瓶子里的歌唱家

7月15日 星期六 晴

今天太阳大得把柏油路都晒软了，知了在树上叫得人心痒。奶奶从面筋袋上揪下一小团面筋，捏在竹竿头上，让我去树下试试。我举着竿子站在槐树底下仰头找，脖子仰得酸，找到了：一只大黑蝉，趴在最高的枝上，肚子一鼓一鼓。

我把竿子慢慢举上去，一点，一点。面筋碰到它尾巴的时候，它才发现不对，翅膀一展，已经晚了，粘在面筋上，六条腿乱蹬。我小心地把它捋下来，装进罐头瓶，拧了个透气的盖子。瓶子往桌上一放，我宣布：从今天起你就是我家的歌唱家。

白天它不叫。我以为它哑了，凑近瓶子看，它扒着瓶壁，腿一蹬一蹬。奶奶说，知了白天认生，夜里就好了。

夜里真的应验。我刚躺下，瓶子里就响起来，嗡——嗡——，一声比一声亮，隔着瓶子都像打雷。我枕头边摆着瓶子，听着自己的知了叫，翻个身都能笑出声。它叫到后半夜才停，停之前最后一声特别长，像唱累了叹口气。

第二天早上我去看它，笑不出来了。它两只前腿的钩钩磨秃了，瓶壁上蹭了几点褐色的印子，它扒着瓶壁，蹬腿的劲儿没昨天大了。我盯着它看了好久，想起它昨天在树上叫得多理直气壮，那棵树比我家屋顶还高，它的亲戚朋友都在上面。

我把瓶子端到槐树底下，拧开盖子，把瓶口对着树枝。它爬出来，爬到枝上，翅膀抖了两抖，没马上飞。我屏住气等它飞，它没飞，倒是叫了一声，就一声，然后才扑棱一下上了更高的枝。整棵树接着叫起来，像欢迎它回家。

晚上我在日记本上写：歌唱家回剧团去了。瓶子洗干净装绿豆。面筋还剩一小团，奶奶说留着明天再粘。我想了想，说明天我不粘了。奶奶问为什么，我说，它在瓶子里的那一夜，叫得没有它在树上的一半自在。

The Singer in the Bottle

July 15, Saturday, sunny.

The sun was so strong that the asphalt road turned soft, and the cicadas screamed in the trees until my heart itched. Grandma pinched a small ball of wheat gluten from its bag, fixed it on the tip of a bamboo pole, and told me to try under the tree. I stood under the locust tree holding the pole up, chin tilted, searching until my neck ached, and found one: a big black cicada lying on the highest branch, its belly pumping.

I raised the pole slowly, bit by bit. The cicada realized something was wrong only when the gluten touched its tail; it spread its wings, but too late, stuck to the gluten, six legs kicking wildly. I carefully worked it off and put it into a

glass jar with a breathable lid. I set the jar on the table and announced: from today you are our familys singer.

It did not sing during the day. I thought it had gone mute, and peered into the jar: it clung to the glass, kicking its legs. Grandma said cicadas are shy by day and fine at night.

She was right. The moment I lay down, the jar began to sound, buzz, buzz, each call brighter than the last, loud as thunder even through the glass. I kept the jar beside my pillow, listening to my own cicada sing, and laughed every time I turned over. It sang until past midnight; its last call was especially long, like a sigh after a tired song.

The next morning I went to look and stopped smiling. The hooks on its two front legs were worn blunt, and a few brown smears marked the glass; it clung to the wall and kicked with less strength than yesterday. I stared at it for a long time, remembering how boldly it had sung in the tree yesterday. That tree was taller than our roof, and all its relatives and friends were up there.

I carried the jar under the locust tree, unscrewed the lid, and pointed the mouth of the jar at a branch. It crawled out, climbed onto the branch, and shook its wings twice without flying right away. I held my breath waiting, and it did not fly at first; it sang one single note, then fluttered up to a higher branch. The whole tree burst into song again, like a welcome home.

At night I wrote in my diary: the singer has returned to its troupe. The jar is washed and holds green beans. A small ball of gluten is left, and grandma said we can catch more tomorrow. I thought a while and said I would not catch any more. Grandma asked why. I said: in the jar, its song was not half as free as its song in the tree.