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.

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