演樵夫的那个小男孩

马小跳在课本剧里演樵夫。樵夫一共三句台词，第一句是：我的斧子掉进河里了。班主任选他的时候说，你个子结实，像樵夫。他站在讲台上应了一声好，回到座位才开始慌。

候场的时候，别的节目在台上闹，笑声一阵一阵传过来。马小跳蹲在侧幕后面，把三句话念了四十遍。第一句，我的斧子掉进河里了。第二句，河神爷爷，你把我的金斧子银斧子都捞上来吧。第三句，我还是要把原来的那把拿回去。念到第三十遍，旁边的道具斧子都显得熟了。

轮到他班。幕布拉开，聚光灯打过来，白得晃眼，台下黑乎乎的看不见脸，只能看见一排排反光的手机屏。马小跳拎着道具斧子走出去，斧子的木柄在手里滑了一下，他攥紧了，站定。

他张开嘴。第一句没了。脑子里那四十遍像被人一下子抽走了，一个字都不剩。他站在灯底下，听见自己的呼吸，听见台下有人咳嗽。侧幕后面班主任的手抬起来，又放下。

半秒，一秒。马小跳憋出半句：我的……斧子……河里的……声音又小又干。台下静得可怕。这时候演河神的同学往前抢了一步，接住话：哦？你的斧子掉进河里啦？马小跳顺着她的话找回了调门：掉、掉进去了！金斧子银斧子——他接上了，全接上了，第三句说得又响又稳。

戏演完，他们手拉手出来谢幕。台下掌声起来，哗啦啦，比排练时响任何一次都实在。马小跳鞠躬，直起身，看见第三排他爸爸举着手机在拍，冲他竖大拇指。

回后台，演河神的同学用胳膊肘捅他：刚才吓死我了。马小跳说：我也是。两个人对视了一眼，笑出声。道具斧子靠在墙角，木柄上有一道他攥出来的汗印。

晚上他爸把演出的视频给他看，卡住的那一段只有四秒，视频里他愣在灯下，半句台词含在嘴里。他爸说：这四秒我看了五遍，后面接得漂亮。马小跳把手机还回去，心里那四秒还是长的，可它到底过去了。

The Boy Who Played the Woodcutter

Ma Xiaotiao played the woodcutter in the class play. The woodcutter had three lines in total. The first was: My axe fell into the river. When the homeroom teacher picked him, she said: You are sturdy, you look like a woodcutter. He stood at the podium and said okay, and only started to panic after getting back to his seat.

While waiting backstage, other acts made noise on stage, and laughter drifted over in waves. Ma Xiaotiao crouched behind the side curtain and recited the three lines forty times. Line one: My axe fell into the river. Line two: God of the River, please fish up my gold axe and silver axe. Line three: I still want my old axe back. By the thirtieth round, even the prop axe beside him felt familiar.

It was his class's turn. The curtain opened, the spotlight hit, white and blinding. Downstairs he could not see faces in the dark, only rows of phone screens glowing. He walked out carrying the prop axe; its wooden handle slipped once in his

hand, he gripped it tight, and stopped.

He opened his mouth. Line one was gone. The forty recitations seemed yanked away all at once, not a word left. He stood under the light, hearing his own breathing, hearing someone downstairs cough. Behind the side curtain, the homeroom teacher raised her hand, then lowered it.

Half a second. One second. Ma Xiaotiao forced out half a line: My... axe... in the river... The sound was small and dry. The silence downstairs was terrifying. Then the classmate playing the River God stepped forward and caught his words: Oh? Your axe fell into the river? Ma Xiaotiao climbed back onto the track from her line: It fell, it fell! The gold axe and the silver axe - he caught up, caught up with all of it, and said the third line loud and steady.

When the play ended, they came out hand in hand to take a bow. The applause rose downstairs, roaring, more solid than any rehearsal. Ma Xiaotiao bowed, straightened, and saw his dad in the third row holding up a phone, giving him a thumbs-up.

Backstage, the classmate playing the River God nudged him with her elbow: I nearly died back there. Ma Xiaotiao said: Me too. They looked at each other and laughed out loud. The prop axe leaned against the corner of the wall, a sweat mark from his grip on its handle.

At night his dad showed him the video of the performance. The frozen part was only four seconds: in the video he stood dazed under the light, half a line stuck in his mouth. His dad said: I watched those four seconds five times, and the recovery after was beautiful. Ma Xiaotiao handed the phone back. Those four seconds still felt long inside him - but they had passed.