树荫下的午后

树下，正午放慢了脚步。 阳光从叶缝里漏下来，碎成一地铜钱，没有人去捡。 树荫是一座凉快的岛，跟着太阳慢慢挪动。 我坐在岛的中央，书摊在膝上， 有一页，留给风去读。

蝉鸣像雨，不大，却把整个下午淋透。 它从头顶来，从荫的最浓处来， 把头顶的光影缝成一块粗布，旧而柔软。 我不赶它。 村里只剩这一种声音， 好像全世界都在解释同一个词。

墙边的旧自行车靠着打盹， 车筐里躺着两只西瓜，和去年的夏天。 狗在树荫最凉的地方睡熟了， 耳朵偶尔一动，像在梦里打拍子。 它尾巴一扫， 把一地碎光，扫到了院子另一头。

井里的西瓜沉在桶底，被凉水抱着。 祖母坐在门槛上剥绿豆， 剥着剥着，自己先睡着了，一碗豆子扣在膝头，像一场小小的绿雪。 蝉鸣替她守着这个下午， 守得那么稳，连时间都绕着这棵树走。

书只翻过去几页。 字在纸上浮浮沉沉，我读到行末， 就悄悄溜走，去看田那边的云。 云很白，天很高， 路从田头出发，一直伸向远方， 拐一个弯，消失在光里。 我知道远方那边有镇子，镇子那边，有我还没见过的海。

蝉鸣不停，像用嗓子量着下午的长短。 荫挪一寸，书挪一寸，我也挪一寸， 跟着影子散步。 光变成金色的时候， 母亲在门口喊我的名字， 我合上书，用手指夹住这一页， 把下午做了记号。

后来很多个下午，我都想起那片树荫。 蝉鸣没有停过，远方还在路的那头。 那年读的书，我早忘了名字， 只记得凉意落在肩上—— 整个夏天按着我的肩膀，轻轻的， 像怕我发觉，它正在过去。

Afternoon in the Tree Shade

Under the tree, noon has slowed its footsteps. Sunlight sifts through the gaps in the leaves, breaking into coins of light scattered on the ground that no one gathers. The tree shade is a cool island, drifting slowly with the sun. I sit at the center of the island, a book open on my knees, and one page left for the wind to read.

The cicada song is like rain, not heavy, yet it soaks the whole afternoon through. It comes from above my head, from the thickest part of the shade, stitching the light and shadow overhead into a piece of coarse cloth, old and soft. I do not drive it away. The village keeps only this one sound, as if the whole world were explaining one and the same word.

The old bicycle by the wall leans there asleep, its basket holding two watermelons and a summer from last year. The dog sleeps soundly in the coolest corner of the shade, its ears twitching now and then, as if beating time inside a dream. One sweep of its tail sends the scattered light rolling to the other end of the yard.

The watermelon in the well sits at the bottom of a bucket, held by the cold water. Grandmother sits on the doorstep shelling green beans, and halfway through she falls asleep first, a bowl of beans tipped over on her knees like a small green snowfall. The cicada song keeps watch over her afternoon, keeping watch so steadily that even time takes a detour around this tree.

The book has turned only a few pages. The words float on the paper, and when I reach the end of a line I slip away quietly to watch the clouds beyond the field. The clouds are white, the sky is high, and the road sets out from the edge of the field, stretching toward the distance, turning once, then vanishing into the light. I know there is a town beyond the distance, and beyond the town, a sea I have not yet seen.

The cicada song does not stop; it seems to measure the length of the afternoon with its voice. The shade moves an inch, the book moves an inch, and I move an inch too, taking a walk along with the shadow. When the light turns golden, mother calls my name from the doorway, and I close the book, holding the page with one finger, marking this afternoon.

In many afternoons since, I have remembered that patch of tree shade. The cicada song has never stopped, and the distance is still at the far end of the road. I have long forgotten the name of the book I was reading that year; I only remember the coolness settling on my shoulders, the whole summer resting its hand on my shoulder, gently, as if afraid I would notice it passing.

