一次能射出去一大股水。

第二天午后，人聚在井台边分组。分组的办法是报数，一二一二，报一的一组，报二的一组。表哥和我在一组，小虎在对面。分组的时候出了个岔子：我们组少一把枪。表哥把他那把蓝黑的新枪塞到我手里，从墙角落里翻出一把灰扑扑的旧枪，枪屁股上有一道裂缝，用手指头一按，水就往外渗。他说这把归他，正好压我。

装水在井台。辘轳摇上来一桶，孩子们把枪泡到桶里去灌，灌满一把递一把。我的新枪有个橡胶塞子，塞子松，得用牙咬着才能塞紧，我塞了三回才塞住。小虎的炮枪口径大，一桶水倒进去，半桶洒在井台上。井台边的青苔被水冲得发亮。

开战没有信号，是小虎先动的手。他隔着稻场边的草垛朝人堆里压了一炮，水头砸在地上炸开，我们这边三个人裤腿全湿了。表哥喊一声散开，我们绕着草垛跑。我端着新枪躲在打谷机后面，看准小虎的肩膀滋了两下，他脖子后头立刻深了一块。他回头找枪声，我在打谷机的铁皮底下笑，笑得肩膀一抖一抖。

表哥那边吃紧了。他的旧枪打五下漏三下，水顺着他的胳膊往下流，他干脆把枪口朝下泡在桶里，打一桶灌一桶。小虎逼到他跟前，两人隔着一只谷桶对峙。表哥把最后一股水滋在小虎脸上，小虎抹了把脸，大笑着扑过去，两个人滚在稻场的草灰里，谁也没赢谁。

太阳落到山后头，大人们在村口喊吃饭。我们这一组输了，按规矩输的组明天请吃冰棍。表哥把新枪从钉子上取下来，说借我玩到开学。我抱着枪往回走，枪身上的胶带蹭着我的胳膊。那天我才知道，输一场仗可以这么高兴，因为明天还有仗打，还有冰棍，还有表哥和他那把漏水的旧枪。

The Water Gun of My Cousin

Of the last afternoon of that summer at my cousin of the village, I remember everything through his water gun. The gun later hung on a nail in the storage room, a crack on its body wound round with tape. But that afternoon it was the most fearsome thing on the whole threshing ground.

The evening before, the village children had made the appointment: tomorrow afternoon, a water fight on the threshing ground. My cousin asked whether I dared

come. I nodded very hard. I had never fought such a fight in the city. Fights where I lived happened on the open ground below the buildings, a few people, a few guns, and then everyone went home. The village fight was different. People came from every direction, and the biggest of them, Xiaohu, carried a big press-rod cannon gun that could fire a huge stream at once.

The next afternoon everyone gathered at the well to pick teams. The method was counting off: one, two, one, two; the ones against the twos. My cousin and I landed on one side, Xiaohu on the other. There was a snag: our side was one gun short. My cousin pressed his shiny blue-black gun into my hands and dug a dusty old one out of the corner by the wall. Its stock had a crack, and pressing it with a finger made water seep out. He said this one was his, a perfect match for me.

Filling happened at the well. A bucket came up on the windlass, and the children dipped their guns into it to fill them, passing each full gun down the line. My new gun had a rubber stopper that had gone loose, and I had to bite it tight with my teeth; it took me three tries. The cannon of Xiaohu had a wide mouth; a bucket of water went in and half a bucket spilled onto the well platform, and the moss by the well shone where the water washed it.

The battle had no signal; Xiaohu fired first. From across the threshing ground he let a cannon shot fly over the haystack into our crowd, the water bursting on the ground, and three of us had our pant legs soaked. My cousin shouted scatter, and we ran around the haystack. I crouched behind the threshing machine with the new gun and hit Xiaohu twice on the shoulder; the back of his neck went dark at once. He turned looking for the shooter while I laughed under the tin belly of the machine, my shoulders shaking.

My cousin was having a hard time. His old gun fired five shots and leaked three, water running down his arm, so he simply stood the muzzle down in the bucket and refilled after every shot. Xiaohu closed in on him, and the two faced each other across a grain bucket. My cousin fired his last stream into the face of Xiaohu, who wiped his face, laughed loudly, and tackled him, and the two rolled in the chaff of the threshing ground, neither one winning.

The sun fell behind the hill, and the grown-ups called us to supper from the village entrance. Our side had lost, and by the rules the losers would buy popsicles tomorrow. My cousin took the new gun off its nail and said I could keep it until school began. I walked home hugging the gun, the tape on its body rubbing my arm. That day I learned that losing a fight could make you this happy, because tomorrow there would be another fight, and popsicles, and my cousin with his leaky old gun.