知了没捉着，网兜先下了水

暑假的午后，蝉叫得整条巷子都在晃。小满举着网兜站在树底下，仰头看了十分钟，相中了一只大黑蝉。那蝉停在柳树最细的一根枝上，翅膀油亮，叫得理直气壮。小满回头冲我比了个手势：别出声。他踮起脚，把网兜往那根枝上送，一寸，又一寸。

网兜离蝉只有半尺了，蝉还在叫。我屏住气，连蝉的声音都听不见了，只听见自己的心跳。小满的手再往上送最后一寸，网口罩到蝉头顶的那一瞬，他脚底那片青苔滑了。他整个人往侧面一歪，胳膊本能地一甩，网兜脱手飞出去，在空中翻了个跟头，噗通一声，先蝉一步下了池塘。

蝉被那一声响惊动，慢悠悠地换了根树枝，背对着我们，继续叫，叫得比刚才还响。小满站在树根上，保持着举网的姿势没缓过来，半天说出一句：它是不是在笑我。

捞网兜成了下午的正事。网兜带着一根长竹柄，柄还露在岸边，我们俩蹲下去拽，拽不动，像是挂住了水底什么东西。小满脱了鞋卷起裤腿下去，脚一进水就嘶一声，石头缝里的水凉得咬人。他一步一挪走到网兜跟前，先捞的不是网，是一片大荷叶，扣在他自己头上。他顶着荷叶愣了两秒，我在岸上笑得坐下去。

网兜终于捞上来，兜底兜着两条指头长的小鱼和一撮水草。小满把鱼养在罐头瓶里，网兜晾在院墙上。蝉还在柳树上叫，一声比一声长，好像下午那件事没有发生过。小满重新举着网兜回到树下，冲我摆手：这次不踩树根了。

第二回他绕到柳树背面，从低枝一级一级往上爬，爬到一半，手够着网兜往蝉那边探。蝉这回离得更近，近到能看清它翅膀上细细的纹路。网口刚要扣，蝉忽然不叫了，翅膀一展，贴着网兜边沿飞走，绕着小满的头飞了一圈，落在更高的地方，重新开始叫。小满趴在树上，手还举着，回头看我，脸上的表情说不上是懊恼还是服气：它让了我一圈。

傍晚，我们收了网兜回家。罐头瓶里的两条小鱼放回了池塘，网兜靠在门后。蝉声从巷子口一直铺到家门口。我心想，捉蝉这件事，捉不着好像也不亏：一个跟头翻进池塘的网兜，一片扣在头上的荷叶，一只让了我一圈的蝉，这些都比一只装进袋子的蝉值钱。

夜里蝉不叫了，巷子安静下来。我把下午的事在心里又过了一遍，过到网兜翻跟头那一下，还是忍不住笑。暑假才刚开始，这样的下午，后面还多着呢。

No Cicada Caught, but the Net Went Swimming First

On a summer afternoon, the cicadas sang so loudly the whole alley seemed to tremble. Xiaoman stood under the tree holding a dip net, chin tilted up, watching for ten minutes before he set his heart on one big black cicada. The insect sat on the thinnest branch of the willow, wings glossy, singing as if it owned the afternoon. Xiaoman turned and signaled to me: not a sound. He rose on his toes and pushed the net toward that branch, inch by inch.

The net was half a foot from the cicada, which kept singing. I held my breath and

could no longer hear even the cicada, only my own heart. Xiaoman pushed the last inch up. The instant the net covered the head of the cicada, the patch of moss under his foot slipped. His whole body tilted sideways, his arm swung by instinct, the net flew out of his hand, turned a somersault in the air, and with a splash went into the pond one step ahead of the cicada.

The cicada was startled by that sound, moved unhurriedly to another branch, turned its back to us, and kept singing, louder than before. Xiaoman stood on the tree root still holding the pose of raising the net, frozen a long while before he said one sentence: is it laughing at me.

Fishing the net out became the real business of the afternoon. The net had a long bamboo handle, and the end of the handle still stuck out near the bank. We squatted down and pulled, but it would not move, as if something at the bottom of the water had caught it. Xiaoman took off his shoes, rolled up his trouser legs, and stepped in. The moment his feet touched the water he hissed through his teeth, the water between the stones was cold enough to bite. He moved step by step to the net, and the first thing he lifted was not the net but a big lotus leaf, which he set on his own head. He stood there under the leaf, dazed for two seconds, and I laughed so hard I sat down on the bank.

The net came out at last. In its bottom were two finger-length fish and a handful of waterweed. Xiaoman kept the fish in a glass jar and hung the net on the yard wall to dry. The cicada went on singing in the willow, one call longer than the next, as if nothing had happened that afternoon. Xiaoman took the net back under the tree and waved at me: this time I will not step on the tree root.

For the second try he went around to the far side of the willow and climbed from branch to branch, and halfway up he reached the net toward the cicada. This time the insect was closer, close enough to see the fine lines on its wings. Just as the mouth of the net was about to close, the cicada stopped singing, spread its wings, slipped away along the edge of the net, circled once around Xiaomans head, landed higher up, and began to sing again. Xiaoman lay flat on the tree with his arm still raised, and looked back at me with a face half annoyed and half admiring: it gave me a lap.

At dusk we packed up the net and walked home. The two fish in the jar went back into the pond, and the net leaned behind the door. The sound of cicadas spread from the mouth of the alley all the way to our gate. I thought to myself that not catching the cicada was no loss: a net that turned a somersault into the pond, a lotus leaf on someones head, a cicada that gave me a lap, all of these are worth more than one cicada shut in a bag.

At night the cicadas fell silent and the alley grew quiet. I went over the afternoon once more in my mind, and at the part where the net turned its somersault I

still could not help laughing. Summer vacation had only just begun, and afternoons like this were still waiting ahead.