单车上的夏日午后

那年暑假，我有一辆单车， 后座绑着一只帆布包，包里一本书，一瓶水。 我不去什么地方，我只是骑。 路两边的树把荫铺给我， 一段，一段，又一段， 像谁把凉意切成薄片，随我取用。

蝉鸣在树荫里等着我。 车一进去，它就响起来， 车一出来，它就停住， 好像它只给过路的人演奏。 我故意在荫里骑得慢， 让它以为我是来听曲的， 不是路过的。

正午的村庄很静，狗都躲在门影里。 只有我，和头顶的蝉，醒着。 阳光把田野晒得发白，远处的路像一条亮带，铺向远方。 我望着它想：远方有多远？ 脚一踩，它就近一寸； 再想，它又退一寸。

路过村口的老槐，我停下来喝水。 树荫大得像一间屋子， 蝉在最高处唱，声音却落在最低的枝头， 砸在地上，碎成一片一片的响。 我蹲在荫里，看蚂蚁搬运一只飞蛾， 它们排着队，走得比我还认真。

再上路，风热起来了。 帆布包在背后一颠一颠， 书角敲着腰，像提醒我别忘了它。 其实我读得很慢，一个下午， 只够读二十页，加一段路，加一片蝉鸣。 可我觉得，那个下午我读到的

东西， 比后来一个学期都多。

天边浮起灰蓝的云，远方在云下发起亮来。 我掉头往回骑，树荫换到路的另一边， 蝉鸣落在身后，越来越薄。 到家时，水壶还温，书页里夹着一片槐叶。 母亲问我去哪儿了，我说： 去远方转了一圈。 她笑，我也不解释。

多年以后，我去了真正的远方， 在地铁里听见孩子的笑声，忽然想起那条亮带一样的路。树荫还在不在，我不知道， 蝉鸣每年夏天都准时回来。 而我终于明白： 那个下午，我其实哪儿也没去， 我只是把远方，骑进了心里。

A Summer Afternoon on a Bicycle

That summer I had a bicycle, a canvas bag tied to the rear seat, a book and a bottle of water inside. I was not going anywhere in particular. I was only riding. The trees on both sides of the road unrolled their shade for me, section after section after section, as if someone had sliced coolness into thin pieces for me to help myself.

The cicada song waited for me inside the shade. When I rode in, it began; when I rode out, it stopped, as if it played only for people passing by. I deliberately rode slowly inside the shade, so that it would think I had come to listen to the music, not just to pass through.

The village at noon was very quiet; even the dogs hid in the shadows of the doorways. Only I, and the cicadas overhead, were awake. The sun bleached the fields white, and the road in the distance lay like a bright ribbon stretching toward the faraway place. I looked at it and wondered: how far is far? One push of the pedal brings it an inch closer; one more thought of it, and it retreats an inch.

Passing the old locust tree at the village entrance, I stopped to drink water. Its shade was as large as a room, and the cicadas sang at the highest point, yet the sound fell onto the lowest branch and shattered on the ground into pieces of noise. I squatted in the shade and watched ants carrying a moth, marching in line, more serious than I had ever been.

Back on the road, the wind turned hot. The canvas bag bounced behind my back, the corner of the book tapping my waist, as if reminding me not to forget it. I had been reading slowly: one afternoon was only enough for twenty pages, plus one stretch of road, plus one patch of cicada song. Yet I feel that what I read in that afternoon was more than in a whole later term.

Gray-blue clouds rose at the edge of the sky, and the distance began to shine beneath them. I turned the handlebars and rode home, the shade switching to the other

side of the road, the cicada song falling behind me, thinner and thinner. When I got home the water bottle was still warm, and a locust leaf was pressed between the pages. Mother asked where I had been, and I said: I took a ride out to the distance and back. She laughed, and I did not explain.

Years later I went to a real faraway place, and in a subway car I heard a child laugh and suddenly remembered that road like a bright ribbon. Whether the tree shade is still there, I do not know; the cicada song returns on time every summer. And I finally understand: that afternoon I actually went nowhere at all; I simply rode the distance into my heart.

