大槐树下的网兜

暑假里最有趣的是捉知了。我们家前面有一棵大槐树，一到中午，树上的知了就叫成一片，一声压着一声，像谁在屋顶上敲铁皮。我吃过午饭就举着网兜往树下走，网兜是去年买的，圈上破了个口，爸爸用铁丝拧上，看着丑，好用。

知了比我机灵。它趴在树干上，身子跟树皮一个颜色，不细看根本分不出来。我仰着头从树根往树梢扫，扫得眼睛发酸，才发现一只——就在树干分杈的地方，肚子一鼓一鼓地叫。

我不敢出声，把网兜先放在脚边，踮着脚往上凑。凑到离它三步远，叫声停了。我立刻站住，连眼睛都不敢眨。过了一会儿，知了又叫了。我往前挪一步，叫声又停。我摸清了规律：它一停就是在听我，我得等它再叫起来才敢动。

第一次扑，扑空了。我把网兜举起来朝它罩下去，网口拍在树皮上，掀开一看，里面什么也没有。知了已经飞到更高一根枝上，接着叫，像是笑话我。我手心全是汗，不服气，又回到树下重新找。

第二次我换了办法。我让弟弟在树另一边拿树枝弄出动静，知了的叫声猛地停住，等它再叫，我从侧面举网，看准它下面一点的位置罩下去，把网口死死贴在树皮上。网里嗡的一声，翅膀撞着网眼。我捏住网兜口，从缝里偷看：知了两只翅膀透明的，腿在网里乱抓。

弟弟跑过来，我们轮流捧着网兜。知了不挣了，趴着不动。弟弟说，放了吧，装在袋子里它会死。我想了想，把网兜口贴回树干。知了爬进树叶里，回头又哇地叫了一嗓子，像是说它还会叫。

那天下午我们又捉到两只，看了看都放了。回家的路上弟弟说，明天还来。我说来，看谁先发现。我们俩一人守一棵树，比谁眼睛尖。

现在想起来，捉知了最趣的不是网下去那一下，是踮着脚凑近的那几步，是扑空以后手心上的汗，是放了它以后它回头那一嗓子。大槐树还在，知了年年叫，我的网兜挂在门后，圈上的铁丝一直没拆。

The Net Under the Locust Tree

The most fun thing in summer vacation was catching cicadas. In front of our house stood a big locust tree, and at noon the cicadas in it rang in one solid wave, one sound pressing on another, like someone hammering sheet metal on the roof. After lunch I would walk under the tree with a net. The net was bought last year, with a broken ring that my father had twisted shut with wire. It looked ugly, but it worked well.

The cicada was smarter than me. It lay flat on the trunk, its body the same color as the bark, impossible to pick out unless you looked hard. I tilted my head and swept from the roots to the treetops until my eyes ached, and finally found one —

right at the fork of the trunk, its belly puffing in and out as it sang.

I did not dare make a sound. I set the net down at my feet and tiptoed closer. When I got within three steps, the singing stopped. I froze at once, not even blinking. After a while the cicada sang again. I moved one step forward, and it stopped again. I figured out the rule: when it goes quiet, it is listening for me, so I must wait until it starts singing again before I move.

The first pounce missed. I raised the net and clamped it down where the cicada had been. The rim slapped the bark, and when I lifted it there was nothing inside. The cicada had already flown to a higher branch and kept singing, as if laughing at me. My palms were all sweat, but I refused to give up and went back under the tree to search again.

The second time I changed the plan. I had my little brother make noise with a stick on the other side of the tree. The singing stopped with a jerk, and when it started again I raised the net from the side, aimed a little below the cicada, and pressed the rim hard against the bark. Inside the net there was a buzz, wings beating against the mesh. I pinched the opening shut and peeked through the gap: the cicada had two transparent wings, and its legs were clawing around inside.

My brother ran over, and we held the net in turns. The cicada stopped struggling and lay still. My brother said: let it go, it will die if we keep it in a bag. I thought it over and pressed the net opening back against the trunk. The cicada crawled into the leaves, turned back, and let out one loud cry, as if to say it could still sing.

That afternoon we caught two more, looked at them, and let them go too. On the way home my brother said: tomorrow we come back. I said yes, and we will see who spots one first. We each took one tree and competed on who had the sharper eyes.

Thinking back now, the fun of catching cicadas was not the moment the net came down. It was the few steps on tiptoe, the sweat on my palms after a miss, and the one loud cry the cicada gave after I let it go. The big locust tree is still there, the cicadas sing every year, and my net hangs behind the door, its wire patch never taken off.