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.

第五下松开爪子

暑假傍晚，大树底下的凉风刚起来，知了的叫声就稀了。这时候最好玩的不是捉会飞的知了，是

捉土里的知了猴——刚钻出地面、还没爬高脱壳的那种。我跟表哥每人拿一个手电筒，一人守半棵树，光贴着树干扫。

知了猴比我想的慢。它趴在树根往上一点的地方，爪子抠着树皮，一动不动，像一坨泥。表哥先发现一只，喊我别动，他伸手捏它后背。知了猴的腿张开，扒得更紧。表哥说不能硬拽，得顺着它，让它以为树还在动。他手指轻轻晃，知了猴松了一下爪，一下就进了他手心。

我照着做。手电筒咬在嘴里，光一晃，我看见一只，蹲下去伸手。它扒得死紧，我晃了两下它不松，我急了，指甲抠着它旁边树皮一起揭，差点把树皮抠破。表哥说停，让我重新来。这回我耐住性子，手指托着它肚子底下慢慢晃，晃到第五下，它的爪子一根一根松开了，落进我手心。它在我手心里爬，腿扎扎的，痒得我直咧嘴。

我们捉了十几只，装在一个带盖的塑料盒里，盒壁上扎了洞。回家放在阳台的纱窗上。第二天一早去看，知了猴背着裂开一条缝，从缝里慢慢拱出来，头先出来，再是身子，最后两条后腿从旧壳里拔出来，整个过程我在纱窗前蹲了一个钟头，大气不敢出。表哥喊我看，我摆手让他小声。

表哥还教我看树洞。他说知了猴晚上从洞里钻出来，洞口留一圈新土，一摸是软的。我们挨个树根摸过去，摸到软土就把手电筒放低，等它自己爬出来。有一回我们守着一个洞守了二十分钟，一只知了猴终于顶开土冒出头，我和表哥都不敢出声，光都不敢乱晃，看它一步一步往树上爬。

新出来的知了翅膀是皱的，绿得发亮，一点一点展开、变硬。中午它飞到院子里的树上，傍晚开始叫，跟树上原来的知了叫到一处。我听了半天，分不清哪只是我放飞的。

表哥说，明年还来。我说来，还守半棵树。回家的路上我手心里还留着知了猴腿扎扎的感觉。这个暑假最好玩的事，就是那第五下——它一根一根松开爪子，落进我手心的那一下。

The Fifth Wiggle and the Loosening Claws

In summer vacation, as soon as the cool evening wind rose under the big tree, the cicada songs thinned out. At that hour the best game was not catching flying cicadas but catching the nymphs just out of the ground, the ones that had not yet climbed high to shed their shells. My cousin and I each took a flashlight and each guarded half of one tree, sweeping the light flat along the bark.

The nymph was slower than I expected. It clung a little above the roots, its claws dug into the bark, motionless, looking like a lump of mud. My cousin spotted one first and told me not to move. He reached out and pinched it from the back. The nymph spread its legs and gripped harder. My cousin said you cannot yank it; you have to go along with it and make it think the tree is still moving. He wiggled his fingers gently, the claws loosened for a moment, and the nymph landed in his palm.

I did the same. I held the flashlight in my teeth and swept the light. When I saw one, I crouched and reached out. It gripped like a knot. I wiggled twice and it would not let go, so I got impatient and dug my nail into the bark beside it, nearly tearing the bark off. My cousin said stop and made me start over. This time I kept my patience, supported the underside of its belly with my finger, and wiggled slowly. On the fifth wiggle its claws opened one by one, and it dropped into my palm. It crawled across my hand, its legs prickly, so ticklish I grinned.

We caught more than a dozen and put them in a plastic box with a lid, holes poked in the walls, and set the box on the window screen on the balcony. Early the next morning we went to look. A crack opened down the back of a nymph, and it pushed itself out through the crack: head first, then body, and at last the two hind legs pulled free of the old shell. I squatted in front of the screen for a whole hour, afraid to breathe. My cousin called me to look, and I waved him to be quiet.

My cousin also taught me to read the holes in the ground. He said the nymphs come out of the earth at night and leave a ring of fresh soil at the hole, soft to the touch. We went from root to root feeling the soil, and whenever it felt soft we set the flashlight low and waited for the nymph to climb out itself. Once we watched one hole for twenty minutes until a nymph finally pushed the soil open and poked its head out. Neither of us dared make a sound or move the light, and we watched it climb up the tree step by step.

The fresh cicada had wrinkled wings, green and shining, that spread out bit by bit and hardened. At noon it flew to the tree in the yard, and by evening it was singing, blending with the old cicadas. I listened for a long time and could not tell which one I had set free.

My cousin said: next year we come back. I said yes, and we will each still guard half a tree. On the way home my palm still remembered the prickly feel of the nymph legs. The best thing of that whole summer was the fifth wiggle — the claws opening one by one, and the small weight dropping into my hand.