给远方的一封信

你转学去远方那年， 我们一人分了一半树荫。 你走的那条路，笔直， 笔直得像一道没写完的题。 我站在树下看它变窄， 看到最后，只剩蝉鸣， 替你把话说完。

这个暑假，我决定给你写信。 纸和笔摆在树荫里， 树荫是那块老地方，蝉是同一批蝉， 只是对面空出来的位置， 被光占着了。 我写：这里一切都好， 蝉还是那么吵，荫还是那么凉，就是风经过的时候，少了一个人笑。

写着写着，笔慢下来。 蝉鸣灌进纸的纤维里， 每个字都带着一点夏天的响度。 我写下午的西瓜，写井水的凉， 写数学作业最后那道题， 我把它留白，等你回来一起做。 又划掉，重新写：我一个人，也把它做出来了。 写完这一句，我愣了很久。

远方是什么形状？ 我把它画在信封的右下角， 一个小小的圈，圈外画几条线， 代表路，也代表光。 邮筒在镇上，骑车要四十分钟， 树荫陪我一程，又一程， 蝉鸣送我一段，又一段。路上我把信捏在车把上， 觉得它很轻，又觉得它 装得下一整个夏天。

投进去的那一响，咚， 像下午忽然有了回声。 回程的路上天擦黑了， 田野里的蛙声接住了蝉鸣， 像一场演出换了班。 我骑得很慢，影子在前面铺路， 远方在信封里，也在路的尽头，两头都在等我。

你的回信在八月末到了。 你说远方的蝉不叫， 楼太高，树太少， 它想念我们那棵老槐。你说那道留白的题， 你在那边也做了一遍， 答案和我的一样。 我把两封信并排放在灯下， 中间隔着几百里， 和整整一个暑假。

如今我又回到树下。 蝉还是那批蝉的后代， 叫法却没变过， 好像它们也守着一种约定。我把你那半树荫也坐了， 把信里没说完的，说给蝉听。 远方还是远方， 只是从今往后， 它有了地址，有了笔迹， 有了一个会在夏天想起它的人。

A Letter to the Distance

The year you transferred to a faraway place, we split one patch of tree shade in half. The road you left on was straight, straight as an unfinished problem. I stood under the tree and watched it narrow, and at the end only the cicada song was left, finishing the words you had not said.

This summer vacation I decided to write you a letter. Paper and pen lay out in the shade; the shade is the same old place, the cicadas are the same generation of cicadas, only the empty seat across from me has been taken by the light. I write: everything here is fine, the cicadas are still as noisy, the shade is still as cool, it is just that when the wind passes, the laugh of one person is missing.

As I write, my pen slows down. The cicada song pours into the fibers of the paper, and every character carries a little of the volume of summer. I write about the afternoon watermelon, about the coolness of the well water, about the last problem in the math homework, which I leave blank, waiting for you to come back and solve it with me. Then I cross it out and write again: I solved it by myself too. After writing that line, I sat stunned for a long time.

What shape is the distance? I draw it on the lower right corner of the envelope, a small circle with a few lines outside it, standing for roads, and also for light. The mailbox is in the town, forty minutes by bicycle, and the tree shade accompanies me one stretch and another, the cicada song sees me off one segment and another. On the road I hold the letter on the handlebar, feeling it very light, and also feeling that it can hold a whole summer inside.

The drop made a sound, plop, as if the afternoon suddenly gained an echo. On the way back the sky was dimming, and the frogs in the fields caught the cicada song the way one shift of a performance changes to the next. I rode slowly, my shadow paving the road ahead. The distance was inside the envelope, and also at the end of the road, and both ends were waiting for me.

Your reply arrived at the end of August. You wrote that the cicadas do not sing where you are, that the buildings are too tall and the trees too few, and that it misses our old locust tree. You wrote that you solved the blank problem on your side as well, and your answer was the same as mine. I put the two letters side by side under the lamp, with several hundred li between them, and a whole summer vacation.

Now I am back under the tree. The cicadas are still the descendants of that same batch, and their way of singing has never changed, as if they too keep a kind of promise. I have sat in the half of the shade that was yours too, and I tell the cicadas what the letters left unsaid. The distance is still the distance, only from now on it has an address, a handwriting, and a person who will think of it in summer.