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.