柳树底下的比赛

暑假里我们一伙人捉知了，最热闹的是在村口那几棵大柳树下。树底下放牛的老爷爷都认识我们，看见我们举着网兜跑过来，就把牛往边上牵，给我们让出树下来。我们五个人定了比赛规矩：一人捉一只，谁先捉到谁赢，输的人明天带冰棍。

中午的柳树底下又闷又吵，知了的叫声从头顶压下来，一只叫，一片跟着叫，震得耳朵嗡嗡

的。我们仰着头分散开，一人盯一棵树。我盯的那棵上有一只大黑知了，趴在树杈上叫得最响，我一看就觉得稳了。

我举着网兜悄悄靠近，网兜举过头顶，胳膊举得又酸又抖。离三步远，知了停了。我僵在原地。我们组里的刘壮从后面赶过来，踩着一截干树枝，咔嚓一声。知了嗡地飞起来，绕着柳树飞了一圈，落在我头顶上方的枝上。我抬头看它，它低头看我，我气得直跺脚。

更逗的是刘壮。他盯上一只，猛地举网扑捉，网没罩住知了，罩住了一只马蜂。马蜂在网里乱撞，刘壮脸都白了，举着网兜原地转圈，喊救命。我们吓得四散跑开，蹲到远处的庄稼地边，看他举着网兜一路小跑，把网兜扔进沟里，自己一屁股坐在地上喘。

最后是瘦小的周雨捉到的。她捉知了不用猛扑，她举着网兜在树下慢慢转，转到知了背面那侧，从下往上轻轻一扣，网口贴住树皮，知了连飞都没飞起来。她捏着网兜口走过来，脸不红气不喘。我们四个输的，第二天一人一根冰棍。

放牛的老爷爷笑我们，说他们小时候捉知了不用网，用面筋。揪一小团面筋粘在竹竿头，往知了身上一按就粘住了。我们听得眼睛都直了，回家缠着大人要面筋。那年夏天我们后来真用竹竿粘知了，比网兜还灵。

现在想起来还是好笑：刘壮举着网兜转圈的样子，周雨轻轻一扣的样子，还有老爷爷牵牛让树的样子。大柳树的知了年年叫，我们一伙人暑假还凑在那儿，比谁先发现，比谁手法轻。捉知了这件事，一个人捉是好玩，一伙人捉才是趣。

The Contest Under the Willows

In summer vacation our whole gang caught cicadas together, and the liveliest spot was under the big willows at the village entrance. The old herdsman under the trees knew us all. When he saw us running over with nets in our hands, he led his cow aside and gave us the shade under the trees. Five of us set the rules of a contest: each person catches one cicada, the first to catch one wins, and the losers bring popsicles the next day.

Under the willows at noon it was hot and noisy. The cicada songs pressed down from overhead — one started and a whole chorus followed, buzzing in our ears. We spread out with our heads tilted up, each of us watching one tree. In my tree sat one big black cicada, singing loudest of all on a fork of the branch, and I thought victory was sure.

I crept closer with the net raised above my head, my arm aching and shaking. At three steps away, the cicada stopped. I froze in place. Then Liu Zhuang from our group came hurrying up behind me and stepped on a dry branch with a loud crack. The cicada buzzed into the air, circled the willow once, and landed on a branch right above my head. I looked up at it; it looked down at me. I stamped my feet in

frustration.

The funniest one was Liu Zhuang. He spotted his target, thrust the net up in one big pounce, missed the cicada, and trapped a hornet instead. The hornet crashed around inside the net, Liu Zhuang turned pale, and he spun in circles on the spot shouting for help. We scattered in fear and crouched by the crops in the distance, watching him jog away with the net raised, finally flinging it into a ditch and sitting down hard on the ground, gasping.

In the end it was skinny little Zhou Yu who caught one. She did not pounce. She walked slowly around the tree with the net raised, worked her way to the far side of the cicada, and flicked the net up gently from below, pressing the rim against the bark before the cicada could even fly. She walked over holding the net opening shut, face not even red, breathing not even fast. The four of us who lost each bought her a popsicle the next day.

The old herdsman laughed at us and said that when he was small they caught cicadas without nets, using wheat gluten. You pinch off a small ball of gluten, stick it on the end of a bamboo pole, and press it onto the cicada — it sticks right there. Our eyes went wide, and we went home begging the grown-ups for gluten. Later that summer we really did catch cicadas with the bamboo pole, and it worked even better than the net.

It still makes me laugh to think of it: Liu Zhuang spinning with the net, Zhou Yu flicking it up so gently, and the old herdsman leading his cow aside to give us the tree. The cicadas in the big willow sing every year, and our gang still gathers there in summer vacation, competing on who spots one first and who has the lightest touch. Catching cicadas alone is fun — catching them as a gang is where the real fun lives.