知了壳里的空房子

7月28日 星期五 阵雨转晴

傍晚那阵雨来得急去得快，雨一停我就跑下楼。空气里有土腥味，树叶亮得反光。就在我家那棵梧桐树离地一尺高的地方，我看见一个奇迹：一只知了正从它的壳里往外拱。

它的背先裂开一条缝，一个嫩绿的脑袋顶出来，然后是胸，然后是两条前腿，扒着旧壳，像扒着船舷。旧壳是褐色的，两只前爪还保持着抓树皮的姿势。我看呆了，蹲在树下不敢动，连呼吸都放轻了，怕把它吹跑。

最难的是后腿。它整个身子倒挂着往下坠，两条后腿在旧壳里够来够去，够一次，滑一下，我看得手心出汗，恨不得伸手帮它。它自己够到了，腿一蹬，整个身子翻出来，落在旧壳顶上。这时候它还皱皱的，绿得像一片刚发的芽，翅膀是软的，缩成一团。

我就蹲在树下看它晾翅膀。翅膀一点一点展开，像有人往里吹气，纹路清清楚楚，透明的，路灯亮起来的时候，翅膀上落了一小片灯光。前后整整半个钟头，它从一只皱巴巴的绿虫子变成了一只会飞的知了。

它试了两下才飞起来，先撞到树叶，再落到更高的枝上，然后开始叫。第一声还有点哑，第二声就亮了。我抬头找它，它藏在叶子里，叫得整棵树都在响。树下那个旧壳还保持着抓树的姿势，空空的，像一个退掉的房子。

我把那个壳请回家，放在窗台上，底下垫了张白纸。吃晚饭的时候我妈问我笑什么，我说我捡了一间空房子。我妈顺着我的手指看过去，哦了一声，说蜕的壳还能入药呢。我立刻紧张，问会不会有人来收。我妈大笑，说不收不收，归你了。

睡前我又去看它。壳在台灯底下投出一小片影子，前爪的姿势跟它在树上时一模一样。我在日记里写：今天我在树下看了半个钟头的搬家。新房子是翅膀，旧房子还留在树上。它半夜要是回头看一眼，应该能看见我窗台上那盏灯。

The Empty House in the Cicada Shell

July 28, Friday, shower then clear.

The evening shower came fast and left fast. The moment it stopped I ran downstairs. The air smelled of wet earth, and the leaves shone with reflected light. On our plane tree, about a foot off the ground, I saw a miracle: a cicada was pushing its way out of its own shell.

First a crack opened on its back, a tender green head pushed out, then the chest, then two front legs gripping the old shell like the rail of a boat. The old shell was brown, its two front claws still holding the posture of gripping bark. I squatted under the tree, too amazed to move, breathing softly, afraid to blow it away.

The hardest part was the hind legs. Its whole body hung downward, the two hind legs groping inside the old shell, reaching once, slipping once, and my palms sweated just watching; I almost reached out to help. It reached on its own, kicked its legs free, and flipped its whole body out onto the top of the old shell. At that moment it was still wrinkled, green as a fresh sprout, its wings soft and bunched up.

I squatted there watching it dry its wings. They spread out little by little, as if someone were blowing air into them, the veins clear and transparent; when the street lamp came on, a small patch of its light landed on the wing. Half an hour from start to finish, and a crumpled green creature became a cicada that could fly.

It tried twice before it flew, first bumping into leaves, then landing on a higher branch, and then it began to sing. The first note was still hoarse; the second one rang out. I looked up for it, hidden among the leaves, singing until the whole tree sounded. Down below, the old shell still held its tree-gripping pose, empty, like a vacated house.

I brought the shell home and set it on the windowsill over a sheet of white paper. At dinner my mother asked what I was grinning at. I said I had picked up an empty house. She followed my finger, said oh, and added that shed cicada shells can be used as medicine. I got nervous at once and asked whether anyone would come to collect it. My mother laughed and said no, it is yours.

Before bed I checked it again. Under the desk lamp the shell cast a small shadow, its front claws in exactly the pose they held on the tree. I wrote in my diary: today under the tree I watched a moving-out ceremony for half an hour. The new house is its wings; the old house stays on the tree. If it looks back at midnight, it should see the lamp on my windowsill.

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