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.